The Very First Steps

Does this mean that everything had been clearly thought out by the time of the March 1985 plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU—which was the starting point for change in the policies of our party and country? Of course not!

Some of our thinking had matured by then, including considerations that were highly important in principle, but we were far from having resolved everything. In general, the principles of the new thinking, and the corresponding "moves" that were made, underwent constant evolution. They developed as part of a process—a process of thought, discussion, debate, and theoretical elaboration—that continued throughout the perestroika era.

For now I would like to devote special attention to the brief period from March to December 1985, a time that researchers have paid little attention to, as a rule. It was an extremely important period, marked by an intense search for new policy approaches leading to conclusions that became the core of the new thinking. These conclusions were not drawn until 1986-87, when they were developed further, but the search for new approaches began in 1985.

At first, as the general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, I spoke of our country's unchanging foreign policy course, stating that there was no need to change it. This position was justified: Any renewal had to be combined with continuity. But continuity itself was understood (as was stated at the April 1985 Central Committee plenum) as a "steady movement forward, discovering and resolving new problems and removing everything that hinders progress."

Our activity in the realm of foreign policy began to unfold in this spirit, beginning literally with the first working day of the new leadership of the party and the country.

On March 11, 1985, the Central Committee plenum reaffirmed "A Course Toward Peace and Progress" outlining the basic direction of our country's foreign policy. I stated: "Never before has such a terrible danger hung over the heads of humanity as in our times. The only rational way out of the current situation is for the opposing forces to agree to immediately stop the arms race—above all, the nuclear arms race—on the earth's surface and not allow it into outer space. This agreement must stand on an honest and equal basis, without any attempts by one side to 'outmaneuver' the other or dictate conditions."

On March 13 I held a series of meetings with the heads of delegations from foreign countries that had arrived for Chernenko's* funeral. The transcripts of those discussions were not published, but they are undeniably of great interest. For it was precisely in those discussions that Western leaders at the highest level were told for the first time about the principles on which the new leadership's activities would be based in world affairs, principles that foreshadowed the ideas of the new thinking.

In a discussion with President François Mitterand of France, the following observation was made: "We have reached the point where a certain question arises: Where can we go from here? Is it not time to make decisions corresponding to the interests of all nations and all peoples, decisions that would not allow the world to slide into the abyss of nuclear catastrophe, the consequences of which it is difficult even to predict."

The need for a major reversal in world politics was subsequently repeated in discussions with other foreign leaders, including those of the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, Japan, India, and China.

Perhaps of special interest was the meeting with U.S. Vice President George Bush and Secretary of State George Schultz, where we presented our views on Soviet foreign policy. I will quote several passages from that meeting:

> The Soviet Union will pursue an active and constructive policy based on an understanding of its role and responsibility as a great power. On the global level we see our task as that of promoting, in all our relations with other governments, the aim of creating a healthier international situation and of generating conditions for the expansion of international ties, cultural exchanges, exchanges in the fields of science, technology, and so on.

* Konstantin Chernenko was Gorbachev's predecessor as general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee.

> We attribute great importance to our relations with the United States. We have no desire to achieve military superiority over the United States, and we have no intention of infringing on the valid interests of the United States. In our opinion, there are great possibilities for fruitful cooperation between us.
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> We must learn to construct international relations in the real world. The formulation of policy and its practical implementation in all likelihood will depend on how those realities are understood. . . . Every country has certain constant or permanent interests. Accordingly, in carrying out our foreign policy we must take into account the interests of each state. We cannot proceed on the basis that might makes right. . . . We cannot understand the present policy of the United States. It simply does not fit in with the concept of normal international relations.

A short while later, on April 10, 1985, as general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, I received a visit from Thomas ("Tip") O'Neill, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and a meeting with him ensued. This meeting was along the same lines as the previous one, but with a greater degree of candor. In my effort to convey to the American congressman my views on the seriousness of the moment, the new possibilities emerging, and the terms and conditions that should be observed if these possibilities were to become a reality, I said the following:

> The relations between our countries are presently in a kind of ice age. We favor restoring Soviet-American relations to normal channels. At bottom, our position includes the understanding that *a fatal conflict of interest between our countries is not inevitable*. Further, we have a common interest—in avoiding nuclear war, in guaranteeing the security of both our countries, of preserving life itself for our respective peoples. . . . We do not wish to remake the United States in our own image, regardless of what we like or dislike about that nation. However, the United States should also not undertake the quixotic task of remaking the Soviet Union to suit its own tastes. That would just lead to war. . . . Many problems exist in the world—political, economic, and social—but there is a way out, namely, peaceful coexistence, *the recognition that each nation has the right to live as it wishes. There is no other alternative*. . . . We must build a bridge toward cooperation. But to build such a bridge, as everyone knows, construction must proceed from both sides.

