Gorbachev's "New Political Thinking" - conceptual cover for changed approach to regional conflicts.

In his book *Perestroika*, wrote Gorbachev: What is the world we all live in like, this world of the present generations of humankind? It is diverse, variegated, dynamic and permeated with opposing trends and acute contradictions. It is a world of fundamental social shifts, of an all-embracing scientific and technological revolution, of worsening global problems - problems concerning ecology, natural resources etc. - and of radical changes in information technology. It is a world in which unheard of possibilities for development and progress lay side by side with abject poverty, backwardness and medievalism. It is a world in which there are vast "fields of
tension".¹

This summarises the General Secretary’s world view and his practical approach to international affairs and relations. The conciliatory note, inherent in such a view, manifested itself in the form of Gorbachev’s "New Political Thinking". The 27th Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1986 paved the way for a new approach to world problems which was subsequently conceptualised as New Political Thinking. In his political report to the Congress, Gorbachev spoke about "a contradictory but interconnected, interdependent and essentially integral world". The new approach favoured overcoming contradictions for the sake of interest of all mankind. The New Political Thinking ruled out nuclear war as a means of achieving political, economic, ideological or any other goal. Since then, all the foreign policy initiatives were guided by the philosophy of new political thinking.

Before advancing the basic idea of this chapter, it would be appropriate, first of all, to make an analysis of the concept of new political thinking which formed the bedrock of Soviet foreign policy behaviour under Gorbachev.

Though there were hints of change in the Soviet theoretical writing on Third World in the late Brezhnev years when the non-capitalist path of development was criticised but only mildly. However, the wholesale change in Soviet attitude to Third World came only after Gorbachev came to power. His new political thinking was composed of the following important elements:

   - Shift from ideological to "pragmatic" considerations which focussed on the primacy of

¹ M.S.Gorbachev, Perestroika, (London : Collins, 1987), p.135
human values over a class approach. This change was more pronounced especially in relation to the Third World. Human survival as such was perceived to be at stake if drastic measures were not taken to end the regional conflicts which were viewed as potential areas of "threat" to international peace and security.

- As a natural corollary to human values aspect, attempts were made to arrest the growing arms race. A concept of "higher stage of civilization" was evolved which meant that in the conduct of peaceful co-existence, the previous forms of confrontation were to be replaced by international co-operation in order to avert a nuclear holocaust. Although the element of rivalry between the two competing world systems, capitalism and socialism, was retained, it was changed to 'peaceful rivalry' meaning thereby the exclusion of nuclear competition and extension of arms race to outer space. On the nuclear question, Gorbachev wrote, "If the huge stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and other weapons that have been accumulated are unleashed, nothing will remain of the world. What we are talking about is the survival of humanity."  

- New Political Thinking implied that decisions in the international arena could no longer be taken with the interests of only one side in mind. The multifaceted interests of all sides were to be taken into account. The whole idea of 'interdependent' world rests on this thinking. "We say with full responsibility, casting away the false considerations of "prestige" that all of us in the present day world are becoming increasingly necessary to one another." Interdependence

4. Ibid., p.137.
clearly aimed at the removal of contradictions between the opposites, not by cataclysms and catastrophes, but by concerted efforts and synthesis of diverse experiences of the antagonistically opposite parties.  

- Security, based on mutuality, especially in the context of US-Soviet relations, was to rest increasingly on political rather than military instruments. It was so propounded, as insecurity on the part of United States was thought of breeding insecurity in the Soviet Union and vice-versa. In practice this meant the reevaluation of Brezhnev's policies and the emergence of a "comprehensive system of international security." It also formed the basis of enhanced US-Soviet relations under Gorbachev.

The traditional Soviet views on international affairs, as evolved under Brezhnev, were based on the correlation of forces in the world having moved in favour of socialism. For the Soviets, this movement formed the basis of detente, and impossibility of the West to deal with the Soviet Union from a position of strength. Although the idea of correlation of forces, recognised the importance of political, economic and military power, Brezhnev regarded the growth of Soviet military power, particularly the attainment of strategic parity with the United States as a crucial factor in the move towards detente. But the collapse of detente and the increase in tension by both US and Soviet moves and countermoves, led Gorbachev to abandon Brezhnev's policies and


7. Ibid.
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carry forward his new thinking.  

Central to Gorbachev's foreign policy drive was the suggestion that a new framework for international relations be established. Introducing this framework during his report to the 27th Party Congress, Gorbachev said:

"Now, as never before, it is important to find ways for closer and more productive co-operation with Governments, parties and mass organisations and movements that are in fact preoccupied with the destinies of peace on earth, with all peoples, in order to build an all-embracing system of international security".  

