Overcoming the Cold War

THE NEW THINKING created a new basis for practical action in the realm of Soviet foreign policy.

First, it removed the internal contradictions characteristic of previous foreign policy conceptions. After all, no matter how much you may talk about peaceful coexistence, when you proceed from the assumption that the twofold division of the world is inevitable, involving the victory of one side over the other, your policies will inevitably be confrontational.

The new thinking made possible the assertion of a genuine unity between our country's interests, as properly understood, and the interests of all humanity. Thus the opportunity for fruitful cooperation with all nations was created.

Finally, the methodology of a politics based on the new thinking, which presupposed reliance on the primacy of reason, not the irrational use of force; on mutual respect for one another's rights and interests, not on imposing one's position on others; on tolerance and a search for mutually acceptable solutions through negotiations—this methodology in fact opened the way for the peaceful resolution of any problem, even the most tangled and complicated one.

The first document in which the new concepts and practical ideas were comprehensively expressed was the January 15, 1986, declaration by the general secretary, described above. This declaration indicated the path toward a nuclear-free world.

In the West, and to some extent in the USSR as well, the proposals contained in this statement were at first considered utopian and unrealizable. At best the statement was thought to be a good propaganda exercise. At the same time Soviet diplomacy persistently sought to put these ideas into prac-

tice, formulating specific and realizable initiatives, step by step. In this process it became clear that working out such steps was simply impossible without consciously involving not only diplomats and scientists in this work but also those in the military, those engaged in economic management, representatives of the military-industrial complex, and representatives of educated society in general. Incidentally this approach to carrying out practical measures in foreign policy became standard practice and saved us from many mistakes, although some miscalculations did occur.

A real breakthrough occurred at the Reykjavik summit meeting with President Reagan. At that meeting we did not reach the point of a joint signing of documents, but we moved a considerable way toward one another on major questions of security. Later on, after the results of this meeting had been thought over, we began to work out specific steps toward nuclear disarmament.

As a result, in December 1987 a Soviet-American treaty for the elimination and destruction of medium- and short-range missiles was signed. This was the first time in history that a treaty on the destruction of an entire class of nuclear weapons was agreed to by both sides. It is difficult to overestimate the significance of this step.

In July 1991 a Soviet-American treaty on substantial reduction of strategic offensive weapons was concluded. A great deal of work was put in to arrive at this agreement. In addition, in 1992 agreement was reached in principle for further reduction in strategic nuclear arms. A treaty on the complete cessation of nuclear testing was agreed to in 1996 (implementing a pledge contained in the nuclear nonproliferation treaty, which had been extended indefinitely in 1995).

We can look back on all this now with great satisfaction —the proposals of January 15, 1986, were not utopian after all! And although the road to a nuclear-free world may turn out to be longer than one might wish, this noble and salutary goal is reachable, given the good will of all members of the international community, above all the nuclear powers, and, after them, those on the verge of becoming nuclear powers.

My statement of January 15, 1986, along with the proposal for moving ahead toward a nuclear-free world, also contained proposals for reducing conventional weapons in Europe. Negotiations on this question continued into 1990. At last, in November of that year, the treaty was signed in Paris. The reduction of conventional weapons in Europe has already become a

reality—granted that it turned out to be a complicated process, not without conflicts, and granted that geopolitical changes in the 1990s forced new elements to be introduced.

The implementation of these treaties, both those concerned with nuclear weapons and those concerned with conventional weapons, has proceeded under strict international verification, including an "open skies" policy and on-site inspection. The decisions regarding monitoring (which were also arrived at through difficult negotiations) by themselves testified to the increasing trust between the two sides. At the same time these decisions stimulated broader contacts between the military leadership on both sides, which, in turn, could create the basis for further strengthening of mutual understanding.

During perestroika notable progress and concrete results were achieved in negotiations on banning chemical, bacteriological, and biological weapons. The production of chemical weapons was ended and agreement was reached on destruction of stockpiled chemical weapons.

