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GLASNOST AND PERESTROIKA IN USSR : ADJUSTMENT OF THE SYSTEM OR SYSTEMIC CHANGE ?

Ever since Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, Soviet leadership has assumed a style considerably different from that under his predecessors. Gorbachev inherited a Soviet society which has been beset with numerous problems. The economy has long been stagnated leading to endless shortages and belying the rising hopes and aspirations for a "workers' paradise". Inefficiency, indiscipline and lack of incentives have pushed the country to a point of static formation where the entrenched interests and corrupt groups could flourish. A considerable segment of the party and government *apparatchiks* have grown into powerful vested coteries almost at all levels. The society was virtually reeking with mismanagement and corruption. In a word, Gorbachev took over the steering in Kremlin at a time when the Soviet system had been facing a serious crisis of confidence. The apparent weakness of the system also began to undermine the strength of the Soviet Union as a global power as compared to its adversaries in the West.

Against this backdrop Gorbachev embarked on a new policy of *glasnost* and *perestroika* meaning openness and restructuring. All this is meant for the transformation of Soviet society, one that will speed up the country's sluggish economic growth and modernize its

aging institutions. Gorbachev clearly hopes that the genuine approach of *glasnost*, combined with its twin, *perestroika* will inspire Soviet society to mend at least some of its less redeeming ways. He makes efforts at breaking away from the dogmatic past and throwing the Soviet system to open practices. With a determination to reinvigorate and revamp its social, political and economic scene the Soviet leader has initiated some significant changes in the system. All these have sparked off developments in Gorbachev's Soviet Union which are being watched with intense interest not only in the West and East European countries but also elsewhere in the world.

The Kremlin boss however, seems to be far from having a smooth sailing. The managerial-bureaucratic system that has developed over the years can not be cowed by Gorbachev so easily. The reform is sometimes sabotaged by those creaky armchair warriors who feel their comfortable seats being pulled from under them. For sure the pen pushers will give their last bite, since no one wants to be deprived of one's privileged position. So, the question is, will Gorbachev be able to push along with his reforms or will he stumble against resistance. Much would depend on how far Gorbachev himself wants to go—does he want just adjustment of the system or systemic change? It will also be pertinent to relate a resurgent Soviet Union to its fallout effects on its politico-ideological adversaries. All this makes a study on Gorbachev's Soviet Union worthwhile.

The paper consists of four sections. In the first section Gorbachev's measures of reforms—political, economic, socio-cultural—will be discussed. In the second section an attempt has been made to highlight the extent of reforms Gorbachev will or can pursue in a bid to show the paradoxes of Gorbachev's professed changes in the system. Implications of these reforms both in the East and West as well as in the Third World have been focused in the third part of the paper. And the concluding section deals with the resistance and problems that Gorbachev faces in pushing along his policies and programmes.

Gorbachev's Measures for Change

Under Gorbachev the buzzword for a multidimensional programme of domestic renewal is acceleration. The concept of acceleration runs through all the pre-Congress documents and is one of the hallmarks of the Party's re-edited programme which proclaims that under the present domestic and international conditions the all-round progress of Soviet society, its onward movement toward communism can and must be ensured by speeding up the country's socio-economic development. The Party under Gorbachev aims at a qualitative transformation of all aspects of life in Soviet society through "a radical renewal of its material and technical foundations on the basis of the achievements of the scientific and technological revolution; refinement of social relations, above all economic; profound change in the content and character of labour, in people's material and cultural conditions; and invigoration of the entire system of political, social and ideological institutions".¹

There is no denying that the Congress has been accompanied by a kind of churning of the Soviet society in the wake of Gorbachev's call to bring about "concreteness, efficiency, consistency, the unity of word and deed, the choice of the most effective ways and means, a careful consideration of the people's opinion and a skillful coordination of the efforts of all public forces", that is, practical steps to "completely overcome inertness, formalism, apathy, the habit of drowning a living cause in idle and endless roundabout talk, attempts by some people to 'get onto the bandwagon of reconstruction'.²

In fact, a careful reading of the report Gorbachev made at the 27th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and of some of the contributions made by the delegates helps us obtain a clearer idea of the new Soviet leadership's projects or at least of the image it wants to give of it. On two points at least Gorbachev's overall design

1. Devendra Kaushik "Domestic Renewal : A Refined Approach", *World Focus*, January 1986, p. 11
2. Sumit Chakravarty, "Winds of Change", *World Focus*, January 1986, p. 3

was already becoming fairly clear in the wake of his accession to the Soviet power hierarchy. First, there is to be tighter discipline all down the line among the regime's cadres, which should initially lead to a more efficient and economic utilization of the country's resources. Secondly, there will be a drastic reduction of the role played by "intermediate echelons", that is, ministries which have been blamed for all the cardinal signs of inertia, stagnation, incompetence and bureaucracy.³

In his speech at a two-day meeting of the plenum of the Party Central Committee, which ended in Moscow on 28 January 1987 Gorbachev had a bracing message for his colleagues in the Kremlin. He said that the Soviet socialist system was a mess and must be fixed. He further said that it is the leading bodies of the Party and the state that bear the responsibility for all this. He rattled off a long catalogue of abuses of the system. He charged that:⁴

- "Disregard for the law, report padding, bribe taking, sycophancy and the encouragement of toadyism have had a deleterious effect on the moral atmosphere of the society."
- Soviet policymaking has grown rife with "conservative" sentiments, inertia, a tendency to brush aside everything that does not fit into conventional patterns, and an unwillingness to come to grips with outstanding socio-economic problems."