The fundamental principles of this system were defined in four spheres, which are:

1) The Military Sphere:

That all the nuclear powers of the world should abstain from the use of nuclear weapons against each other or against any other non-nuclear nation; prevention of an arms race in the outer space, cessation of test on all nuclear weapons and a total destruction of them, a ban on and the destruction of chemical weapons, and renunciation of the development of other means of mass annihilation. Achievement of 'reasonable adequacy' by a strictly controlled lowering of level of military capabilities, and reduction of military budgets. Military alliances to be disbanded and renunciation of their enlargement and of the formation of new ones.  

2) The Political Sphere:

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8. Ibid., pp. 69-70.


10. Ibid., p. 109.
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Unconditional respect in international practice for the right of each people to choose the ways and forms of its development independently and a just political settlement of international crises and regional conflicts. Elaboration of a set of measures to build confidence between states and the effective guarantees against attack from outside and the inviolability of their frontiers. Measures to prevent international terrorism, and the safety of international land, air, and sea communication. It was, in fact, a further elaboration of the concept of peaceful co-existence. These political-military facts were highlighted by Afanasiev, when he wrote:

"Peaceful co-existence implies the renunciation of war and non-use of the force or the threat of force in setting disputes and their settlement through negotiations; non-interference in internal affairs and respect for each other's legitimate interests; the right of the people to decide their own destiny themselves; strict respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and inviolability of their borders; co-operation on the basis of full equality and mutual benefit...."12

3) The Economic Sphere:

Elimination of all forms of discrimination from international practices; renunciation of the policy of economic sanctions and blockades; a joint quest of ways to achieve a just settlement of debt problems; establishment of a new world economic order in order to guarantee equal economic security to all the countries.13

11. Ibid.
13. M.S. Gorbachev, n. 9, p. 110.
4) The Humanitarian Sphere:

Co-operation and mutual interaction between the people of the various countries, their better understanding of each other and the dissemination of the ideas of peace, disarmament and international security; extirpation of genocide, apartheid, fascism etc.; the extension of international co-operation in the implementation of the political, social and personal rights of the people. These were the four major areas in which an international security system was envisaged by Gorbachev.

There is one thing very clear about all these areas: the involvement of United States in some form or the other. In his formulations Gorbachev always attributed a primary position to the West and US in particular. This led to an improvement of the US-Soviet relations but they were mostly sought by giving unilateral concessions to the United States, which was viewed with great awe and respect. Gorbachev, while abandoning the traditional antagonistic approach to the US wrote, "I will never accept the claim -whatever anyone might tell me- that the American people are aggressive towards the Soviet Union. I cannot believe that." Eulogising the USA further, he wrote, "America has a great history. Who will question the importance of the American Revolution in mankind's social progress, or the scientific-technological genious of America and its achievements in literature, architecture and art?"

As a result of new political thinking, significant changes were noted in the character of US-Soviet relations. Confrontation gave way to co-operation, so much so, that there were seven

14. Ibid.
15. M.S. Gorbachev, n.1, p.211.
Summit meetings between the US and the USSR Presidents and the relations between the two countries improved tremendously. For the United States, the unilateral concessions made by Gorbachev on such key issues as INF, Regional Conflicts (Afghanistan), human rights (release of Sakharov, emigration of Russian Jews etc.) and the domestic reforms (economic and political) provided the proof of Gorbachev’s sincerity about ‘new political thinking’.  