In these two discussions—first with George Bush and George Schultz and then with Tip O'Neill—in addition to the kind of ideas the Soviet government had previously formulated, new ones were presented that had not been part of Soviet policy in the past. I am referring to the principle of balancing interests (and, accordingly, the renunciation of "zero-sum" diplomacy), that is, the need to search for mutually acceptable compromises, to recognize freedom of choice for each nation, and to acknowledge that any system is valid if chosen by the people.

The same principles were posed in meetings with Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl. Also touched on in these meetings were specific problems of bilateral and Europeanwide relations.

An important step in the conceptual development of our new views on foreign policy was taken at the April 1985 Central Committee plenum—the same plenum at which a presentation of forthcoming changes in our government's domestic policy were first set forth. To quote from the general secretary's report:

> We are in favor of proper, correct, smoothly functioning, and, if you will, civilized relations between states based on genuine respect for international legal norms. But one thing must be clear: Only if imperialism renounces any attempt to resolve by military means the historic dispute between our two social systems will we be successful in bringing international relations back into the channel of normal cooperation.

This was the general framework defining what we saw at the time as the limits of what was possible.

Later in the report two other points were singled out: First, "disputed questions and conflict situations must be resolved by political means—that is our firm conviction"; and, second, "the CPSU, and the Soviet state, unalterably support the right of self-determination for all peoples, that is, the freedom to decide their own socioeconomic conditions and build their future without interference from the outside. To deny any nation this sovereign right is a hopeless task, doomed from the start."

This principle was universal in the renewed form of Soviet policy. It applied to all governments and states, including those belonging to the so-called socialist system. This was emphasized at two meetings that took place in 1985 with leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries, one on March 13, the other on April 26. The following summarizes what was said at those meetings:

The relationship between allied countries [i.e., between the Soviet Union and its allies] had to be reshaped. Relations were to develop based on principles of independence, equality, and noninterference in one another's internal affairs. Each country was to bear responsibility for the decisions it made. In other words, and this point was emphasized, we were ending the so-called Brezhnev doctrine; we were turning a new page, leaving behind the old one on which were recorded episodes of the USSR's intervention in its allies' internal affairs.

Not all the leaders attending the Warsaw Pact meetings may have fully appreciated the meaning of what was said. After all, similar words had been spoken in the past, which had by no means prevented our troops from being sent, for example, into Czechoslovakia. But soon everyone realized we were talking about a serious and firm orientation.

On May 8, at a meeting celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the victory over fascism, another proposition was put forward signifying an important step toward expanding the framework of the new foreign policy. The following statement was made: "The only sensible solution today is to establish active cooperation among all governments in the interest of a peaceful future for all; it is the creation, utilization, and development of international mechanisms and institutions of such cooperation that would make it possible to find optimal correlations between national interests and the interests of humanity as a whole." The advancement of this thesis indicated that the USSR's concept of foreign policy, in contrast to that of the past, was beginning to move away from narrow class positions to include the new realities in the new world.

This theme was developed further during my visit to France, in discussions with President Mitterand and at meetings with parliamentarians, as evinced by the following statement made at that time:

> There is closer and closer interconnection and interdependence among countries and continents. This is an inevitable condition for the development of the world economy, for scientific and technical progress, for the accelerated exchange of information, and for the movement of people and goods on the earth's surface and even in outer space—in short, for the overall development of human civilization. Unfortunately the advances of civilization are by no means always used to promote the people's well-being. Scientific and technological achievements are too often used to create means of destruction, to produce and stockpile ever more terrifying weapons.

> Under these conditions Hamlet's question—To be, or not to be?—no longer confronts just the individual but challenges the human race as well. Indeed it is becoming a global question. There can only be one answer: Humanity and civilization must survive. But this can be ensured only by learning to live together, to get along side by side on this small planet, by mastering the difficult art of considering one another's interests.

In the person of Mitterand I had found a partner who took these questions seriously.

During the meeting with Mitterand our side advanced one more proposition that further developed the theme under discussion: "We think that in current circumstances it is especially important not to carry ideological disagreements, in imitation of certain medieval fanatics, into the realm of relations among states."

