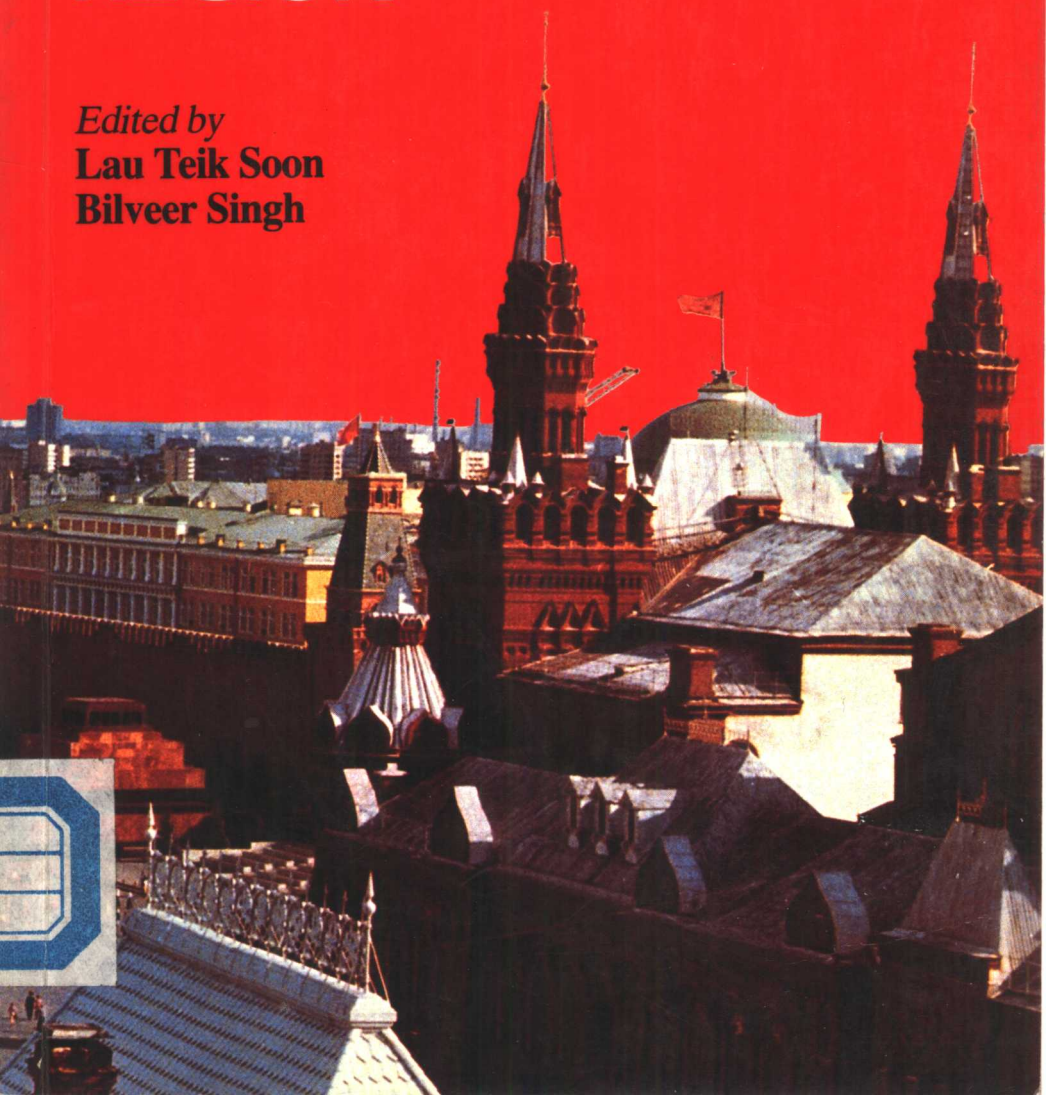


# THE SOVIET UNION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

*Edited by*  
**Lau Teik Soon**  
**Bilveer Singh**



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## Preface

The Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) was founded in September 1961 by a group of academics from the National University of Singapore (then called the University of Singapore) who believed that there was a need for a forum to promote greater understanding of current affairs among Singaporeans. The SIIA has tried to achieve its objective by organizing talks, international conferences, special courses and publishing occasional papers. The SIIA also works closely with various other institutes of strategic and international studies.

