

NEW POLITICAL THINKING AS A PHILOSOPHY AND A TOOL OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

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On the eve of the twenty-first century, it is difficult to doubt the necessity and even the inevitability of radical changes in the management of international relations. Since the time when the catastrophic consequences of nuclear warfare were demonstrated and appreciated, it was clear — at least to the more far-sighted ones — that mankind has entered a qualitatively new state in its development. The ability of self-destruction was achieved. Subsequent nuclear-arms race added little to the basic proposition and, gaining the momentum of its own, nevertheless after more than forty years of fierce competition left us with the same legacy — the ability of self-destruction. For years rivers of ink were wasted on both sides of “the iron curtain” with the single purpose in mind — to bring the blame for the nuclear arms race to the opponent’s porch. Although it is, perhaps, feasible to point out a culprit, responsible for some of its particular stages, the general trend of action/counter-action, followed by counter-counter-action and ad infinitum suggests what the USSR’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. E. Shevardnadze, defined as the “problem of our common responsibility.”¹

Meanwhile, scientific, technological and economic development, gaining in speed and in scale, jointly contributed to the accumulation of energy, environmental and population problems of global proportion and, at the same time, failed to solve food and health problems of the third world. Some of those problems, if not treated immediately, can have catastrophic consequences in their own right. By now not only nuclear powers, but almost all members of the international community, have acquired a possibility to pitch in a process of human self-destruction.

At the same time, both prevailing political thinking in the world and global politics as a whole until most recent times were lagging behind the pressing needs of the present-day world. Locked in the rigid, ideologically charged stereotypes often deeply rooted in the cold-war mentality, world body politics was for all practical purposes, unable to provide comprehensive answers to the global problems facing humanity. East-West and North-South divides, although constantly

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1. Shevardnadze, *Is Perestroika a Soviet Version of the New Deal?*, The Washington Post, Oct. 8, 1989, at C1.

shifting in depth and length, remained fixtures of the system of international relations.

And yet, it is common knowledge that the same economic, political and social forces which brought mankind to the verge of collapse already have a potential to solve crucial problems involving poverty, under-development and the environment. The abnormality of this situation was not lost on various social and political circles around the world. In 1986, in the address given at the University of Osnabruck (Federal Republic of Germany) the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Javier Peres de Cuellar, noted that "the political mind is still lagging behind the massive and astonishingly rapid transition which has taken place in the last four decades."²

Now when the problems of mankind's survival and self-preservation came to the fore, all governments are facing the necessity to come up with a solution. On a broader scale, ideological systems were also subject to a test. They have to prove their values in new and challenging circumstances.

The Soviet leadership's response to those challenges took the form of a new political thinking (NPT). The purpose of this article is to examine it on three different levels:

- as a new philosophy of international relations;
- as a basis for a long-term foreign-policy strategy and planning; and
- as a framework for current foreign policy of the USSR.

I.

New political thinking as a philosophy of international relations has its roots in V. Lenin's concept of a just and democratic world as envisaged in the Decree of Peace of 1917. A further step forward was taken in the doctrine of peaceful coexistence of states and different social structures and furthered by the experience of active cooperation between the USA, USSR, Great Britain and other allies during World War II. Unfortunately, for a host of internal and external reasons, the concept of peaceful coexistence and the related idea that nuclear war can be avoided were not always adequately reflected in day-to-day conduct of foreign affairs. But new trends in world economic, political and social development made it necessary for Soviet leadership to undertake thorough re-evaluation of both ideological premises of Soviet foreign policy and some of its aims and goals. Profound changes in the Soviet Union's behavior in international arenas since the spring of 1985 are part and parcel of the process of revolutionary changes of Soviet society and policies, best known as "perestroika." NPT is sometimes seen abroad as a pragmatic concept, exclusively designed to serve the purpose of supporting internal reforms in the USSR. But the sheer magnitude of changes already introduced into the Soviet foreign policy put NPT well above the role of a simple tool of "perestroika."