Based on all these ideas, and as a means of renewing international relations, a meeting was held in November 1985 between the general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and the president of the United States, Ronald Reagan. Summarizing the results of this meeting, which was marked, above all, by progress on these very questions regarding human survival and a mutual recognition of the inadmissibility of nuclear war or a policy course aimed at achieving military supremacy, I said the following:

> Yes, I am convinced that at the present stage of international relations, which is characterized by greater interconnectedness among states, by their interdependence, a new policy is required. We believe that a new approach requires that the current policies of all states be nourished by the realities of today's world. This is an essential prerequisite for any state in constructing its foreign policy and will also contribute to improving the world situation.

I hope readers will take an understanding attitude toward my use of frequent quotations which I feel obliged to make in order to demonstrate persuasively the line of argument that took place in 1985. In just nine months of that year important steps were taken in forming and developing Moscow's new worldview and, accordingly, our country's new foreign policy conception. The basic features of this conception are discussed in the next chapter. For now it is important to stress the following: The development of theoretical views was immediately reinforced by appropriate practical measures. This of course was essential. Because of the prevailing mistrust between East

and West, only specific measures could contribute to establishing trust. And without trust even the slightest improvement in world affairs would be impossible to achieve.

When the Soviet leadership declared its new approach to negotiations on nuclear and space-based weapons, it took an immediate and concrete step in that very direction. On April 8, in an interview in *Pravda*, I stated that from that day on the Soviet Union would place a moratorium on the deployment of medium-range missiles and would stop taking certain measures in Europe that had previously been the Soviet Union's response to specific U.S. actions. The moratorium would last until November 1985. The decision as to what would follow would depend on the response by the United States. In early October a declaration was made in Paris regarding cutbacks on certain types of Soviet medium-range weapons in Europe. At the same time we advanced the idea of building a "common European home"—developing all-round cooperation and genuinely peaceful, neighborly relations among all the European countries.

Seeking to end the nuclear arms race, on July 30 we declared a moratorium on nuclear testing, to begin on August 6, 1985 (and this was extended several times). We appealed to the government of the United States to follow our example.

At the same time a message was sent to President Reagan proposing a substantial reduction in strategic nuclear weapons, which would of course be linked with the renunciation of a nuclear arms race in space.

On September 17 we published Soviet proposals to the United Nations concerning the basic directions and principles of international cooperation in the peaceful utilization and nonmilitarization of outer space.

The above is an incomplete list of initiatives taken during 1985. But it shows well enough that the proposals we introduced were quite specific, and their implementation was easily verifiable. These were realistic measures aimed at stopping the expansion of the nuclear arms race.

It should be noted that the measures taken by the Soviet leadership were in some cases unilateral, whereas at other times proposals were addressed equally to both sides. What was involved, then, was the desire to give material content to the idea of a renewal of international relations, based on the principle of equal security for both sides and freeing them both from a confrontational approach.

The idea was precisely for all to have *equal* security. For example, when the Soviet Union stopped taking countermeasures in response to U.S. actions

in Europe, the level of security increased for the entire continent; at the same time no harm was done to the interests of the USSR itself, for at the time the USSR had superiority in medium-range missiles in Europe. All the appropriate measures were carefully worked out, of course, with the active participation of both our political and military leadership.

Were the new Soviet ideas and the corresponding practical measures assessed fairly in the West? The answer is yes and no. Western observers at the time noted that something new was apparent in the Soviet proposals, but they often regarded this as merely a propaganda maneuver.

The appraisal of the specific actions taken by the USSR was basically positive, but by no means was a symmetrical response made all at once. (True, the United States, beginning in late 1985, did in fact slow down its deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe.) The cessation of nuclear testing on our part, which received a broad and positive response from most governments and world public opinion, was not reciprocated by the United States, which continued its testing.

Obviously hard work lay ahead and possibly for a long time. At a CPSU Central Committee plenum on October 15, 1985, taking into account the events that had transpired, we took note of increased "counteraction by the aggressive forces of imperialism in response to the positive changes in the world." These forces aspired to social revenge and, for that purpose, sought to maintain international tension.

In all meetings and discussions between the general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and representatives of Western governments, constructive ideas were advanced but these were often accompanied by serious, specific, and sometimes quite sharp criticism of the foreign policy positions held by our negotiating partners—above all, the Americans. In all cases the observation was made that steps toward new world relations must be mutual; otherwise nothing would come of them.

At the Twenty-seventh CPSU Congress in February-March 1986 a balance sheet was drawn on the work that had been accomplished. It was at this plenum that we first formulated the basic, general conclusions that would become the decisive framework of the new thinking. Nothing can diminish the importance of these first steps—both theoretical and practical—that were taken during 1985 toward promoting world cooperation. All this was a substantial prologue to the active and assertive promotion of the new principles and methods in world affairs.