From 25–28 May 1987, the SIIA organised an international conference in Singapore to examine Soviet foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region. The specific topic of the conference was, “The Soviet Union in the Asia-Pacific Region”. Some 95 participants — including 19 foreign scholars from the United States, China, South Korea, England, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Brunei — evaluated the changing Soviet posture towards the Asia-Pacific region. Eight papers, now the various chapters in this book, emerged from the conference. While they were written from different backgrounds and perspectives, they have all attempted to address the basic theme of changing Soviet posture towards the Asia-Pacific region, especially since the inauguration of Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in March 1985.

While the conference was organised by the SIIA, the editors of the volume would like to express their gratitude to various organizations and individuals who have assisted in one way or another in making the conference a success. We would like to thank the Asia Foundation for their generous financial support. Our special thanks go to the paper presenters from whose diversified perspectives we have bene-

fited so much. We hope that the end product of the international conference will significantly add to the on-going academic and policy debates on the future of Soviet role in the Asia-Pacific region. While the papers have been published by the SIIA, the paper writers are themselves responsible for their views and they do not in any way reflect the opinion of the sponsor nor its supporters.

Editors

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## Introduction

A relatively new phenomenon in Soviet foreign policy in the 1980s has been its focus in the Asia-Pacific rim. While the Soviet Union has been involved in Asian politics for a long time, its focus on the Asia-Pacific region, especially in its official proclamations, became a regular feature only after Gorbachev's accession to power in March 1985. In four of his major addresses and proclamations, that is, Gorbachev's address at a banquet for Indian Prime Minister in Moscow in May 1985, Gorbachev's speech at the Twenty-seventh CPSU Congress in February 1986, the Soviet Government Special Statement on the Asia-Pacific region in April 1986 and Gorbachev's speech in Vladivostok in July 1986, the Soviet leader emphasised in no uncertain terms his country's stake in the Asia-Pacific region. While Soviet leaders in the past, beginning with Lenin, had repeatedly stressed their Asian character, Gorbachev was the first Soviet leader to comprehensively assert and stake a claim in the Pacific for his country.

Added to the new emphasis in the Asia-Pacific region, past Soviet policies in the region have been described by many analysts in negative terms. Soviet goals in the region have been viewed in anti-status quo perspectives, aimed at disrupting relationships, hitherto thought to be favourable to its principal adversary, the United States. At the same time, her heavy-handed, strong arm approach with an undue reliance on the military instrument is believed to be counter productive. This is said to be manifested in the steady growth of her armed strength in the region, especially along the Chinese border, in Mongolia, in the occupied Northern Territories, the growth of her Pacific Fleet, now the largest of all Soviet Fleets, her acquisition of military bases in North Korea and Vietnam as well as the rapid growth in the deployment of nuclear weapons in the Asia-Pacific side of the Soviet



Union. These developments are said to be manifestation of the primary considerations of the Soviet Union in the region, namely her military competition with the US and its allies and the PRC. In this regard, the Kremlin's underlying goal in the Asia-Pacific region can be understood from her traditional concern for general state security, the legitimacy of the Socialist system and its assertion that the Soviet Union is a power to be reckoned with in the Asia-Pacific region.

