Impact of Restructuring on Foreign Policy Viewed

'Mistakes' of Past Noted

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[Article by IZVESTIYA political observer A. Bovin: "Restructuring and Foreign Policy"]

[Text] Restructuring has, in practice, embraced all the floors and all the systems of our public edifice. But its pace, the thoroughness of the changes, and the correlation between word and deed change from floor to floor, from one sphere of social life to another. It seems to me that restructuring has affected the sphere of spiritual culture to the greatest degree, particularly its operational "genres." What we are saying and writing, seeing and hearing today was inconceivable the day before yesterday. Real changes are less noticeable in the economic and sociopolitical spheres. Although the main links of the braking mechanism which operates here are in the zone of glasnost, in the zone of open critical discussion, the forces of resistance are not yet yielding their positions.

The restructuring process in foreign policy is developing differently. Here, as far as can be understood, the main assemblies of the braking mechanism have already been dismantled. The vigorous practical realization of the principles of the new political thinking and the radical renewal of the leading structures of the diplomatic apparatus have enabled us to escape from the customary, traditional ideas and to scale heights which only recently were considered inaccessible.

In order to get a better, more detailed picture of the scale and significance of the changes in our foreign policy reality, it is useful to recall an extract from the CPSU Central Committee Theses for the 19th all-union party conference. "Critical analysis of the past," they state, "has shown that dogmatism and a subjectivist approach left their mark on our foreign policy too. It was allowed to lag behind the fundamental changes in the world, and the new opportunities for reducing tension and for greater mutual understanding among the peoples were not realized in full. In seeking military-strategic parity, in the past we did not always utilize the opportunities for ensuring the state's security by political means and, as a result, we allowed ourselves to be drawn into the arms race—which could not fail to affect the country's socio-economic development and international position."

It is not hard to realize that a foreign policy which bore the "mark" of dogmatism and a subjectivist approach, which was unable to familiarize itself in time with the scope of the changes which had embraced the world, which "did not always" emphasize political means of ensuring the country's security—that such a foreign policy frequently avoided real opportunities, was devoid of internal dynamism, and was attended by mistakes and miscalculations.

The siting of SS-20 missiles and the introduction of troops into Afghanistan are, in my view, typical examples of decisions of a subjectivist nature geared to the use of strong-arm military methods in foreign policy. In both cases we clearly overestimated our own potential and underestimated what could be called the "resistance of the medium." In both cases we scored our own goals—which damaged our prestige in the international arena. In both cases we suffered great moral and material harm. And in Afghanistan we paid the highest price—the price of blood.

In both cases we drove ourselves into a corner and created impasse situations from which there was no exit within the framework of the old way of thinking and the old stereotypes. It was only the switching of foreign policy activity to a new system of coordinates that enabled the Soviet political leadership to reinterpret the state of affairs and to adopt the only correct decisions—to go for the "zero option" with the "Euromissiles" and to withdraw the troops from Afghanistan.

Each of these decisions is important and significant in itself. And at the same time they can be viewed as unique symbols of overall restructuring, the renewal of Soviet foreign policy, and the radical change in its style and the ways and means it uses. The fundamental orientation of the beneficial changes was set by the concept of the new political thinking.

Quite a lot has already been written about the new political thinking. Nonetheless, there is some point in taking another look at its basic characteristics.

The new thinking is above all consistently scientific thinking. This thinking is strictly realistic. It sees the world as it is, in all its complexity, contradictoriness, and multi-dimensionality. It does not turn its back on "unpleasant" facts and situations and proceeds not from what is desirable but from what is possible. This thinking is self-critical by its very nature. Complacent infallibility and claims to a monopoly of the truth are alien to it. Relying on feedback, it corrects, supplements, and modifies political decisions, seeking to make them as effective as possible. This thinking is antidogmatic in principle. It is open to everything new and unexpected which does not fit into the usual systems. It does not balk at reviewing views sanctified by time if these views contradict life and reality.

The new political thinking may be described as a synthesis, as the union of science and politics.

Science notes that man is living through a crisis-laden, critical period of his development. We now have no guaranteed future. Existing stocks of nuclear weapons create the technical possibility of the breaking up and halting of history. The "ecological bomb" is no less dangerous. Scientific and technical progress is making air, water, and food increasingly toxic and poisonous. The actual process of living runs the risk of turning into

slow suicide. The extremely uneven pace of economic and social development and the contrasts between poverty and wealth create dangerous spheres of tension on global and regional scales. Alarm, anxiety, and a sense of instability and uncertainty are traumatizing the era's public consciousness.

Politics, the politics on which the Soviet Union insists, offers a way out, offers salvation. There is no acceptable, sensible alternative to peaceful coexistence. Consequently the solution of the complex of global problems is possibly only on the roads of constructive, creative collaboration between states and peoples. Consequently, moreover, the attentions of politics and politicians should be focused on general human, all-human interests. Consequently, finally, the times demand that the arms race be halted, without which there can be no question of any constructive collaboration or any satisfaction of general human interests.

Offering a specific, detailed program, encompassing all types of armaments, for a transition to a nonnuclear, nonviolent world, the Soviet Union is far from any ultimatums or demands of the "all or nothing" type. We are prepared to modify our positions and to take partial, interim decisions, as long as they mean movement in the necessary direction. We are prepared for in-depth compromises and for a consideration—on a mutual, equitable basis—of the interests of all states. We are prepared to accompany each step along the path of disarmament with the toughest verification measures if, of course, our partners in the talks are prepared for this.

And all this is already not only words, not only good intentions—all this is already the Soviet Union's foreign policy practice. The decision to withdraw the Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the ratification of the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate- and Shorter-Range Missiles, the advances at the talks on a substantial reduction of strategic offensive arms, the destruction of chemical weapons, and the banning of nuclear explosions, and the overall stabilization of Soviet-U.S. relations—these are the real, tangible results of the restructuring of Soviet foreign policy and the penetration of the new political thinking into political practice.

We are trying to understand others better and have begun to be better understood ourselves. Our relations with many states have improved—none have deteriorated. The myth of the "Soviet threat" has been markedly shaken. Everyone is learning to see present and future partners in former "enemies." The thread by which the Damoclean sword of the nuclear threat still hangs has become much stronger. For 3 years of restructuring this is quite a lot to accomplish.

"The development of events in the Soviet Union has become a key factor raising the situation in the world to a qualitatively new level." This conclusion was drawn in the annual "Strategic Review of the World Situation 1987-1988" published by the London International Institute for Strategic Studies. The Soviet Union will do everything possible to ensure that the level which has been reached becomes a stepping stone for the further relaxation of international tension and stabilization of the world situation.

The restructuring of Soviet foreign policy continues. One of the next tasks is to change the nature of the relationship between the Soviet public and the apparatus responsible for evolving and implementing the foreign policy course. For decades the work of this apparatus has been beyond the control of the public. This situation still persists today. The public finds out about decisions in international policy only when these decisions have already been made. And the only thing left for the public to do is approve the decision which has been taken.

At present the zone of glasnost, the zone of critical analysis, is beginning to approach only individual episodes in the history of our foreign policy activity. We must, we must without fail, go further. Of course, it is hard to break traditions which have become the flesh and blood of our state organism. But if we are really serious about democracy we must resolve to take this step and place the whole of our diplomatic service in the zone of glasnost and control "from below." The participation of the broad public in the discussion of foreign policy subjects, the proposal and comparison of different possible courses of action in the world arena, and analysis of the pluses and minuses of foreign policy activity will undoubtedly help to make our foreign policy still more effective and closer and more intelligible to the people.