

The New Thinking in the Post-Confrontational World

In drawing a political balance sheet on the first post-confrontational years, we can arrive at the following conclusions:

- The world has entered a new phase in its development—a transitional order that will lead it to some new state of existence whose contours are still undefined.
- The world has entered this new phase, as before, in a politically fragmented condition, although this fragmentation has taken on a new configuration, and in fact the nature of international relations on the whole has changed.
- The world is gradually moving through an arc of crisis—partially conscious of this, yet partially unaware. The potential for crisis in all spheres of existence, all regions of the world, is accumulating. Scientists in the Department of Research on Problems of Peace and Conflict at Uppsala University in Sweden have calculated that over the past five years ninety conflicts of varying intensity have been recorded around the globe and forty-seven of them continue to this day.
- The constructive potential in world politics has diminished notably. Both international policies and those of individual countries have not only made no effort to counter disorganizing developments but have often displayed impotence or indifference in the face of dangerous chaotic processes. Policy making has trailed along in the wake of events but has neither foreseen nor attempted to prevent their occurrence.

Once again, the world is facing a serious, if not critical, choice. Either it will allow the processes we now observe to continue to develop or it will try, through the collective efforts of governments and peoples, to influence their

evolution in a direction favorable for everyone. Thus far no one has resolved how to arrive at the second, more salutary alternative. The situation seems insoluble.

Yet in the mid-1980s, as hopeless as the prospects for curbing the arms race and ending the Cold War appeared, those things were actually accomplished! The understanding on both sides that continued confrontation represented a mortal danger gradually took root and played an important role in this accomplishment. What was needed as well was the political will to put an end to the situation. The decisive role in this was played by the new thinking and the policies of the Soviet Union, based on that thinking. Thus both sides were able to break through the seemingly impregnable wall of old ideas and the policies of hatred, intolerance, and mutual rejection that corresponded to those ideas.

Essentially the same factors that succeeded in the past are needed today: first, an understanding that the policies being pursued have no prospects for resolving today's problems; second, the political will to change the direction and orientation of these policies; and, third, a conception that accurately reflects the needs of today's world and corresponds to the challenges of the time.

Further, the experience of the past few years, the overcoming of the Cold War, has not yet been entirely squandered. And we still benefit from the assets created at that time, for example, the treaties reducing nuclear and conventional weapons, and several agreements setting limits on actions harmful to the environment.

How, then, should we relate to the new thinking, which served as the conceptual basis for overcoming the Cold War and which retains its significance today? Is the new thinking just a part of history? Does it no longer reflect the needs and interests of worldwide development? Or is it only that certain people would like to consign this philosophy to oblivion? I believe the latter is the case and that underlying that attitude are narrowly egoistic interests, a desire to maintain the status quo in international relations at all costs.

The point of departure for the new thinking was the concept of the wholeness of the world, its interconnectedness and interdependence. Is this idea really outdated? On the contrary, the world's interdependence makes itself felt ever more strongly with each passing year. Everyone today, it seems, is talking about globalization.

And is the proposition no longer relevant today that universal human interests must take priority? Again, just the opposite is true. Today, as re-

searchers and international forums point with alarm to the current dangers threatening the survival of the human race, this proposition is more solidly grounded than ever. It is precisely today that joint efforts aimed at saving the human race must become the backbone of world politics.

The new thinking asserts the principle of freedom of choice and recognizes pluralism regarding the interests of different countries and the right of each to defend its interests; at the same time it demands that politics find a balance among the interests of all countries as the basis for making mutually acceptable decisions. This also reflects a realistic understanding of today's increasingly diverse world.

The new thinking rejected brute force as an instrument of world politics. Can it be that recent events have refuted the correctness of this requirement? Of course not. Something else troubles us, however: A process is under way in which people are gradually growing accustomed to the use of force. Politics is becoming immoral, and permanently aggressive, even in solving domestic problems. Is it not time to place limits on this barbarization of politics?

Finally, the new thinking calls for political methods to be used in solving problems, and it is oriented toward patience and tolerance. This approach is unquestionably justified—it is the lack of dialogue, of trying to find political solutions, that often results in bloodshed.

It is my profound conviction that the principles of the new thinking have not become outdated but indeed still apply today. Further, as confrontation has been overcome thanks to these principles (although they are by no means used consistently by the West), it means that the present backward trend has occurred to a large extent because these principles have been forgotten. They have fallen victim to self-seeking, egoistic intentions and actions.