Conceptual Novelties of New Political Thinking vis-a-vis The Third World:

A departure from the traditional Soviet attitude towards the Third World formed the starting point of Gorbachev’s new political thinking in relations to the Third World countries. Here too, the conventional Soviet views on Third World regional conflicts, as framed under Brezhnev, were bid adieu. Before analysing the ‘novelties’ under Gorbachev, it would be appropriate, in the first place, to note as to what these views were and then how they underwent changes, signalling the advance of new political thinking in the top gear. Brezhnev’s views on Third World regional conflicts were based on six basic assumptions:

1. That stability in the Third World was artificial and that anti-colonial revolutions in these countries were historically unavoidable to safeguard the interests of these young states. It was, therefore, the duty of the Soviet State to support them. 

Even since Lenin, policy-makers in Soviet Union saw no innate merit in stability in the Third World. In accordance with the Marxist theory that world history passes through abrupt, qualitative leaps towards socialism, the stability in Third World implied a deceleration of a natural, historical tendency. It was in direct contrast to the established Western opinion that

stability is preferable to civil conflict, and that a change, if necessary, should be brought about through increased social reforms. The Soviets saw the Third World instability as the logical means by which the Western World's political and economic control over the developing world could be challenged and replaced. The theory of 'national liberation', originally devised by Lenin and adapted and amended by his successors, was used towards this end only. Soviet authors regarded national liberation as a process which brought about political, and eventually economic independence of the Third World countries. The national liberation process was regarded as a transitional phase to socialism and accorded the status of an objective, national historical process. The outcome of this process, according to the Soviet authors, could be temporarily retarded, but was eventually assured. And finally, national liberation necessarily involved the struggle against the established, exploitative, and reactionary elites that the United States favoured as allies. Thus, by supporting the national liberation movements, the socialist world, led by Soviet Union was thought of fulfilling its historical task.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was also a part of the 'internationalist duty' of the socialist Russia to help and protect a socialist state on the basis of the above-mentioned principle. A Soviet commentary, on the Afghan intervention in those times went:

The experience of the revolutionary liberation struggle of the peoples show that at critical moments solidarity with a victorious revolution calls not only for moral support, but also for material assistance, including under definite circumstances military assistance.... Today, when there exists a system of socialist states, it would be simply ridiculous to question the right of such assistance.... To refuse to use the possibilities at the disposal of the socialist countries would signify virtually evading performance of the internationalist duty and returning the world to the times when imperialism could throttle at will any revolutionary movement. In the given

instance, not to come to Afghanistan's aid would signify leaving the Afghan revolution and people prey to the class enemies, to imperialism and feudal reaction .... 19

2. That wars of national liberation for anti-colonial revolutions were "just".

According to Soviets, history not only justified the support of national liberation movements, but also determined the justness of wars of national liberation. As one of the Soviet attempts to 'justify' those wars in the 1960's, declared:

"There will be wars of liberation as long as imperialism exists, as long as colonialism exists. These are revolutionary wars. Such wars are not only possible but inevitable, since the colonialists will not voluntarily grant the peoples independence. Therefore the peoples can win their freedom and independence only through struggle including armed struggle." 20

Arguments, such as these, continued to justify Soviet military support for national liberation struggles during the 1960s and 1970s, and were a part of the Soviet ideological overview of the Third World (conflicts). Writes Macfarlane, "National liberation movements make an important contribution to this effort (world revolutionary process) by weakening the imperialist camp and thereby altering the international correlation of forces in favour of world socialism. For this reason, the cause of national liberation is considered a just one." 21

3. That imperialist meddling was solely responsible for the interruption of the "natural cause" of development of the Third World countries. As a result of this meddling only, a situation arose which threatened the peace and tranquility of the Third World.


Resting its position on the acceptance of revolutionary instability in the Third World as a natural and normal process; and on the justness of the wars of national liberation, Soviet Union, under Brezhnev, dismissed attempts at stabilization as an imperialist quest to reverse revolutionary process. As put by one Soviet commentator, for example, the "Stability in Africa signifies (for the imperialists) above all securing continued possibilities, as earlier to exploit in an unhindered way the African people and the riches of the continent". Western interference in the affairs of the Third World countries, was thought not only marring their growth and progress towards social harmony, but also giving rise to the military conflicts in some areas. While accepting the "natural" instability as part of a revolutionary process, the Soviet view, under Brezhnev, rejected the "unnatural" instability caused by imperialist interference in the Third World. Brezhnev, was quite clear on this score when, while talking about Africa, he said in an interview to Le Monde:

Instability in Africa is born differently. It is caused by external forces that are trying to prevent African people from choosing that path which they consider most appropriate. These forces are trying to set some African countries against others, they kindle and fan discord, and provoke quarrels over problems which come to the African peoples from colonial times.

