GORBACHEV AND THE WEST

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We may now conclude that Mikhail Gorbachev is serious when he speaks of restructuring, reform, and "new thinking." In spite of what some observers originally thought, his actions are not a "trick" to lull our Western vigilance. The reasons for the changes are almost exclusively internal: they aim at extricating the USSR from a state of "pre-crisis" (the euphemism used by the General Secretary) in which it has been plunged by a Stalinism unduly prolonged by Brezhnevism. Even before attempting to prove the hypothetical "superiority of socialism," Gorbachev needs to make it work, bringing Soviet technology and the economy up to the standards of modern countries.

Nevertheless, there is no reason to be prematurely astounded and to sing praises to our hero. First of all, the General Secretary remains, until demonstrated to the contrary, a communist: the defender of a system hostile to the so-called bourgeois democracies and which hopes to supplant them. More importantly, the magnitude of the resistance and opposition which the new path elicits is still underestimated in the West, and it should cause us to be careful. Nothing has yet been played out, and Stalinist-Brezhnevism is not lacking in resources: it could very well return in force (it has already attempted this), even if it leaves the current problems unresolved.

Therefore, we should shake off the inferiority complex which Gorbachev would like us to adopt every time he invites his Western interlocutors (for example George Shultz in the spring of 1987) to also embark on "restructuring." The West has its own problems, which are not at all analogous to those of the Soviet Union. Thus, there is no reason why we should all be subject to the Kremlin's timetable just because a General Secretary who is more dynamic than his predecessors decides to reset the political clock after decades of stagnation.

Moreover, the moment belongs to the West: whatever Gorbachev or the watchful Ligachev may say, all that is said and done in Moscow with respect to *glasnost*, the rehabilitation of the private sector, or the acknowledgement of human rights, is a step taken in the direction of the democracies, and not the reverse. It is undoubtedly courageous to denounce the stagnation of the Brezhnev era, but this also amounts to forcing the doors which all foreign observers had opened long ago. And one of the most desirable results of the

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ongoing *perestroika* will be attained once we stop to consider as a special event the call of communist regimes to good common sense. There is no reason for us to feel inferior, and even less to panic: we are under no obligation to search for an answer to the new Soviet challenge at any cost, as some Western Sovietologists have already feverishly done.

Should We Help Him?

As Mr. Genscher, the West German minister for foreign affairs, once asked, should we try to "influence the ongoing evolution in the USSR, to steer it in our direction, to speed up and participate in its implementation?"

The answer to this question can only be ambivalent. In fact, Western observers of the Soviet scene are somewhat schizophrenic with regard to what has taken place in Moscow over the past two years. On the one hand, they observe that the changes have made this scene infinitely more interesting than in the past, and that so many steps have been taken in the right direction. What Gorbachev has done for the dissidents, the intellectuals and the press amounts to a better life for at least a number of Soviets. The West is both interested in limiting the global expansion of totalitarianism and in seeing its influence diminished where it already exists. We want not only to reduce the suffering it causes individuals, but also to mitigate the tensions which it inevitably creates in the international sphere. Our inclinations should not long waver between Gorbachev and the hardliners, who would reinstate the most repressive orthodoxy.

Another consideration soon emerges: if the goal of all these changes is really the one declared by Gorbachev — that is to make socialism more efficient and to restore the power and the expansionist capabilities which it was in the process of losing — then we have a different choice. At the extreme, the logic of anti-communism dictates that at the head of the USSR we would want not a reformer, but a Brezhnev or Chernenko who would guarantee stagnation and regression. Going even farther, true cynics will maintain that, with or without socialism, the success of economic reforms will result in making Soviet industry and agriculture more efficient, thereby creating a formidable competitor even in the absence of political disagreements. The transformation of the USSR into a new Japan would not necessarily be advantageous for the European Community.