Thus one of the most important prerequisites for improving world affairs and passing beyond the present complicated transitional order is a return to the principles of the new thinking and to finding ways of solving the world's political problems that correspond to these principles. This is not to say that we should simply repeat the methods of the past, even of the recent past, even those that have been successful. No, the world is developing and evolving and the new thinking must also evolve.

The efforts of our team at the Gorbachev Foundation since it was established on March 3, 1992, have focused precisely on analyzing ongoing developments in world affairs so as to enrich the new thinking.

Naturally, the course of worldwide development has in itself forced us

to pay significant attention to changes occurring in the geo-political realm. These changes are truly significant: In place of the bipolar structure in the world, a new multipolar, pluralistic structure has arisen with fundamental changes in the balances of forces among nation-states and groups of states. Along with that, the relative weight and influence of certain states in world politics have also undergone change. Economic, scientific, and technological factors are becoming increasingly important. It is no accident that today more and more discussion is heard about the increased role of geo-economics alongside geo-politics.

As our analysis has deepened, it has become clear that we cannot limit ourselves to geo-political and geo-economic problems. Although these problems must be studied, that alone will not enable us to penetrate to the primary causes of existing problems and difficulties or find ways of resolving and overcoming them.

The development of the entire world organism has a complex structure, which minimally is twofold. This “double-layered” quality is to some extent inseparable from world history. But in certain periods it becomes particularly obvious and is often the cause of sharp contradictions.

The first, upper layer (the surface layer) comprises the multiple relations among nation-states and peoples. Here a decisive role is played by the subjective factor—politics, politicians, and political forces working in different directions—and the interests of governments, peoples, and social and national communities are interwoven. Typical of processes in this sphere are mobility, changeability, and frequent shifting of coordinates.

The second, deeper layer involves immanent, objective shifts in the basic nature of civilization, beginning with the constant renewal of means and methods of economic progress and ending with the constant and unstoppable evolution in the way of life of the millions of people in the world. In the final analysis, these shifts determine the dynamics and direction of world development.

Take economic development, for example. During the twentieth century the developed countries passed from classical industrial production, characterized by widespread manual labor, to assembly-line production. Automated production emerged later and was followed by cybernetics and information systems. A new society has begun to emerge from industrial society. It is often defined as the postindustrial, or information, society (although neither of these terms is entirely accurate).

These processes, of course, are connected with those developing in the upper layer, but the link is of a special kind. Scientific and technical progress to a significant degree has been impelled by the requirements of politics, by the “struggle of each against all.” In the twentieth century, a venerable law of history has been fully confirmed: Wars have been the most reliable consumer and most efficient accelerating mechanism for economic and industrial progress.

If the surface processes, mainly the political ones, have influenced the more profound processes of economics and revolutionary changes in production, then the more profound processes have had very little practical effect on the superficial processes. The deeper processes have actually strengthened the various attempts to divide the world on the basis of force; those who master the secrets of technology earlier and more efficiently for military purposes can exploit these abilities in military conflicts or in bloodless trade wars.

Scientific and technological progress has changed not only the economy but also the world’s social structure and its consumption patterns, as well as the way of life and the thinking of millions of people. These changes, of course, have not always been consistent with the real needs of normal development. Here again, the influence of the surface layer, with its confrontational political culture and the self-seeking nature of individualist society, has had its effect.

Finally, the more profound processes in the scientific and technological realm, mainly the computer and information revolution, have significantly accelerated a tendency lodged in the very nature of our civilization—the tendency toward internationalization and subsequent globalization of world development.

We have referred to only a few modern trends, but they are sufficient for us to say that these objective shifts in our civilization obviously need to be adequately considered on the level of politics. As a rule, however, this has not happened.

In the past, when the pace of such shifts was still fairly slow and had only local effects, the contradiction between the two layers of world existence did not produce catastrophic consequences. Policy making lagged behind, but it was able, so to speak, to get away with it, although the consequences even then were quite negative. During the past few decades, however, as these processes basic to our civilization have sharply accelerated and acquired an

unprecedentedly profound and genuinely global character, the situation has changed. We urgently need to define new parameters of economic, social, political, and spiritual development in society and develop policies for managing the new challenges before us. Once again, however, this has not happened.

In short, an extremely dangerous *gap* exists between politics and the development of objective processes. Over time this gap has grown into an antagonism capable of blowing up the world.

The end of Cold War confrontation represented a partial defusing of the contradiction I have described above and averted a nuclear war. As I have said, however, in recent times we have regressed, granted not toward nuclear war but possibly toward the rise of new tensions. The end of Cold War confrontation, moreover, normalized the situation only in the upper, or surface, layer of world development; it did not touch the second, deeper layer and did not represent a resolution of the contradiction between the two layers.