We believe that it is a broader and world-wide trend which may be loosely defined as "neo-humanism." Sweeping revolutionary changes in the USSR aimed at, among other things, the democratization of the political process with a strong

2. J. PEREZ DE CUELLAR, MESSAGES AND STATEMENTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PEACE 1986, at 71 (1987).

emphasis on respect of law, are based upon the idea of primacy of human values. The changes in the USSR are by no means a unique and separate phenomenon. They fall in line with the movement toward democracy in the Americas, efforts to achieve sustainable development in the third world, and world-wide movement in defense of human rights.

One would be tempted to include in this list the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe. But as important as they are, those revolutions have been in effect, the extensions of two more general trends, as previously mentioned: "perestroika" in the USSR, which signalled the beginning of painful transformation of the socialist society and at the same time provided a favorable international environment for East European revolutions to succeed; and a global movement to protect human rights.

NPT is part of a re-awakening of global human consciousness. Its most ambitious aim is to prove that man indeed is the measure of all things. The philosophy of NPT evolves around four basic elements:

- priority of human values and human survival;
- interdependence;
- freedom of choice; and
- de-ideologization of international relations.

Human *survival* is the ultimate aim of NPT. Now it is evident that the danger is not limited to the threat of nuclear annihilation. Intensification of traditional-type industrialization spells environmental disaster. The gap between the developed and the majority of the developing countries is increasingly growing into a global threat. If not checked, illicit trafficking of drugs can present yet another mortal danger in the nearest future. To counter these problems, a new level of international cooperation should be achieved. It should be based on a universal consensus and built around fundamental human values. This, in turn, demands a change in our assumption of the present-day world. Although we went far from the bipolar model, based on the pattern of East-West confrontation, "global thinking" or appreciation of the world as a common responsibility has yet to gain broad recognition.

For this reason, the second most important cornerstone of NPT is the idea of the emergence of a *mutually interrelated and integral world*. In a speech to the UN General Assembly, President Mikhail Gorbachev put forward the following reasons in support of this idea:

We have come to a point where the disorderly play of elemental forces leads to an impasse. The international community must learn how it can shape and guide developments in such a way as to preserve our civilization and to make it safe for all and more conducive to normal life.³

The term "integral world" does not mean a world lacking in changes or variety. Rather, it is a world where internal transformations develop within particular countries, making full use of the achievements of the outside world and of equitable cooperation. The idea is to make difference a factor of mutual enrichment and mutual attraction.

3. 43 U.N. GAOR (72d mtg.) at 9, U.N. Doc. A/43/PV.72 (1988).

The third formative element of NPT, the principle of *freedom of choice*, calls for respect for the views and beliefs of others, tolerance, and the ability to live side by side with others, while remaining different. To quote from Mr. Shevardnadze's speech in general debate of the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly:

[F]reedom of choice continues to crown the hierarchy of a nation's supreme values. Every nation is free to choose the ways and means of its own development, but to do so in a responsible manner . . . Freedom does not mean irresponsibility towards others, for in the final analysis that would mean irresponsibility towards oneself.⁴

Finally, a new concept of foreign policy requires *de-ideologization* of relations among states. To appreciate the importance of this principle, it is worthwhile to recall that even peaceful coexistence, a policy applied by the USSR to relations with western states, was until recently considered to be a form of class struggle. The concept does not exclude "a fair rivalry of ideologies,"⁵ but it should not be extended to relations among states because it would hamper the movement toward solution of the world's common problems. If ideology no longer seems to be an important component of the USSR's foreign policy, one may wonder whether this particular aspect of NPT would still be valid. But it has to be mentioned here as a part of the original doctrine. The ultimate vision behind the NPT as a philosophy of international relations is a non-violent and secure world.

II.