With the accession of Gorbachev, however, new elements are said to have been added to the Soviet Union's Asia-Pacific posture. First, the Kremlin has tried to justify its stakes in the Asia-Pacific region. It has argued that geographically, demographically and in view of the various physical features, such as having a Pacific coastline of 16,700 miles, it is unquestionably an Asia-Pacific country. In his Vladivostok address, for instance, Gorbachev categorically stated that "the Soviet Union is an Asian and Pacific country". Secondly, Gorbachev has linked the various developments in the Asia-Pacific region with the future of the Soviet Union's security. Here, the principal focus of the new leader has been on building new relations with China and Japan. The Soviet Union realised that the past antagonistic approach to the two countries had only led them to close ranks with the United States and form closer relationship which would amount to a strategic understanding among them. To counter this trend, the new regime in the Kremlin has begun to build new bridges with Beijing and Tokyo, thereby hoping to undermine the strategic arrangements among the United States, China and Japan. The high level exchange of visits as well as the rapid growth in economic and cultural relationships are some manifestations of the new approach. Thirdly, Gorbachev's Soviet Union has publicly acknowledge the importance of the other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, especially those in Indochina, ASEAN, the Indian sub-continent and in the South Pacific. Here, the Kremlin has signalled its intent to establish proper and positive state to state relationships, especially in the economic arena. Links are to be forged not only with socialist countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, North Korea but also the non-socialist countries, indicating the widening horizon of the new Soviet leadership as well as its comprehension of the complex nature of the Asia-Pacific region in terms of political, ideological, social and cultural structures. Finally, the Gorbachev administration has unveiled 'new' mechanisms to ensure peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region such as its support for the All Asia Forum and Pacific Economic Cooperation

Conference. In short, in addition to superpower relations and rivalry, which had hitherto rationalised and been the focus of Soviet Union's posture towards the Asia-Pacific region, the Soviet Union under Gorbachev is pursuing or has signalled its interest in pursuing relationship at a secondary level with all countries in the region. Here, not only is the military instrument judged to be counterproductive, but the new approach which involves building links through non-military means seemed to be credible and in line with the demands of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It also coincides with Gorbachev's domestic agenda, which has a heavy stress on economic efficiency. However, sceptics in the region are cautious as it may also give the impression of the Soviet Union trying to translate its growing military strength in the region into political, diplomatic and economic capital. Regardless of this, the various dimensions added by Gorbachev in his Asia-Pacific initiative are seen as something new and novel.

In the light of these developments the book explores the various aspects of Soviet foreign policy, particularly, as it pertains to the Asia-Pacific region. Some of the main queries which the various chapters will address include: what are the domestic factors, including ideology, which has implications for Soviet foreign policy? What are the main interests, commitments and policies of the Soviet Union towards the Asia-Pacific states? What is the Soviet perception of Southeast Asia and the role of these states in Soviet global strategy? What are the ASEAN states' perception of the Soviet Union and how serious do these governments regard the question of the Soviet threat?

Chapters One and Two examine the broad outlines of Soviet foreign policy. Malaya Ronas' chapter details the domestic factors in Soviet foreign policy, examining the economic and political reforms of Gorbachev as declared in the new edition of the Programme of the CPSU approved in its Twenty-seventh Congress. The writer analyses the observation that "the links between Soviet economic and foreign policy are closer than ever". Frank Cibulka's chapter examines Gorbachev's 'new thinking' and the priority areas in Soviet foreign policy with its focus in the Asia-Pacific region. He details Soviet motivations in the region and attempts to relate the 'new thinking' under Gorbachev with Soviet priorities in the Asia-Pacific region. Chapters Three and Four explore Soviet policies in the Northeast Asian region. Han Sung-Joo's chapter details the policies of the Northeast Asian states, with particular reference to China, Japan, North and South Korea, towards the Soviet Union, especially in the