Yet the intensification of the contradiction between the two levels, the inability of politics to take into account the more profound changes in the very fundamentals of existence, cause us to characterize the situation as a crisis of contemporary civilization. Our resources are obviously nearing an end, and the customary forms of development are being exhausted.

A crisis in the model of technogenic development is making itself felt. This is quite obvious. Modern technology-based civilization has placed tremendous possibilities in human hands, but at the same time it has created conflict fraught with catastrophic consequences, a disharmony in the relations between human beings and the rest of nature.

A crisis in the forms of social life is at hand everywhere in the world. The character of political activity even in democratic systems seems to be increasingly less democratic. Contradictions between the individual and society, between government and the individual, are not being resolved but are accumulating. Increasing tension is noticeable even in relations among individuals.

We find that world relations are in serious crisis because they do not meet the requirements of today's interdependent world. The political culture inherited from the past does not allow the international community to concentrate sufficiently on the task of overcoming global threats.

The world economy is shaken now and again by spontaneous eruptions and unexpected crises that threaten people the world over. According to an opinion fairly often expressed at international conferences, attempts are

being made to use the global economy in general and finance in particular to destabilize the economy of one or another country. There are indications that economic power centers are coordinating activities aimed at pushing Russia off to the sidelines in relation to the world economy and holding back China's modernization process.

An extremely unhealthy symptom of our times is the moral degradation of the individual and of society, which has grown to tragic proportions in some places. Fundamental spiritual values are being lost. Terrorism, the spread of organized crime, and especially drug trafficking are dangers in and of themselves and also create a breeding ground for the criminalization of politics.

Lastly, there is an ideological crisis. The dominant ideologies have proven incapable of explaining what is happening or proposing any rational way out of the existing situation.

In short, we are talking about a global crisis in all areas.

The research we have conducted at the Gorbachev Foundation has led us to conclude that it is impossible to find a way out of the present transitional period by attempting to resolve only the current ongoing political problems—however important they may be. It is essential to move forward decisively toward finding answers to the new challenges on the global level of civilization as a whole. It is necessary, in other words, to find roads leading to a new civilization.

It is difficult to foresee what this new civilization would be like. What is undeniable, however, is that it should ensure a harmonious or at least nonconfrontational coexistence between humankind and the rest of nature; it would ensure peaceful, democratic co-development of all nations and nationalities; it should be more kind and humane in relation to individuals, protecting their rights and ensuring the well-rounded development of each individual.

We understand that building such a civilization is a long-term task (although on the scale of history a task that cannot be postponed). Few people in the world are ready for the profound, fundamental changes required for the creation of this civilization. What, then, should be done?

We should not try to effect immediate all-embracing changes; rather, we should move toward such change step by step, finding urgent solutions where they are absolutely necessary and partial solutions where nothing else can yet be done. Solutions will gradually enlarge the field of agreement and the range of possibilities for later, more substantial measures.

Absolutely unacceptable, however, are measures that would introduce instant revolutionary change in one or another sphere of international relations or domestic circumstances. In today's fragile world, sudden change is terribly painful and would be self-destructive. Evolution, reform, and carefully thought-out change—these are the optimal roads to take.

In our view, the new thinking can assure gradual but sure movement forward without infringing on anyone's interests, but respecting freedom of choice and preserving the unique characteristics of national or regional cultures.

As I have stated above, new conclusions and new ways of posing questions are necessary today. Above all, it is important to focus on the challenges of the new millennium. These are challenges to life itself, to the very existence not only of the human race but of all living things on earth. These are the challenges of (1) globalization, (2) diversity, (3) global problems, (4) power politics, (5) democracy, and (6) universal human values. We will deal with each of these six challenges in the following six chapters.

These are well-known challenges that we have all become accustomed to discussing. But familiarity dulls our perceptions and weakens our awareness of danger. It reduces our energy for thought and action aimed at overcoming these challenges. This is a problem especially because some political leaders and scientists console themselves by suggesting that these challenges have been exaggerated and, in any case, may solve themselves. After all, they argue, not all the predictions have come true so far.

But let us ask a simple but grave question: can we really ignore these challenges? The answer is clear, at least for anyone who seriously thinks about the prospects of the future. No, it is not possible to avoid these challenges or avoid seeking to manage them effectively. We do not have the right to do that. Avoiding these challenges would mean signing a death warrant for future generations.

I believe that humanity is capable of dealing with these challenges.