

Gorbachev's Restructuring of Soviet Foreign Policy and Its Impact on the Korean Peninsula

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I

Western skeptics have doubted the prospect of any real change in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev. However, the recent statements by Gorbachev and his people, and the actual Soviet behavior show the emergent "new" thinking to deal with the international problems.

Gorbachev's departure from the past consists of two dimensions. The first dimension is a shift from the militarist to the political approach. The past policy is criticized for its tendency to solve the international problems by military means, not exhausting opportunities for political settlement.

The rationale behind this shift is the need to make Soviet foreign policy cheaper. The militarist approach made the Soviet Union seek military parity with the West. This caused an enormous burden. As a Soviet academician aptly points out:

Seeking parity, we placed an intolerable burden on our economy. By my calculations, the combined national income of all the Warsaw Pact countries is approximately two fifths of the combined national income of the NATO countries. Let us assume we achieve an equal defense result for equal expenditure-although I am not sure of that (yes, we have cheap manpower, but the nucleus of modern armaments-electronics-costs us many times more than other countries). Nonetheless, let us assume equal results for equal expenditure. But even that means that the burden on the national income is 250 percent greater for us. The United States spends approximately 6 percent of its national income on defense and the European countries 3 percent or more. If you take these figures, it turns out that the burden on our national income is around 10-15 percent. Perhaps that figure could be made more precise in future. In any case, it is unprecedented expenditure. Of course, this takes place at the cost of reducing all domestic consumption in the country to a minimum. We probably have millions of people who can hardly make ends meet. So the cost approach in foreign policy is by no means an abstract problem, it is a vital issue for millions of people. (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, June 29, 1988:140).

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The militarist approach also made the Soviet Union actively involve in the regional conflicts. The extensive involvement in the latter half of the 1970s provoked the new cold war in the 1980s and Reagan's huge military buildup. So the involvement incurred double costs.

As Gorbachev's perestroika calls for economic revitalization and the raising of living standard, the involvement in the costly arms race and regional conflicts could not be continued. Now the economic evaluation of foreign policy should come to the fore. Whether foreign policy helps to save resources for productive utilization is one of the main criteria in evaluating it.

From the economic evaluation of the militarist approach stems the political approach. It aims at cutting foreign policy costs. For this purpose, in the buildup of military forces, the new principle of defensive sufficiency is adopted. Defensive sufficiency is defined as "a state of the country's defense-capability and of its armed forces that ensures the reliable defense of the state (of an alliance of states) against aggression with the minimum of armed forces.(Ibid). Such a state can not be attained by a unilateral action. Since sufficiency is determined by the nature of the military threat, the implementation of the principle of sufficiency is a mutual process. The dialogue and compromise based on the balance of interests are necessary. That is, the political approach is needed instead of the militarist one based on the balance of forces. The INF agreement is a first step towards defensive sufficiency, achieved by means of political dialogue.

Not only the implementation of the principle of defensive sufficiency is a mutual process. The solution of regional problems also demands a political settlement taking into consideration of the legitimate interests of the conflicting parties. The following statements typically show the new line of political approach to the regional problems.

The principled stand of the Soviet Union lies in how to resolve these conflicts, no matter how complicated and recalcitrant they are, and to resolve them politically.(FBIS, May 31, 1988:27).

...a settlement... would be to insure a balance of interests for all sides and to seek constructive and mutually acceptable solutions to all aspects of the conflict.(Izvestiya, April 22, 1988).

According to Gorbachev, the Soviet policy towards the Afghan conflict was based on this new line of political approach. And he hoped that the Afghan example could be applied to the settlement of other regional conflicts.

The practice of past decades shows the entire balefulness and barrenness of attempts to find military solutions to conflicts. It shows that the search for a political solution is the only correct approach. ...

As a matter of fact...such an approach was put in the foundation of the far-reaching proposals to settle the situation around Afghanistan. We are prepared to fulfil the commitments which we undertook on arrangement with the leadership of the Republic of Afghanistan given, of course, that all the other interested sides will consistently observe the agreed-upon terms. If matters develop in that direction this example will help advance the settlement of other regional conflicts as well ... (Vital Speeches of the Day, May 1, 1988:420).