In short according to Soviet view under Brezhnev, "hotbeds of tension in the Third World are result of collision between an irresistible force (the struggle for national liberation) and an object which, though perhaps not immovable, is difficult to budge (Western, and especially

22. V. Kuznetsova as quoted in Ibid., pp. 299-300.
23. Brezhnev as quoted in Ibid., p. 301.
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American imperialism). 24

4. That there was no connection between detente and the Soviet behaviour in the Third World.

Though, during the entire period of detente of 1970s, there existed debates about the nature of it, yet the Soviets were amply clear about their objectives in the pursuance of detente. As a prominent Western author writes:

"With the help of expertise available at such of their international research institutes as IMEMO and ISShA [Institute of U.S.A.], they (Soviets) have devised a policy of detente which serves their immediate interests without jeopardising their long term aspirations. They at least know what it is they want and how to try to go about getting it, by objectively analysing Western strength and weaknesses." 25

It is quite clear that Soviet Union's objectives with detente were threefold, the one serving as the logical basis for the next. 26 Firstly, the Soviet Union wanted the United States to recognise it as a nuclear equal. Secondly, because it was a nuclear equal, it was also a political equal-globally, and had a legitimate role to play in global issues. Finally, and as a consequence to the previous two objectives, the third one was to use measures such as the agreement on the prevention of nuclear war, to reduce the risks involved in the US-Soviet rivalry in the Third


World. Detente, to Soviet Union, never meant relinquishing of Soviet support to the national liberation movements of the Third World countries, but it only served as a check in the event of this support and American reaction getting out of hand. Infact, Soviet leaders and commentators often, and publicly stated that detente didnot imply restraint on Soviet support for radical movements in the Third World. For example, Brezhnev, in 1973 declared, "We have always regarded, and regard now, as our inviolable duty stemming from our Communist convictions, from our socialist morality, to render the widest possible support to the people fighting for the just cause of freedom. This has always been the case, this will be the case in future as well". The same ideas were repeated in an Izvestia commentary of 22 May 1975, "It is indeed clear that the easing of tension in relations between states and internal processes within these states are different things.... Detente is not a barrier on the path of the national liberation movements and progressive sociopolitical transformations".

5. That regional conflicts do not necessarily have to escalate into global confrontations.

Prior to Brezhnev, and especially under Khrushchev the Soviet thinking on the relationship between local (regional) conflicts and nuclear confrontation between the superpowers was of a cyclical nature. Even Khrushchev viewed that local wars, if left unchecked, could lead to a nuclear war as interests of both the superpowers clearly overlapped in these wars. But from 1969 onwards, Soviet writings and speeches increasingly began to suggest that the progression

27. As quoted in Ibid., p.127.

28. As cited in Macfarlane, n.18, p.303.

was no longer to be regarded as inevitable. The thought to gain currency was that the growing military might of the "socialist world" would in itself deter the "imperialist camp" from escalating local wars into global nuclear confrontation. It implied that mutually assured destruction would help the Soviet military to be more active in local wars, freed from the once perceived risk that such action would invoke nuclear retaliation by the United States. The history of Soviet military involvement under Brezhnev during the entire period of 1970s testified to the prevalence of this confident and modified Soviet view.30 This change over the Khrushchevian view was noted in 1978 in a new volume of the Soviet Military Encyclopedia:

The tendency toward the broadening of the scale of local wars and the intensification of the struggle in them increases the danger of transforming local wars into world war. At the same time, with the growth of the economic and military might of the countries of the socialist commonwealth, grows the possibility of preventing the transformation of local wars into a conflict of world wide scale.31

6. That in some regional conflicts, "political settlements" should be pursued.

During the Brezhnev era, and even during Andropov's period, the issue of "political settlements" of regional conflicts was raised, albeit, with less universal application and also less frequently. Brezhnev's "peace programme" of 1971 explicitly referred to political settlements of regional conflicts, but restricted these to South-East Asia (Vietnam) and the Near East. After three months of the intervention in Afghanistan, the issue of political settlement was discussed by Soviet writers and commentators. For example, in Literaturnaya Gazeta of 12 March 1980,

30. Ibid., pp. 67-69.

31. As quoted in Mark N. Katz, Ibid., p. 97.
commentator Vitaly Kobysh wrote about "The path of a settlement in Afghanistan". This was followed by a Pravda editorial on 2 July 1980, entitled "key to a political settlement", which declared that "achieving a political settlement of the situation that has come about with respect to Afghanistan is an urgent problem."