If the new thinking had provided impetus for no other accomplishments besides those named above—stopping the nuclear arms race, reducing the production of nuclear and conventional weapons in Europe, and eliminating chemical arsenals—by themselves these would have constituted major historic achievements. The arms race, of course, was both a result of the Cold War and a cause as it constantly provided new stimuli for continued rivalry. The decisions to reduce arms production, in fact, became an important step on the road to ending confrontation and creating healthier relations between East and West.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union continued to advance proposals for the creation of a comprehensive system of international security. The proposals were translated into specific diplomatic documents and démarches, including some that were sent to the United Nations for consideration. In the years up until 1991 this world organization received four documents embodying the Soviet leadership's conceptions, and the UN formulated specific proposals for implementing those proposals. Unfortunately not all were implemented; many were simply forgotten as a result of changes in the international scene following dissolution of the USSR.

In any case, the general idea of comprehensive security was made specific after 1986 in two proposals directed at specific regions. The first concerned the creation of what we called "our common European home." This idea, as we have said, was first proposed in Paris in 1985 and was presented

in more fully developed form in a speech I gave at the Council of Europe in 1989. It was further supplemented and detailed in 1990. The central purpose behind this idea kept developing and expanding.

In 1989–90, treaties of major significance providing for wide-ranging cooperation were concluded between the Soviet Union and France, Italy, Spain, and West Germany. Relations were established between Moscow and the European Union (although they were not fully formalized at that time).

Once confrontation ended, the next stage had the altogether different goal of making a transition in Europe toward a fully developed system of stable, long-term peaceful cooperation.

These ideas were favorably received by the European countries, the United States, and Canada, and in November 1990 the ideas were embodied in the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe*. This document contained the fully worked-out principles and standards for international relations in Europe, including the requirements of the new era that had begun. Unfortunately, although some steps of an organized nature were taken after this, on the whole the tasks that had been outlined were not carried out. To a significant extent this was the result of the dissolution of the USSR.

A second proposal, concerned with Asia, aimed at concretizing the general idea of an all-embracing system of regional security. In 1986, and again in 1989, the Soviet leadership took the initiative of proposing a system of security and cooperation in the Asian-Pacific region. What we had in mind was by no means simply to transfer to the Asian continent what had been proposed for Europe. There was no talk of a "common Asian home" as political conditions there did not at all resemble those in Europe. However, the region obviously needed a series of collective endeavors, for dangerous hotbeds of conflict also existed in Asia.

The progress of these ideas in Asia was delayed at first. Even today there is a long way to go in creating an organic system of peaceful relations on an Asia-wide scale. Still, some positive changes did unfold there in later years. The ideas we expressed at Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk began to have an effect, and discussions about them did begin. In Japan a roundtable was established for the regular discussion of proposals we had made at Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk. At the same time cooperation among the countries of that region began to develop more energetically.

From this point of view, the normalization of relations between the USSR and China was highly significant. (Those relations had of course

been quite strained since the late 1950s and early 1960s.) A number of quarrels were resolved, including border disputes. The revival of normal dialogue between the USSR and Japan in 1991 was also important, as was the establishment of normal relations between the USSR and South Korea. No such relations had previously existed.

As early as 1985 the Soviet side proposed initiation of coordinated actions by the USSR, the United States, and other countries in the international community for the resolution of regional conflicts by political methods. Many of these conflicts, if they were not a direct expression of the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, were being used by each side to try to weaken the other's position.

It is quite clear that in this process the genuine interests of the populations of the countries involved were, to say the least, considered only to a very slight degree. Sometimes those interests were not taken into account at all. Policy based on the new thinking necessarily included determined efforts to restore peace wherever it had been disrupted, and to unconditionally respect the rights of the respective countries to choose their own path of development free of outside interference.

As early as 1985, during discussions in the Politburo, the question of ending the war in Afghanistan was raised. In February 1986, at the Twenty-seventh Party Congress, the political report from the party Central Committee publicly declared that the war must be ended. Soon after, some Soviet troops were withdrawn. Still later, all Soviet troops withdrew from Afghan territory. This process was completed on February 15, 1989. A shameful and unhappy page in history had been turned.