light of recent Soviet foreign policy initiatives towards Asia. The writer analyses the rationale for the generally cautious but positive reactions of these countries towards the new Soviet diplomatic initiatives in Asia. Wang Jisi, on the other hand, reviews the dynamism and problems of Sino-Soviet relations. The writer analyses the recent developments in Sino-Soviet relations, presenting China's perceptions of Soviet role in the Asia-Pacific region and evaluates Chinese analyses of the dynamism of Soviet-American relations and their implications for China's foreign policy. Chapters Five and Six analyse Soviet relations with Indochina. Thai Quang Trung examines Hanoi's policy towards the Soviet Union, arguing that despite the sanction of economic reforms by the Sixth Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party, no significant change has taken place in the area of foreign policy. Rather, there are indications of a reinforcement of Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation. Leszek Buszynski examines Soviet Policy towards Indochina: Priorities and Contraints. The writer analyses Soviet Union's relations with Indochina in terms of wider Soviet foreign policy goals towards the Asia-Pacific region, especially in terms of their priorities with other Soviet objectives. The writer also examines the domestic constraints on Soviet decision-making as it pertains to Indochina. Chapters Seven and Eight elaborate on Soviet-ASEAN relations. Bilveer Singh explores Soviet relations with ASEAN in terms of policies, problems and prospects. The writer examines the changing Soviet policies towards the regional association, analyses the widening gulf between the two and speculates on the future. On the other hand, Sukhumbhand Paribatra analyses the Soviet factor in ASEAN's diplomacy since 1975. The writer explores the changes in the Soviet Union since March 1985 and against the backdrop of the dramatic changes in Southeast Asia since 1975, attempts to analyse the growing differences between ASEAN and the Soviet Union.

Lau Teik Soon  
Bilveer Singh

**PART ONE**

**The Foreign Policy of the  
Soviet Union**



# **The Domestic Factors in Soviet Foreign Policy**

Malaya C. Ronas

## **Introduction**

As a background paper focused on the domestic factors in Soviet foreign policy, this discussion presents the policies of economic and political reforms (the Gorbachev Reforms) declared in the new edition of the Programme of the (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) CPSU approved in its 27th Congress as the point of departure in an attempt to show the influence of domestic policies on Soviet foreign policy. It examines the observation that "the links between Soviet economic and foreign policy are closer than ever."<sup>1</sup> This view posits the idea that relaxation of international tensions would allow the Soviet Union to reallocate part of its military expenditure to its economic reform policies and improve the economic well-being of its people. In this context, the Soviet Union may be expected to pursue with vigour and boldness foreign policy initiatives intended to reduce military tensions with the US and other powers in the Atlantic and the Pacific. There are already some indications that the USSR and the US are close to an agreement on the reduction of INF.

After the description of the major features of the strategy for economic and political reforms, some indicators of their performance will be presented. The discussion is aimed at a tentative assessment on whether or not the Gorbachev reforms would end-up just like the conservatism of the Brezhnev era. It is probably adequate at this point to say that Gorbachev appears to have enough political support and intense determination to push his reform programme.

The seeming single-mindedness of Gorbachev to reform Soviet economy has made it imperative that foreign policy must be closely

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<sup>1</sup> Archie Brown, "Change in the Soviet Union," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer, 1986, p. 1660.

linked with this domestic thrust. The implications of the economic reform programme for Soviet foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly its bilateral relations with important powers in the region like the US, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and ASEAN will establish the close link between domestic and foreign policy of USSR. It will likewise provide insights on possible short and medium term foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union in the Asia-Pacific region.

### **The Gorbachev Reforms**

Many questions have been raised about the nature and extent of the economic and political reforms initiated by Gorbachev. Shortly before the 27th Congress declared the new edition of the CPSU Programme, observers noted the keenness of the new Soviet leadership to tackle the economic slowdown in USSR and offer alternative insights about the nature and dimension of its response.<sup>2</sup> There are at least three possible directions that the Gorbachev reforms could take. First is the limited freeing of the market forces intended to increase productivity in selected areas and partly determine pricing policy similar to the Hungarian and Chinese experiments. Second is the reorganization of personnel and modification of incentive system that proved effective in the short-term during the brief stewardship of Andropov. And the third is some kind of combination where the first important step are short-term remedies that may encourage later on fundamental restructuring of established economic policies. It is perhaps too early to tell the ultimate direction of these reforms because barely a year has passed after the proclamation of the new edition of the party programme.<sup>3</sup>

But the major features of Gorbachev reforms may be instructive on the matter of its essential and eventual form and substance. The Programme of the CPSU approved on March 1, 1986 pledges to accelerate social and economic development. More specifically it states:

Soviet society is to reach new heights on the basis of accelerating its social and economic development. This means:

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<sup>2</sup> See Marshall I. Goldman, "Gorbachev and Economic Reforms," *Foreign Affairs*, Fall, 1985, pp. 56-73.