The conceptual basis of Gorbachev’s view of the Third World countries abandoned all the above mentioned assumptions, except the last one, and marked an entirely changed approach to them. His changed approach was the result of a new world view which rested on very different ideas than that of his predecessors. He viewed such fundamental changes in the world as scientific-technological progress; the existence of a number of problems of global nature and the existence of nuclear stockpiles as extremely important, and gave them a primary place in his thinking. He regarded the idea of integral and interdependent world as having far reaching consequences for the theory and practice of the Soviet foreign policy. Gorbachev thus advanced the ideas of his new political thinking on the basis of the following:

a) Diversity: Diversity of the interdependent and interconnected world was something to be appreciated and not scoffed at. Vadim Zagladin, the authoritative Soviet commentator on international relations wrote: "We have rid ourselves of the fallacy that the diversity of the world is nothing but a source of discord and differences, and have come to see it as a rich source of experience whose study can be of great benefit to any civilisation, especially to the socialist civilisation." 

32. For details see Arvind Gupta, n.17, pp.121-129.

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b) **Contradictions**: The contradictions existing between various states and societies were not seen as merely seeds of conflicts, but something which could lead to the movement and development of the societies. These contradictions were to be resolved dialectically and not by war. Zagladin further noted:

We have taken an unblinkered view of the contradictions of world development.... These contradictions, even antagonistic ones, can be resolved dialectically and not necessarily by war.... War, by the way, is the most undialectical method of resolving contradictions: it may destroy one, and in the present conditions, both of the sides engaged in the hostilities and even parties not engaged in hostilities.  

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c) **Co-operation and development**: In an interdependent world more and more co-operation was sought by the Soviets in order to accelerate the developmental process of not only the Soviet Union but also of the co-operating parties.

"We have gained a new awareness of the interdependence of the world. In the past we virtually denied its existence. Infact, even timid suggestions about interdependence and its consequences tended to be seen as disguised sorties of the class enemy.... interdependence opens up broad vistas for the development of co-operation among all countries and offers new and unheard of opportunities for that."  

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d) **Set formulae**: The earlier formulae regarding the interdependence of the world were ignored and thought to be of no good under Gorbachev. Hence the complete revision of the theory of foreign policy and international relations.

e) **Place of Class-Struggle**: As mentioned earlier in this work Gorbachev completely revised the previous class-approach to the international relations. When he spoke of the changes

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p.32.
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introduced in the new edition of the CPSU programme at the 27th Party Congress, he "deemed it no longer possible to retain.... the definition of peaceful co-existence of states with different social systems as a "specific form of class-struggle." What Gorbachev implied by this was that in an interconnected world, highest priority was to be given to the universal values of the mankind. Any approach according priority to the interests of one-class over the universal human values was deemed incorrect, and common human values prevailed over class-division. The "class egoism" was thought to be as dangerous for "every-one".

Besides these, the other ideas formulated by Gorbachev were:

Global Problems: Gorbachev regarded the problems concerning poverty, backwardness, ecology, natural resources, nuclear annihilation etc. as of global nature and tied them closely to the problems of an integral and interdependent world. He accorded them the status of ones which affected the destiny of the mankind as a whole. For solutions to the global problems, Gorbachev advocated global efforts. He maintained that these problems could not be solved by any one country in particular, and they required co-operation by the international community.

Balance of Interests: In order to smoothly conduct the international relations, Gorbachev advocated the recognition of the interests of each state and people in a diverse and interdependent world. According to Gorbachev, no such policy of balance of interests existed when he came to power. He wrote, "Is there a hope for normal and just international relations, proceeding exclusively from the interests of, say, the Soviet Union or the United States, Britain or Japan? No! A balance of interests is needed. For the time being no such balance exists."  