Today I am often asked why I failed to end the war promptly in 1985?

It was necessary first to arrive at a unified position within the Soviet leadership; to ensure coordination of our actions with the Afghan leadership (which proved to be the most difficult task); and, finally, to establish the necessary external conditions for the withdrawal of our troops, inasmuch as other countries had also been drawn into the Afghan conflict, chiefly Pakistan and Iran. Moreover, the United States had been supplying arms to the Afghan *mujaheddin* [Islamic fundamentalist] rebels and had been energetically supporting Pakistan. Rather prolonged diplomatic negotiations were required, and these culminated in acceptance of the necessary and appropriate agreements, but not until May 15, 1988. Immediately after that, withdrawal of Soviet troops began.

At the very first meeting between the Soviet and American leaders, in Geneva in November 1985, agreement was reached on the need to encourage an end to local conflicts. Somewhat later, joint actions by the two governments began, coordinated with other interested countries, aimed at resolving conflicts in Africa (Namibia, Angola, Mozambique), Asia (above all, in Cambodia), and Central America. These joint efforts produced quite satisfactory results in Namibia and Central America. Existing problems in other regions were not resolved until later. Still and all, the peace process was begun everywhere.

A special case was the regional conflict in Yugoslavia, which broke out at the end of the perestroika era. At that time I, as president of the USSR took a lively interest in the development of those events, even though it was a difficult time for me, after the August coup and not long before the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The position of the Soviet president, as expressed to President Bush, Austria's Chancellor Vranicky, and later to Croatian and Serbian leaders who had been invited to Moscow, was as follows: Let the opposing sides sit down at a negotiating table and sort matters out, but things must not be allowed to reach the point of tragedy. Military conflict was, in our view, inadmissible; it would be harmful to all the nations and nationalities involved and would drag out over a long period of time. As a result of the meeting in Moscow, both Tudjman [the Croatian leader] and Milosevic [the Serbian leader] signed a communiqué agreeing to stop military action and resolve the problems peacefully. But after the dissolution of the USSR, this initiative was not continued.

During that same final period of my activities as president of the USSR, on October 1, 1991, an international conference was held in Madrid to resolve the Middle East problem. The USSR and the United States jointly chaired the conference, following prolonged negotiations.

The Soviet Union had proposed such a conference for a long time, but the United States had taken a wait-and-see position. The United States finally agreed to that proposal only when relations between Moscow and Washington had entered a stage of real normalization, and after the Persian Gulf War had demonstrated that it was impossible to delay any longer the resolution of the Mideast problem.

The Madrid conference began the extremely complicated process of negotiating what was the most prolonged conflict of the era since World

War II. The negotiations have continued until the present day and have produced tangible results. Some setbacks have occurred, mainly through the fault of the Israelis, who reject the Palestinians' compromise proposals on the grounds that they fail to guarantee Israel's security. Still, I think the process will continue because the alternative—aggravation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and of relations with the Arab world in general—would threaten the security of both sides. Perhaps both sides would feel more confident if security guarantees included a system of security for the Mideast as a whole. New initiatives are needed, perhaps by the United States and Russia, the co-chairs of the Madrid conference.

Another special case concerns relations between the USSR and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. To this day the question continues to be asked: Why did the USSR reconcile itself to "peaceful revolution" in those countries? Why did the Soviet Union not do everything it could to keep those countries within its sphere of influence?

Such questions reflect a failure to understand the policies of perestroika, or perhaps simply a reluctance or refusal to see the profound turnabout in world affairs that perestroika accomplished; in other words, a desire to hold on to the old imperial attitudes and policies, to refuse, as before, to recognize the right of all nations to freedom of choice.

The renewal of our foreign policy, as I have said, affected the entire spectrum of Soviet relations with other countries. The Soviet leadership understood that the content and nature of Soviet ties with the socialist countries would be the litmus test for demonstrating its intentions. It was not simply a matter of winning the West's (as well as the socialist countries') confidence in Soviet policies. It was a question primarily of winning the confidence of the Soviet people themselves in these new policies.