The structural framework and objectives of Soviet foreign policy strategy are also determined and defined by NPT. Principles which should guide the Soviet Union in the conduct of international affairs have been defined by the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR in 1989. The first of those principles states that, "[o]ur country's security should be ensured, primarily through political means, as a component of universal and equal security, through the process of demilitarization, democratization and humanization of international relations, with reliance on the prestige and resources of the United Nations."⁶

In line with this principle and in order to eliminate threats to the human race and move forward to the creation of a non-violent and secure world, a comprehensive approach to strengthening international cooperation was adopted. This approach envisages simultaneous movement along a number of avenues. The most important of them are the following:

1. *Disarmament*, and first and foremost, nuclear disarmament. Nuclear weapons should be eliminated as a result of negotiations aimed at disarmament and at reducing countries' defense potential to the point of reasonable sufficiency. Reduction of the Soviet and United States strategic offensive weapons by fifty percent, if implemented, would undoubtedly serve as a major boost to the whole disarmament process world-wide. In addition to measures aimed at steady elim-

4. 44 U.N. GAOR (6th mtg.) at 32, U.N. Doc. A/44/PV.6 (1989).

5. Mr. Gorbachev's address to the General Assembly, 43 U.N. GAOR (72d mtg.) at 12, U.N. Doc. A/43/PV.72 (1988).

6. Message from the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR to the Peoples of the World. U.N. Doc. A/44/313 (1989).

ination of nuclear weapons, reduction of conventional arms is of major significance for the formulation of a new model of security. In the process of such reduction, limitation of international arms transfers should be negotiated. Naval forces should be included in the disarmament process. The contribution of the United Nations to disarmament should be increased and all UN mechanisms in this field approved.

2. *Common and comprehensive security*, which, along with disarmament measures, should include confidence-building arrangements and provide for the creation of an atmosphere of openness and transparency in inter-state relations. Dialogue and negotiations aimed at the balance of interests should become the only way of resolving international issues and settling disputes. Comprehensive security systems should exclude the use of force or threat of force as an instrument of foreign policy. Protection of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states should be guaranteed by non-military means.

3. *Peaceful settlement of existing conflicts and crises*. They should be settled in such a way which would make the best use of negotiating mechanisms, including United Nations mediation.

4. *Joint participation in the solution of the world's common problems*, representing non-military threats to security. Here the Soviet Union stresses the necessity of securing healthy development of the world economy and necessity for ecological security. Practical manifestation of its adherence to the concept of interdependence could be seen in measures to assure speedy integration of the Soviet economy into the world economy, the modern international division of labor, and the international exchanges in science and technology. Particular attention is given to the preservation and protection of the environment.

5. *Rule of Law*. One of the objectives of Soviet foreign policy is to ensure the primacy of law in international affairs. Not only should the regime of international law be universally and strictly observed, but its role should be enhanced and a comprehensive international strategy for establishing the primacy of law should be developed.

To achieve all these objectives, flexible, imaginative and results-oriented foreign policy has been set in motion. It already can claim a number of important achievements. Notably, its focus is shifting in the direction of international organizations and multi-lateral machinery of negotiations.

The United Nations and related international organizations are now considered by the Soviet Union as instruments for restructuring international relations through a universal consensus. The views of the USSR concerning the conceptual basis for and practical means of revitalizing the United Nations are set forth in the article by Mr. Gorbachev entitled "Reality and Safeguards for a Secure World" of September 17, 1987 and his already mentioned address to the United Nations on December 7, 1988. Thorough review of policy in relation with the United Nations and other international organizations was undertaken and as a result, an overall approach to the international machinery was adopted. It is aimed at revitalizing the United Nations and transforming it into a genuine center for harmonizing the actions of states.

Furthermore, the new approach is intended to give a full reign to the organization's peace-making potential and to revive its role and authority in world affairs. To this end a number of practical steps were already made by the

USSR or submitted for consideration to different international bodies. New Soviet policy in relations with the UN is in itself a vivid demonstration of its allegiance to the principles of NPT. It is a far cry from the attitudes of the cold war period, when the UN was paralyzed by the prevailing confrontation and reduced to a forum for polemical rhetoric.