36. M.S. Gorbachev, n.1, p.147.  
37. Ibid., p.136.
Freedom of Choice: Freedom was to be given to each and every nation in deciding its course of development, "... respect and defence of the right of the people to decide their own destiny freely is prerequisite for the normal development of international relations." Wrote Anatoly Dobrynin. For Gorbachev himself, freedom of choice meant:

... recognition of the right of every nation to choose its own path of social development on the renunciation of interference in the domestic affairs of other states, on respect for others in combination with an objective self-critical view of one's own society. A nation may choose either capitalism or socialism. This is its sovereign right. ... political positions should be devoid of ideological intolerance.

Based on this principle of freedom of choice, an entirely new approach was adopted towards 'socialist inter-nationalism'; the concept of 'unity and cohesion' of the working class movement; and the restructuring of USSR's relations with the Third World countries.

Deideologisation of International Relations:

"Ideological differences should not be transferred to the sphere of interstate relations, nor should foreign policy be subordinated to them, for ideologies may be poles apart, whereas the interest of survival and prevention of war stand universal and supreme." By this Gorbachev implied that international relations should be deideologised and should not be looked through the

39. M.S. Gorbachev, n.1, p. 143.
40. Ibid.
prism of ideology only. He emphasised that in order to reduce international tensions and enhance co-operation between the states, it was necessary to downplay the ideological differences. The ideological struggle against imperialism was discarded as a result of this approach and a new interpretation of the class-approach in the international relations was formulated. New political thinking stopped carrying with it the ideological struggle. Tensions were sought to be eased by virtue of relaxations in the field of ideologised international relations, and particularly the foreign economic contacts. Gorbachev, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in November 1988 said, "the new stage (in the world) demands that international relations be freed from ideology. Otherwise such imperative objectives as mutually beneficial co-operation between states, breakthrough in science and technology, protection of environment, end of poverty, elimination of nuclear threat and militarism would not be realised."41 This deideologised approach was most clearly visible in Soviet relations with the Third World. It was also responsible for enhanced relations with the West, especially the United States.

**Non-Nuclear, Non-Violent World:**

Gorbachev's principle formulations of new political thinking rested on the premise of a nuclear weapon free world. Referring to the Delhi Declaration on Principles for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free and non-violent world of 1986, Gorbachev wrote:

"In the nuclear age, humanity must evolve a new mode of political thought, a new concept of the world that would provide reliable guarantees for humanity's survival.... Humanity

41. Gorbachev as quoted in Arvind Gupta, n.17, p.124.
deserves a better fate than being a hostage to nuclear terror and despair. It is necessary to change the existing world situation and to build a nuclear-weapon-free world, free of violence and hatred, fear and suspicion."  

The foregoing analysis discusses the core concepts of Gorbachev's new political thinking in general. The specific execution of the new political thinking in relation to the Third World provided certain sets of principles which are summarized as under:  

Contrary to the view held by Brezhnev that stability in the Third World was artificial and anti-colonial revolutions were historically unavoidable. Gorbachev opined that stability in the Third World was necessary for global stability. The ongoing Third World problems were seen as the ones that were worsening "the prospects for universal peace." The Third World problems were also viewed as the ones which fell in the category of global problems, and were, therefore, to be resolved by a joint East-West effort. Great caution and restrain was observed in support for, and solidarity with national liberations movements. The bellicose and self-assuring proclamations of Brezhnev era on the Third World were totally abandoned.  

- New political thinking saw the important theory of socialist orientation (non-capitalist path of development) as wrong and redundant. Various Soviet writers began to question the authenticity of such a theory. For example, Aleksei Kiva, the then head of the sector of working class and Communist movement at the USSR Academy of Sciences. Institute of Oriental Studies wrote:

42. M.S. Gorbachev, n.1, p.144.

43. For details see Arvind Gupta, n.17, pp.187-190.

44. As quoted in Arvind Gupta, Ibid., p.187.
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"... the founders of scientific communism, regarding the possibility of non-capitalist development... were said to have evolved an integral theory of non-capitalist development... although they only advanced a hypothesis about the possibility of individual countries developing in a socialist direction without going through the capitalist phase, a hypothesis which had yet to be proved and elevated to a theory...."\(^{45}\)

The Soviets started viewing the exercise to help hundreds of millions of people on a path to socialism, as overstretching of USSR's limits and potentials. "Are we in a position to help... now that we have so many unsolved problems of our own?"\(^{46}\) asked Kiva.