When we began perestroika, the meaning of which was to bring freedom to our own people, the Soviet leadership could not apply any other criteria to relations with the Central and Eastern European countries. Interference in the internal affairs of our neighbors was ended. No longer was advice given from Moscow, let alone orders. Although it was carrying out perestroika, and was convinced that it needed to free itself of the Stalinist legacy everywhere, the Soviet leadership nonetheless did not wish to export its own aims and intentions, its own experience.

The Soviet leadership made its plans and actions known during visits to the Warsaw Pact countries. But there was no hint of any kind of pressure. Sometimes certain politicians in those countries even took offense at this—

especially those who understood the need for change and wanted Moscow to push the leaders of other countries in that direction. But Moscow remained true to its position. When changes did begin in the Eastern European countries, the results of this manifestation of the people's will were immediately recognized as legitimate and as the expression of the freedom of any people to choose their own path of development.

The new principles and approach of Soviet foreign policy during perestroika played a decisive role in the unification of Germany. The Soviet Union understood the abnormality of having the German nation divided in two. More than once in the past, until 1959, the Soviet Union had submitted proposals for consideration by its Western partners that would provide for the unification of Germany. The West rejected these, considering them to be merely propaganda. To a certain extent, the proposals did have a propagandistic purpose. But our partners never once tried to take Moscow at its word.

In the first years of perestroika the question of German reunification did not arise as a specific problem. Subsequent developments were in large part determined by the situation in East Germany. This was a country where the people lived better in material terms than the population of other "socialist" countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but in terms of political freedom the situation was bad. The process of democratization in the Soviet Union made the East German citizens' unhappiness with the repressive regime in their country increasingly manifest.

Although the West German government never directly raised the question of reunification in discussions with Moscow, the leaders in Bonn, as a rule, did make a point of commenting on the abnormal division of their country. Our attitude was that the division of Germany was a product of history and that history itself would take care of it some day. Without categorically denying the possibility of reunification, the Soviet side suggested that time be allowed to solve the problem. This same idea was repeated during my visit to Bonn in June 1989.

In the fall of 1989, however, events began to develop at a quicker pace as a result of the mass exodus of East German citizens to West Germany, at first through Hungary and later through Czechoslovakia. Some left the country by any means available, even risking their lives by crossing the wall separating West Berlin from East Berlin. Within East Germany there were outbreaks of discontent and mass demonstrations. East German citizens understood at the time that the Soviet Union would not use force to prevent unification. This was a signal to them that their will to have unity could be

realized. The pressure on the East German leadership grew, resulting in the resignation of the old leadership under Erich Honecker, the opening of the Brandenburg Gate, and the fall of the Berlin wall—that symbol not only of the division of Germany but of all Europe into East and West.

In the circumstances that developed, Moscow conducted itself optimally: It ruled out the use of force, including the use of Soviet troops deployed on East German territory. It did everything possible to allow the process to develop along peaceful lines, without violating the vital interests of the USSR or those of East Germany or West Germany, and without undermining peace in Europe.

In early November 1989, Moscow still hoped that the new East German leadership would be able to cope with the situation and, if there were to be reunification, would implement it in stages, preserving East Germany as long as possible. But events developed in a much more precipitous way. During November a process began in which the government structures of East Germany began to fall apart.

Under these conditions, at the end of November 1989 West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl presented his ten-point plan for the step-by-step reunification of Germany. At first Moscow rejected it, perceiving it as an improper attempt by the chancellor to take advantage of the situation and to act unilaterally. West Germany's allies also showed dissatisfaction. President Bush spoke of this directly to the Soviet leadership. The same response was evident from contacts with leaders of other countries, including France. But the new East German prime minister, Hans Modrow, by early 1990 proposed his own plan for advancing reunification.

At the end of January 1990 members of the Soviet leadership held a conference in Moscow on the German question. After an extensive and candid discussion (no report of this conference was published) the following position was formulated:

- The Soviet government would propose the formation of a six-member group (the four victors in World War II—the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain, and France—plus East and West Germany) to discuss all external aspects connected with unification.
- The policy toward West Germany would be oriented toward Kohl without ignoring the Social Democratic Party of West Germany.
- The new East German prime minister would be invited to Moscow along with the new leader of the East German Communist Party, Gregor Gysi.