III.

There is always a danger to slip into a comfortable vein of counting initiatives when one is trying to demonstrate how the principles of NPT are transformed into foreign policy. On the other hand, it would only be prudent to attempt a selective review of some foreign policy decisions taken by the USSR after the spring of 1985 with the aim of showing significant changes in its approach and attitude to problems of foreign policy. Nowhere are changes more significant and momentous as in the field of disarmament. Soviet programs for building a nuclear weapon-free world, put forward in January 1986, has already produced material results. In 1987, the INF Treaty (Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles) between the United States and the USSR was signed. Negotiations aimed at achieving a fifty percent reduction in Soviet Union and United States strategic offensive weapons are currently under way. The Soviet Union is implementing its decision, which it announced at the United Nations in 1988, to reduce its troops and armaments on a unilateral basis. In accordance with that decision, by 1991 the Soviet Armed Forces will be reduced by 500,000 troops, 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery systems and 820 combat aircraft.

Significant as they are, those steps at the same time represent a profound shift in political thinking and behavior. Several taboos were rendered obsolete to make this progress possible. First of all, the notion that reduction always has to be "equitable" in order to be fair had been done away with in favor of a more realistic approach. Secondly, breakthroughs in the field of verification of compliance with the provisions of disarmament treaties had been achieved and principles of on-site inspections, maximum openness and transparency accepted. Those, in turn, provided an impetus to other disarmament negotiations, setting examples of verification modes and procedures. Next, the idea of "linkage" is definitely going out of favor among the negotiators. Several of the "links" were dropped by the Soviet Union to make the INF Treaty a reality. Recently the USSR and the United States found ways to resolve the problem of the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-ballistic Missile Systems which earlier appeared to obstruct progress of strategic arms reduction talks. Finally, unilateral reductions and limitations proved themselves to be an efficient tool of foreign policy of the USSR.

The Soviet Union made good on its official stand on regional conflicts. In strict compliance with the Geneva Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan, signed on April 14, 1988, the USSR in February 1989 completed the total withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan. Now the USSR is taking active part in a UN-coordinated assistance program for the Afghan population, named "Operation Salam." Actually, the Soviet Union is a major donor of the program. It pledged the equivalent of \$600 million, mostly in the form of free deliveries of goods, food, and medical supplies. As noted in the progress report on the relief operation, "[n]ever before has the Soviet Union

made such a substantial contribution to the humanitarian activities of the United Nations.”⁷

The Soviet Union also actively supports international efforts aimed at political solutions to other regional crises. Here again the Soviet approach is characterized by adherence to collective and internationally acceptable measures with a full use of the peace-keeping potential of the United Nations. To this end the USSR recently offered a number of proposals to improve peace-keeping activities of the UN. On a more mundane level it is now repaying its arrears to the budget of peace-keeping forces. Conscious that it is easier to prevent a conflict than to settle it, the Soviet delegation to the 44th session of the General Assembly suggested greater utilization of the preventive potential of the UN and its main organs. The idea is to ensure step-by-step transition from separate measures of confidence-building to a comprehensive and all-embracing policy of openness. In this case, also, we can easily discern the influence of related proposals of “open skies” and “open land” put forward by the United States. The Soviet Union favors the Secretary-General’s proposal for the establishment under the UN auspice of a multilateral center to reduce the threat of war.

It is interesting to note that in substance, if not in form, a number of ideas put forward by the USSR are matched by suggestions of other members of the United Nations. Take, for example, the Soviet proposal to establish a Center for Emergency Environmental Assistance. The issue was raised in December 1988. In 1989 the government of Austria introduced a proposal to create “UN Green Helmets” for the protection of the environment.