This argument cannot be taken seriously. From an economic point of view, a Soviet Union undergoing modernization will be an enormous market open to the goods and technology of Western economies well before becoming competitive with the West. Some American economists believe that this opening up of the Soviet market is the only new factor capable of reviving a sluggish growth in the West. In the political sphere, it is reasonable to think that a USSR engaged in vast reforms will limit its expansionary ambitions and replace the previous surly confrontations with political dialogue and economic cooperation. Deng Xiaoping's China provides one such example: ever since embarking on the road to reform, it has labored to create a more

agreeable international environment and to lower the tensions with its neighbors, namely the Soviet Union.

"Mr. Da"

The same has taken place with the new diplomacy of Gorbachev. Its objectives have undoubtedly remained the same. Dictated by geography and geopolitical interests which go beyond regimes and succession crises, these objectives remain: having access to the warm oceans of the South and East; isolating Western Europe from the United States; and having political and eventually military influence in regional crises. The methods, however, have changed. Gorbachev does not hesitate to overturn the most well-established Soviet traditions, and he accepts Western proposals to the extent of becoming "Mr. Da" precisely where Gromyko was "Mr. Nyet." He accedes in giving his diplomacy the "civil" dimensions (including human rights and limits to secrecy) which it had lacked, and he substituted for Brezhnev's slogan "controlling the gathering of forces to the profit of socialism" with the much more modern idea (already largely explored in the West) of global interdependence and military adequacy.

The "new thinking" can be seen primarily in disarmament, the principal field of interest of Soviet foreign policy. But Moscow's new negotiating proposals are not contrary to the interests of the great power which the Soviet Union wishes to remain, nor do they lead to its weakening: it is a well-established interest of the Soviet Union to promote denuclearization, since such a policy gives still greater weight to its demographic advantage and conventional forces. Such is the meaning of the euromissile agreement; but whereas Brezhnev and Gromyko did not want to pay the price of giving up their SS-20s, Gorbachev has understood the necessity of making this gesture.

Generally, the checks which the General Secretary has brought to the power and appetites of his military are the guarantees of a will to reform, the external manifestation of the new emphasis on domestic problems. Brezhnev had already understood that war was impossible, and that weapons did not permit him to take whatever action he wished. This realization is even more acute in a reformer, a man known to be much more aware of the weaknesses of the Soviet Union.

We might then conclude that we should help Gorbachev. But Genscher's question calls for other observations. In the first place, the West can not do much about Soviet reforms, even if it so wished. The Soviet system has been built to be independent of its own populations as well as external pressures or stimuli. There have been many attempts to employ the "weapon of commerce" either to punish the Kremlin for bad behavior (as Carter and Reagan did with the wheat embargoes and the trans-Siberian pipeline), or on the contrary to encourage moderation (as Nixon and Kissinger did). Neither the carrot nor the stick alternatives have worked: the detente of the 1970s did not prevent Brezhnev from embarking on militarization, and the embargoes of the 1980s did not push back the USSR in Afghanistan.

In the second place, it is very probable that any external support openly offered to Gorbachev might be counter-productive. It is true that the General Secretary has sometimes given the impression of requesting this support, but with the dubious intentions of "softening" his Western interlocutors so as to draw them to the Soviet position. Some time ago it was said that "Brezhnev the moderate" should be aided against the Politburo "hardliners," and Truman himself fell for this trap when he declared in 1948 that Stalin was "a good guy but a prisoner of the Politburo . . ." Concerning domestic politics, there is still the saying of Lenin: "If the enemy gives you praise, ask yourself which error you have committed." It is already highly likely that the complimentary remarks made by certain Western politicians about Gorbachev give comfort to those adversaries who have dubbed him the "Soviet Dubcek."

A False Question

The real answer is, therefore, that the question of whether to aid Gorbachev is a false one. Good feelings which a foreign leader inspires should not be the primary motivation of those responsible for the diplomacy of any country. Rather, the defense of the interests of one's own country must come first. That does not mean that one should ignore what is happening in Moscow. However, the criterion to apply for future decisions and actions should be not our desires or speculations concerning the type of regime which will emerge, but the concrete repercussions of the ongoing changes on the international arena. In a word, the criteria should be the developments in two situations which should interest us above all others: Afghanistan and Eastern Europe.