- Closer contacts would be maintained with London and Paris on the German problem.
- Marshall Akhromeyev was to prepare the withdrawal of Soviet troops from East Germany.

At an "open skies" conference in Ottawa, in February 1990, agreement was reached on the formation of the six-member group, and three rounds of discussions were later held on the procedure to be followed.

Worth noting is that the new East German leaders began to act hastily without considering the possible results. On February 13 negotiations between East and West Germany began in Bonn on the formation of united financial and currency systems. After these negotiations were completed, Prime Minister Modrow of East Germany announced that the two states would soon unite, and on June 24 the so-called People's Chamber in East Germany quickly confirmed a hastily prepared draft treaty concerning economic, financial, and social union with West Germany. And on July 1 this treaty went into effect.

Meanwhile, during discussions on the six-member group and during bilateral negotiations between the Soviet Union and West Germany, the foreign policy aspects of German reunification were considered. Discussions included matters such as recognition by a united Germany of the existing borders (above all, with Poland), agreement that NATO troops would not be deployed on former East German territory after reunification (although a united Germany would be a member of NATO), the schedule for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from German territory, and assistance by West Germany (including financial) in the process of military withdrawal. The agreements reached were embodied in a treaty on the final normalization of relations with Germany. The treaty was signed in Moscow on September 12, 1990, and on October 3 German unification became a fact.

I confidently assert today that had the the unexploded mine of a divided Germany remained in the center of Europe, peace among the major European powers would have remained unstable and we could not have completely overcome the danger of East-West confrontation. Reunification proceeded calmly, without complications or disruption of European stability. This was one more proof of the fruitful and productive character of the new thinking and of the new Soviet approach to foreign policy in the perestroika era.

In discussing this new approach, we cannot fail to mention one more event that occurred in the early 1990s—the Persian Gulf crisis. Without

going into the details of the well-known events, I would only make a few remarks: The Soviet Union had concluded a number of treaties and agreements with Iraq, making that country in effect our ally. Had the crisis occurred before the new thinking was adopted and confrontation ended, the Soviet Union would have been in a difficult position. But it was precisely our new foreign policy orientation that allowed us to take a principled position, to insist that aggression was unacceptable, no matter who the aggressor might be. From the beginning to the end of these events Moscow adhered firmly to this line.

The Persian Gulf crisis proved to be essentially the first serious experience with the new relations then being established between the Soviet Union and the United States. And we withstood the test of this experience, although the situation was not an ideal one.

Certain nuances of the Soviet position differed from those of the United States. They were only nuances, albeit important ones. Moscow did not think war should be waged against Iraq. We thought it was best to use peaceful political means to force Iraq to fulfill its obligations to the international community, first of all to withdraw from Kuwait. Appropriate diplomatic steps were taken to this end. But these steps were undermined by the position held by the Iraqi leadership, which miscalculated in its attempt to create a division of opinion both within the United Nations and in world public opinion.

As a result we did not succeed in preventing the Gulf War. We were not successful in upholding the political approach to ending this conflict, although evidently this approach could have been taken. However, the use of force had become the accepted way of resolving disputes during the Cold War. In the United States that approach persists to this very day. Still, it was a very important precedent in world politics that all actions aimed at stopping aggression and punishing the aggressor were taken with the approval and sanction of the United Nations and in line with Security Council resolutions.

At this point we should remind readers that the turnabout in foreign policy could not have been carried out had perestroika not achieved, within the Soviet Union, that level of democratization that ultimately led to the destruction of the totalitarian system, had our country not taken the road of openness and freedom.

On the one hand, without a domestic perestroika, changing foreign policy would not have been possible politically. On the other hand, perestroika convincingly proved to the rest of the world that the Soviet leadership had honest intentions. The destruction of the Soviet totalitarian system and the

renunciation of Stalinist dogmas in theory and practice proved to the world that the new leadership sought peace.