- The 'concessions' granted to the West, especially to the United States were further expanded when the previous ideas about the imperialist meddling in the internal affairs of sovereign states were revised and abandoned. The conflict areas of Third World were acknowledged to have problems rooted in their own specific social and economic conditions. The role of the West was forgotten and the causes of the Third World problems denoted as indigenous. For example, in February 1987, Karen Brutents, the eminent Soviet Third World specialist, wrote: "It is no accident that most regional conflicts occur in the zone of developing countries. They are maintained by the egoistical class policy of the ruling circles, and national and religious fanaticism. For this reason every regional conflict must be approached with an


\(^{46}\) Ibid., p. 78.
understanding of its specific nature. Ideas such as these reflected that Soviets were prepared to move further away from the Third World and leave the field open to the Western influence. But at the same time a facade was always maintained of the ulterior motives of the imperialists in the domestic affairs of the Third World countries. Karen Brutents was strong enough to note, "This does not mean, however, that outside forces do not play a role in their [regional conflicts] creation or, even more importantly, in their continuation. They do play a very big role, a complicating role; and here we invariably encounter imperialist policies, primarily US imperialist policies."

- The threat of a nuclear war dictated the Soviets to view the nuclear and missile potential of the Third World countries with concern. They criticised this programme and emphasised for joint co-operation with the West to regulate these "risk-zones" of the world. The Soviets, under Gorbachev, started vehemently advocating nuclear free zones everywhere including the Third World countries.

As stated earlier, the spectre of a nuclear holocaust loomed large over Gorbachev and his policy-makers when deciding about the exact course of new political thinking. The nuclear question was an area in which the established Soviet views and ideas underwent qualitative change. Abandoning Brezhnev's views on the link between Third World regional conflicts and


48. Ibid.


50. Ibid.
nuclear war, the Soviet thinking returned to the Khrushchevian position. Although no Soviet comment actually implied the escalation of regional conflicts into global nuclear confrontation as inevitable, yet some commentators came quite close to the view. In an authoritative article on regional conflicts, V.Kazakov came very close to accepting the prevalent Gorbachev view that regional conflicts invariably threaten world peace on a global scale. He wrote, "a conflict in one region of the world acts as a military political detonator which in the present international situation, tense as it is, can cause serious complications for world peace."\(^{51}\) He added:

> Regional conflicts have become most dangerous today, especially because they occur amidst the global arms race and the general growth of international tensions. The interrelationship is obvious here, all the more so since the art of warfare has been developed to the point where, as was predicted by Lenin ‘not only would a war between advanced countries be an enormous crime’, but would ‘inevitably...undermine the very foundations of human society’.\(^{52}\)

The reversion to the Khrushchevian view was based on the same pessimistic evaluation of trends in the nuclear balance of power that prevailed in the 1960's. Where as Brezhnev was able to bargain on the deterrence inherent in the American perception of its limitations vis-a-vis Soviet nuclear capabilities, this was not feasible during the Gorbachev era. In fact, the re-emergence of Soviet concern about the escalatory potential of regional conflicts was thus an index of their pessimism about their ability to counter and survive a first-strike attack.\(^{53}\)

- Efforts were made to make Soviet foreign policy economically viable. An idea was formed which viewed the investment in the unproductive Third World economies as wasteful and a

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51. V.Kazakov, "Regional Conflicts and international security", *International Affairs*, no.2, February 1987, p.46.

52. Ibid., p.47.

53. For details see A.Gromkyo and V.Lomeiko, n.2.
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resource drain. Speaking on the priorities for the Soviet foreign economic policy, Eduard Shevardnaze said, "The Soviet Union has financial and other economic obligations to many countries. We must be true to them. Changes are necessary in many instances, and if we want to change anything, we have to sit at the negotiating table with the other party to make understanding of new conditions." Here the "new conditions" clearly indicated the shift towards the West and moving away from the Third World.