<sup>3</sup> *The Economist* in its "Foreign Report" of 18 September 1986 appears cynical about the reforms while Archie Brown seems persuaded that Gorbachev has the will and support necessary to push the reforms.

**in the economic sphere** — raising the national economy to a basically new scientific-technological and organizational-economic level, gearing it towards intensive development; achieving the world's highest level in productivity of social labour, quality of output, and efficiency of production; ensuring an optimal structure and balance for the integral national economic complex of the country; significantly raising the level of socialization of labour and production; drawing collective-form and co-operative property and the property of the people as a whole closer together, with the prospect of their merging in future;<sup>4</sup>

The economic strategy of the CPSU intended to achieve the above-mentioned general economic goals include the following tasks:<sup>5</sup>

- “rapid renewal of the production apparatus through extensive introduction of advanced technology (e.g. robotisation and computerisation);
- “considerable increase in labour productivity;
- “utmost improvement in the technical level and quality of products;
- “structural flexibility of the economy;
- “higher effectiveness of capital investments;
- “application of the latest achievements of science and technology to machine-building;
- “effective development of the country's fuel-and-energy complex;
- “further strengthening and improved efficiency of the agro-industrial complex;
- “accelerated growth in the production of consumer goods and the entire sphere of services;
- “improving the distribution of the productive forces;
- “accelerated development of Siberia and the Soviet Far East.”

Compared to the CPSU Programme approved in 1961, this one is less ambitious because it does not specify when Soviet socialist society will be transformed into a communist one. The broad direction of economic development and the manner to achieve it remains consistent with Marxist-Leninist principles. It may be argued then that the economic reforms of Gorbachev could only give short-term impetus

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<sup>4</sup> *The Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. (CPSU) (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1986), pp. 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-40.



similar to the initial success of Andropov in reviving Soviet economy through "personnel change, tightened discipline, organizational restructuring and some devolution of responsibility."<sup>6</sup> In which case, nothing dramatic could be expected and the reforms would in no way be comparable with the bold initiatives taken by China. One scenario, however, depicts Gorbachev taking the first cautious steps in preparation for sweeping changes in the nature of Soviet economy. In which case, there may be, in the long run, structural changes introduced that may compare with the Hungarian and Chinese experiences.

In the political sphere, the CPSU Programme includes reforms intended to modify the political processes and allow greater mass participation as a means of accelerating economic and social development. More specifically it states that:

The development of socialist self-government by the people through ever greater involvement of citizens in running state and public affairs, the perfection of the electoral system, the improvement of activities of elective bodies of people's power, the enhancement of the role of trade unions, Komsomol, and other mass organizations of the working people, and an effective use of all forms of representative and direct democracy.<sup>7</sup>

This policy gained impetus when Gorbachev laid down the principles that shall be followed in reforming the Soviet political system in his speech to the Plenum of the Central Committee which opened on January 27, 1987.<sup>8</sup> The principles depart from the established procedures of the CPSU and seem to erode some powers of the central organs of the Party. As reported by the *EIU*, these principles are:

1. Party secretaries — the professional party bureaucrats who represent the most powerful element in the middle and lower levels of the political system — should be elected from competing candidates in secret ballots by party committees rather than nominated from above. These are party committees and secretaries at district, town, provincial, and republic levels.
2. At factory and farm level, foremen and even directors should be elected. (Brigade leaders are already elected, subject to party approval). Open competition should be developed as a way of recruiting management personnel.
3. There should be multiple candidacies for elections to the Supreme Soviet.

<sup>6</sup> Archie Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 1060.

<sup>7</sup> *The Programme of the CPSU*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> *EIU*, No. 1, 1987, (The Economist Publications Ltd., 1987), p. 8.