Perestroika fundamentally democratized not only our foreign policy but also the methods by which policy was elaborated and decisions made. In this respect, the Nineteenth Party Conference played an important role when it proposed democratizing foreign policy decisions, ruling out actions conducted in secrecy (as in the decision to send Soviet troops into Afghanistan), and called for the active involvement of parliament in deciding foreign policy. At the same time, foreign policy became an arena of internal political struggle, especially as constraints were relaxed and internal political discussion and disagreement were permitted. The new spirit later extended to the open expression of different views and currents of opinion. This resulted in growing criticism of our foreign policy by both conservative forces—those of the Stalin school who held onto ideological orthodoxy—and radical democrats. Despite internal and external difficulties, however, the foreign policy of perestroika produced tangible and indisputably positive results based on the ideas of the new thinking.

The primary and fundamental result was that the Cold War was brought to an end thanks to perestroika and the new thinking. A prolonged and potentially deadly period in world history, in which the human race had lived under the constant threat of a nuclear disaster, had come to an end. For several years people have argued about who won and who lost the Cold War. In our view, the very question does nothing more than pay tribute to the past and to the old confrontational way of thinking. From the standpoint of reason it is obvious that all of humankind—every country, every human being—won. The threat of a nuclear holocaust became history—unless, of course, we backslide.

The end of the Cold War brought freedom of choice to many nations in Europe and the Third World and unleashed a worldwide democratic process that had been artificially restrained for decades. This is the second most important result of perestroika on the international level. The field of operations for totalitarianism has been sharply reduced. The field open to democratic development has been expanded.

The third result of perestroika on the international level was that perestroika contributed to the improvement and humanization of international relations.

Finally, the security of the USSR was fundamentally strengthened. Relations with other states, both East and West, became normal and non-

confrontational. The foundations were laid for equal partnership corresponding to the interests of all concerned. It became possible to substantially reduce arms production and thus arms spending. The decades-long threat of war had vanished and no longer troubled our citizens.

Yet vituperative criticism of our foreign policy in the 1985–91 period continues to this day and sometimes is simply slanderous. For example, critics in my country have said that when medium- and shorter-range missiles were being reduced in number, we acted too hastily and removed more missiles than, let us say, the Americans did. This last point is true. But wasn't it necessary to make reductions of any kind in order to avert a real and very great danger? High-precision American missiles aimed at us were capable of reaching our territory, all the way to the Urals, within minutes—while we would not have had time to take countermeasures. Wasn't it of primary importance to save the lives of our people? While sacrificing quantity, we gained immeasurably in quality. That was and remains the priority.

Critics at home have also charged that we lost our allies in Eastern Europe, that we surrendered these countries without compensation. But to whom did we surrender them? To their own people. The nations of Eastern Europe, in the course of a free expression of the will of the people, chose their own path of development based on their national needs. The system that existed in Eastern and Central Europe was condemned by history, as was the system in our own country. It had long since outlived itself and was a burden on the people. Any effort to preserve this system would have further weakened our country's positions, discrediting the Soviet Union in the eyes of our own people and the whole world. Moreover, this system could have been "saved" in only one way—by sending in tanks, as we did in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The consequences of such unjustified action could have included a general European war.

The folly of these criticisms is illustrated by the events leading to German reunification. Support for the East German regime was rapidly collapsing. Its citizens fled the country en masse, even at the risk of death. How was this regime to be saved? By revving up the tank motors once again? Given the importance of Germany to both East and West, given the concentration of armed forces stationed in Germany, any use of force to oppose the will of the German people for unification would have been fraught with the risk of war, perhaps world war.

As I have pointed out above, not everything in the perestroika era was ideal in the realm of foreign policy, not by any means. Certain things possi-

bly could have been done more effectively or in a more sophisticated way. But I can say without hesitation: In all basic and decisive areas, the policies that we conceived and implemented were in the interests of our country and strengthened our security and position in the world. Last but not least, they contributed to consolidating the foundations of peace throughout the world.