- Third World debts were considered as extremely destabilising for the world economy. Gorbachev advocated long moratoriums on debt repayments, soft debt servicing terms and even writing off debts in some cases. Soviet position on Third World debt problem changed dramatically under Gorbachev and Soviet pronouncements also changed simultaneously. These usually consisted of verbal support for Third World demands, with no indication of practical measures. The Soviets, like Western creditors, started favouring market-oriented situations to the debt problem (like transforming debts into equity shares in joint ventures that produced for the Soviet market).

- Though sympathetic to the demand of a new international economic order by the developing countries, yet the Soviets did not support the idea fully. There were reservations on part of the Soviet Union on the new international economic order which dealt with new codes of


55. A.Kolosovsky as cited in Arvind Gupta,n.17,p.188.

international conduct to protect the Third World countries. The Soviets viewed the international economic problems as of a global nature and suggested global approaches to their solution. They did not regard these problems as of significance to the Third World only and advocated a concept of international economic security.

- The Soviets, under new political thinking, started distancing themselves from their Third World commitments by showing to them their dismal records on human rights, democracy, ecology, environment etc.

- Last, but not the least, in contrast to the Brezhnev and Andropov views, which limited the applicability of political settlements to the conflicts in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Middle East, Gorbachev extended his views to cover all regional conflicts. During his elaboration at the 27th Party Congress of the components of an "all-embracing system of international security" he listed those political components, and they have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Gorbachev leadership also linked the issue of political settlement of regional problems (conflicts) to the nuclear war. The Soviet officials suggested that the global arms race and the general militarisation of the Third World exacerbated the already debilitating economic problems of developing countries. Political settlement of regional conflicts would thus, in the Soviet view, "serve not only to limit the risks of their escalation into global wars, but would also have a direct bearing on the gross amount of capital available on a global level for the development projects."

Thus from the above it is clear that the Soviet Third World policies were restructured radically under the impact of new political thinking. This restructuring was part of a broader reevaluation of the foundations of the Soviet foreign policy. Abandoning the inherently
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antagonistic, and ideological approach to the West, especially the United States, Soviet Union proceeded to question the continued heavy reliance on military power and highlighted the problems of international security which called for betterment of ties with the West. Though phrases to criticise the imperialist powers were used quite frequently, yet precious little was done to counter the advancing imperialist positions all round the globe. Writing about these changes, Roger E. Kanet observes:

"The innovative concepts introduced into the Soviet discussion on foreign and security policy have been complemented by the restructuring of the major party and state organs involved in policy making and policy implementation, as well as with personnel changes that are meant to facilitate greater central control over foreign policy and modification in the major lines of Soviet policy." As mentioned in the previous chapters, Gorbachev re-established the Central Committee departments of the Party, and placed the responsibility of carrying out foreign policy tasks on people such as Dobrynin, Yakovlev and Adamishin, all of whom were very sympathetic to the Western view of the Third World. So stark was the reversal of views held by established Soviet scholars that some of them publically regretted the "mistaken" views held on by them earlier.

The commitments to Third World were dismissed on account of their escalating costs and poor record of the clients after independence in creating stable political systems and functioning


58. As cited in Arvind Gupta, n.17, p.190.
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The CPSU programme of the 27th Party Congress echoed skepticism about the earlier Soviet activism in the Third World under Brezhnev. The attempts to sustain the regimes in countries as Afghanistan and aids to countries like Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia were regarded as a drain on Soviet economy already plagued by declining growth rates. The "socialist-oriented" Third World countries were advised to develop mainly through their own efforts, with the help from USSR coming only "to the extent of its abilities".

Overall, a picture, though real to some extent, was painted in order to distance from the Third World and move closer to United States, West and Japan. Underlying was the idea to get more and more economic assistance and improved civil technology from the advanced imperialist countries of the West. As these countries would not like their might to be challenged anywhere in the world, their demands of deactivating commitments in the Third World were met under the guise of new political thinking. It was sort of a cover to see the developments in the Third World from a humanitarian point of view, so as to enable the Soviet Union to shed the "baggage" of the Third World entirely. The 27th Party Congress of 1986, and later on, the 19th All Union CPSU Conference of 1988, bore ample testimony to it.