The political approach does not mean stopping rivalry or competition stemming from the ideological and socio-economic differences of states. But at least for a dialogue pluralism of political choice must be guaranteed by freedom of choice and its respect by other countries. (Izvestiya, June 23, 1988). The myths and propaganda stereotypes depicting the other side as "absolute evil" should be put an end. The outmoded "enemy image" should be discarded. Ideological differences must not be transferred to the sphere of interstate relations. Parallel and joint interests must be given priority, and areas of consensus and mutual enrichment with advanced values must be widened. (Pravda, June 14, 1988). The political approach then presupposes a democratic concept of international relations, a concept of the right of each people to be legitimately respected in terms of its interests and values. (Vital Speeches of the Day, op. cit.).

The second dimension of Gorbachev's restructuring of foreign policy is the economic opening. Gorbachev's restructuring of foreign policy is the economic opening. Gorbachev's foreign economic policy aims at the integration of the Soviet economy into the world market. It fundamentally breaks with the Stalinist line of self-reliance. It thus agrees to the view that "One of the main indicators of the maturity of a state's economy is the extent of its participation and its place in the international division of labor and the level of competitiveness of its output in the world market." (Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta, no.46, November, 1987:23).

Foreign trade in the past was not "in terms of the international division of labor, but was regarded as necessary for solving internal economic imbalances. Including other forms of foreign economic ties such as joint venture, special economic zone, participation in the international economic organizations, which is or is going to be attempted, foreign economic relations are now intrinsically valued as a means for generating not only the savings associated with obtaining products from abroad that are relatively cheaper than if they were produced in one's own country but also the savings achieved in the process of international production sharing and specialization. (Ibid).

II

Gorbachev's restructuring of foreign policy as such have the following impact on the Korean peninsula.

First, the political approach is creating a triangular detente of the U.S., the Soviet Union and China. The political approach lay behind the INF agreement and the progress towards the settlement of the regional conflicts in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Angola. The fruitful dialogue between the U.S. and the Soviet Union on the problems of arms reduction and regional conflicts is begetting the new detente between them. The removal of the Afghan obstacle and the positive move towards the elimination of the Cambodian obstacle certainly will help accelerate the process of Sino-Soviet rapprochement. Hence, for the first time since World War II, there is forming the situation that all three powers at the same time have a detente relationship. Since the cold war or dispute between them was an external factor of tension on the Korean peninsula, the reversal will undoubtedly work for the lessening of tension.

Second, the political approach led to the formation of momentum towards the solution of regional conflicts. The Afghan agreement and the movement towards the settlement of conflicts in Cambodia and Angola became possible because of the decision to withdraw the Soviet or its allies' forces. This decision in turn could not be made without the political approach.

The momentum had been created first by the Afghan agreement. It spreaded to Cambodia and Angola. Now it could spill over to the Korean peninsula.

The coupling of Afghan model with the Korean peninsula occurred in Shevardnadze's speech at his meeting with Kim, Yong-Man, foreign minister of North Korea in last April.

The signing of the Geneva agreements on Afghanistan shows us that regional conflicts can be overcome politically. It is no exaggeration to describe this as an encouraging example of the peaceful resolution of regional crisis situations on the basis of the application of the principles of the new political thinking. The policy of national reconciliation is outgrowing the burdens of one country. Here we have in mind the Cambodian problem. The Soviet Union would only welcome the future development of Sino-Khmer dialogue, which is called upon to unravel one of the most complex, confused tangles in Asia. (Pravda, April 30, 1988).

Despite his support for the North Korean proposals demanding the withdrawal of the U.S. nuclear weapons and troops from South Korea, Shevardnadze in this speech exhibited his desire to apply the Afghan model to the Korean peninsula by emphasizing the need for a constructive intra-Korean

dialogue and the importance of starting talks.(Ibid)

Third, the policy of "opening" the Soviet economy made the Soviet Union interested in the expanding economic relations with South Korea. Newly industrialized South Korea could provide capital and technology that the Soviet Union need, particularly for the development of Siberia and the Soviet Far East region.

Recently Soviet interest in linking the development of the Soviet Far East with the Asian-Pacific economies which was expressed in the Vladivostok speech

The Vladivostok speech

In the CPSU Central Committee general secretary raised the question of creating in the Soviet Far East a highly efficient national economic complex organically incorporated in the system of the all union and international division of labor, with its own large scale resource and science and production base, the optimum economic structure, and developed social sphere. The Vladivostok speech formulated and outlined fundamentally new approaches to our policy in the Asia and Pacific region. One of the program's basic ideas is the active involvement of the Soviet Union-its Far Eastern regions above all-in the international division of labor and in cooperation in Asia and the Pacific basin.(Izvestiya, June 15, 1988).