Some Soviet efforts have been made in Afghanistan. Soviet authorities now admit in private that the massive military intervention in 1979 was a mistake and that there is no military solution. But if troop removal is officially discussed in Geneva, the new Kremlin leadership has not renounced the support of a communist regime in Kabul whose hard core would be constituted by its friends of the Afghan brother party. This policy assumes that the guerrilla problem has been resolved, even though the guerrillas took up arms against precisely this type of regime and have been hardened by eight years of combat. Assuming that Mr. Gorbachev seriously intends to put an end to this war, he will have to undertake all the agony of a phenomenon which is familiar to us in the West but remains completely unknown to the Soviets: that of decolonization and all the consequent problems with his own friends and with the extremists, as well as accusations of treason and sell-out. Nothing indicates that the Soviet leadership might be ready for this at present.

Concerning Eastern Europe, the situation is less tense for the moment but remains complex. All the leaders of the Eastern countries were put in office by Gorbachev's predecessors, in particular by Brezhnev. For many of these heirs, the first reaction against Gorbachev's policies has been to more or less pretend a lack of concern. They have also stated that what may be very good for the Soviet Union, a country which for too long has been sclerotic, not to say backward, is not good for them since they have already made the necessary

reforms. Hungary, and above all, Poland reacted more positively, but this was due to the leaders' perceptions that the changes in Moscow were *a posteriori* justifications of a course which they had chosen long before. In fact, nothing which Gorbachev has done in the past two years in the areas of political and civil liberties or economic liberalization can set an example for Eastern Europe, where conditions everywhere — with the exception of Romania — were generally better than in the USSR. Furthermore, the deep-rooted nationalism causes the same leaders to mistrust all that might signal a return to the situation of the 1950s and 1960s when the smallest change in the party line on the part of "big brother" immediately required corresponding changes in its satellites.

This being said, positive developments in the Kremlin are, in the final analysis, also good for these countries. If a Stalin returns to power, they may not relapse into a totally repressive regime, but will sooner or later suffer its negative effects. If a reformer prevails, changes for the better are not guaranteed to happen in these countries, but at least they become politically feasible — and this already amounts to a great deal. That is why the Soviet press has strong sales in Eastern Europe for the first time, and why Gorbachev has been well received by the people of these countries. In the GDR his name was chanted by demonstrators at the foot of the Berlin Wall, and in Czechoslovakia the people spontaneously recognized the makings of an old conflict on the inverted front line. In the 1987 spring meeting between the heir of Brezhnev and the successor of Dubcek, the more revisionist of the two was not the one we would have guessed. Nevertheless, the rumor of historical revisionism with regard to the Soviet intervention in Prague in 1968 seems to have thrown cold water between Prague and Moscow.

The General Secretary must, therefore, delineate his policy toward Eastern Europe. In particular he must introduce the same flexibility and openness which he is trying to implement at home. This he attempted to do without great success in his April speeches in Prague. On the one hand, he assured all parties of their autonomy and of the "passing away of the Soviet model," while on the other hand he still tightly controls the foreign policy of these countries, (Erich Honecker, the leader of the GDR, needed his permission to visit his cousins in W.Germany) and his embassies continue to exercise strict control over the culture and media of the bloc countries.

In this respect, the turning point taken in Moscow since 1986 has confirmed the above paradox. Just as in 1956 Khrushchev launched de-Stalinization without considering its repercussion on his allies, (it was not long before he discovered his mistake), so Gorbachev launched his call for *perestroika* and *glasnost* without consulting anyone outside Soviet borders. However, the leader in Moscow is not responsible only for the USSR, but is also the head of an empire whose existence is a challenge to democracy. The dilemma is how to have his cake and eat it too, as the Americans would say, or how to liberalize the USSR domestically while keeping the empire. And how to keep all the suppressed nationalities from bursting through the cracks opened by *glasnost*. We already saw the Tartars of Crimea, the Kazakhs of Alma-Ata and the

students of the Baltic Republics take advantage of the new deal to noisily demonstrate their identity, and the same problem could occur in the East bloc countries.

All these issues create further difficulties for the reforms, and Gorbachev has not yet provided satisfactory solutions. Maybe such solutions do not exist. But they are what we Europeans should look for above all.