The conviction that to pre-empt is easier than to control the damage done found its reflection in the Soviet call for an all-embracing regime for the peaceful use of outer space. On more than one occasion it was proposed to establish a World Space Organization, entrusted with the verification of compliance with that regime. This constructive approach to world problems contributed to a substantial improvement of the international climate in general and made it possible to move away from a policy of confrontation.

However, no similar advance has yet become apparent in the field of economic relations between the USSR and the West. The USSR and a number of other socialist countries thus far remain outside the international economic organizations. The USSR is still being discriminated against in foreign trade with the United States where it has not been granted the “most favored nation” treatment. Participation of the USSR, China and other East European states in a discussion of practical trade, monetary, financial and other problems of the world economy would be of interest to all. It is important, therefore, that the Soviet Union be admitted to GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). The Soviet government indicated that it would be prepared to actively cooperate with the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

7. OFFICE OF THE COORDINATOR FOR UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS RELATING TO AFGHANISTAN (UNOCA), OPERATION SALAM: FIRST CONSOLIDATED REPORT UPDATE 5 (1989).

The USSR, like other members of the international community, is worried by the growing gap between the developed countries and the majority of the third world's states. Since it is becoming more and more of a serious threat, economic security and just solution of the debt problem are essential elements of the Soviet approach to the problem of development. The USSR is ready as far as the least developing countries are concerned, in a number of cases, to write off their debts and in others to establish a moratorium for up to 100 years.

In the present circumstances when a "balance of forces" is visibly giving way to a "balance of interests," the enhancement of the rule of international law is featured among priorities of the Soviet diplomacy. Among practical steps which have been taken in this direction, the measures to promote the role of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in world affairs deserve special attention. In 1989 the Soviet Union began to review the reservations which it had made previously to a number of international treaties concerning the jurisdiction of ICJ. This process began by dealing with human rights agreements. On February 10, 1989, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ in respect to six human rights conventions and treaties. On more than one occasion it was confirmed at the highest official level that the international legal norms and obligations of States take precedence over their domestic legislation. Our policy of asserting the supremacy of international law is therefore closely related to the process of creating our own state based on a genuine rule of law. To this end, the norms of domestic legislation are currently being brought in full conformity with the international obligations of the USSR.

In conclusion, it would be fair to state that NPT, both in its philosophical aspects and as a policy, has already influenced the quality and scope of international debates. It has also produced a number of practical results of considerable significance. But it should be understood that only the first steps have been taken and movement towards a nuclear weapon-free and non-violent world, although gaining momentum of its own, is still far from becoming a permanent feature of international relations.

Ironically, the undeniable positive contribution of NPT to the transformation of international relations came at a time when the very existence of the USSR is increasingly questioned both at home and abroad. Although it is impossible now to predict what the future of the USSR may be, it is evident that whatever the outcome of internal transformation and even partial disintegration might be, the new international environment which NPT has helped to create will greatly facilitate the transition period. This, it appears, will be the legacy of NPT which eventually will be the most appreciated by the peoples of the USSR.

Important as it is, NPT could not possibly change political behavior of participants in world affairs. The situation in the world should not be oversimplified. The proposition that mankind is entering a period of peace is indeed substantiated in a number of fields. But it would be a delusion to underestimate the inertia of traditional, power-oriented political thinking and behavior. A fresh proof of obstacles that the international community may encounter in a transition period was furnished by Iraq's unwarranted aggression against Kuwait. Collective response to the aggression as reflected in an unparalleled series of actions by the UN Security Council revealed both the extent of a consensus aimed at making

Iraq comply with the existing norms of international conduct and the difficulties which may arise on the way to enforce collective will.

Thus, it would be prudent to conclude that a transition period of some kind will be imminent when traditional lines of confrontation are gradually eroded and replaced by a new composition of forces. Namely, those opposed to peaceful transformation of world order will form an alliance with an ever broadening coalition, whose participants support the principles of non-violence, freedom of choice and cooperation, to fulfill the impossible dream: a secure and non-violent world with liberty and justice for all.