To remedy the situation, Gorbachev gave a call for political and economic reforms as well as for freedom of speech and the press.

Political Reforms

Gorbachev's strategy is openness, candor, publicity—all summed up in the Russian word *glasnost*. "We don't have an opposition," Gorbachev said, "How then can we monitor ourselves? Only through

3. Alain Jacob, "Gorbachev's Quick-Quick-Slow Tenor of Reform", *The Guardian Weekly*, 6 April 1986, p. 14

4. *Time*, 9 February 1987 p.4

criticism and self-criticism. And most of all through *glasnost*."⁵ *Glasnost* has, in fact, become Gorbachev's rallying cry for reversing the Soviet economy's sagging productivity and the morale of Soviet workers. It is a call for nudging open a closed society, for forcing accountability on an industrial and political elite accustomed to covering up its failures, for galvanizing a younger generation grown cynical about the promise of the workers's paradise.⁶

The imperative of the policy of *glasnost* in a society like that of the Soviets are overarching. It may be mentioned here that the view of *glasnost* was expressed by Yevgeni Yevtushenko, the most famous poet in the Soviet Union. According to him, "One could describe *glasnot* metaphorically as the air above and the national economy as the earth below. It is easier and faster to refresh the air than it is to turn and fertilize the earth, yet purified air is necessary before healthy changes can be made in the earth. So it is too early for us to speak of economic triumphs, and unlike the old days, nobody is making any messianic promises. We must wait for the earth to absorb the air, and be enriched." He further said, "Glasnost is not a deception. It is an evolution, Gorbachev did not invent it, nor did he impose it from above, as those in the West sometimes believe. In his desire to accelerate the development of openness and the economy, he is reflecting the historical imperatives that have emerged from our people themselves."⁷

The wind of Gorbachev's *glasnost* campaign is blowing all over the Soviet Union. Unlike in the past, detailed statistics have been published confirming dismal harvests and unsettling infant mortality rates. Alcoholism, drug abuse and prostitution have become topics of frank public discussion. Since the initial secrecy surrounding the Chernobyl meltdown, the official press has carried detailed coverage of a run of Soviet disasters, from earthquakes and shipwrecks to hijacking, airplane crashes, drug busts and even traffic accidents.⁸ In

5. *Newsweek*, 12 January 1987, p. 16

6. *ibid*

7. *Time*, 9 February 1987, p. 7

8. *Newsweek*, 12 January 1987: pp. 16-17

the Soviet media a complex but expanding process of "de-tabooisation" is observed. High officials are openly criticized, including government ministers and regional party secretaries, some of whom are members of the Party Central Committee. This criticism is not always followed by dismissals, as would have happened in the past.

The question is to what extent glasnost would be permitted. Given the nature of socialist system, only a guided openness policy could be conceivable.

This means that criticism now is a standard for behaviour and not a tool of punishment.⁹

This change has also been observed by Nixon's Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Carter's Defense Secretary Harold Brown, during their visit to the Soviet Union in early February this year. "The Soviets are much, much more open than when I negotiated with them in the past," said Kissinger, while, "It's really quite a remarkable change" was Brown's comment.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Gorbachev wants to discard the practices of "concealment" and "hush-up" with a view to revive the Leninist principle of *glasnost*. Lenin said, "our strength lies in stating the truth."¹¹ Lenin further warned that "false rhetoric and false boastfulness spell moral ruin and lead unfailingly to political extinction."¹² That is precisely why the Party Central Committee deemed it essential to refer once more in the new edition of the (Third) Party programme to the negative processes that had surfaced in the seventies and the early eighties. This is a commitment made before the Party Congress and the Soviet people that in future the basic problems afflicting society would never be concealed from the broad sections of the masses.

9. *Time*, 9 February 1987, p. 7

10. *Time*, 16 February 1987, p. 18

11. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 9, p. 295

12. *ibid*

The question is to what extent *glasnost* would be permitted. Given the nature of Socialist system, only a guided openness policy could be conceivable. The Soviet people are likely to be granted right to criticize or reveal the evils of the society as long as it does not intrude on the basics of the Soviet system. The openness policy is only geared to overcome the inertness and stiffness of the forms and methods of administration, the decline of dynamism of work and an escalation of bureaucracy-which have so long been retarding the development process in the society.

Another of Gorbachev's political reforms is the promise of a dramatic move towards democracy. He has proposed changes in the Soviet electoral system. He has proposed that local, republic-level and perhaps, even national Communist Party officials be chosen from slates of more than one candidate and by secret ballot. He also suggested that heads of enterprises, heads of shops, departmental heads, even farm chairmen will be elected rather than placed in positions from outside. And Gorbachev has set himself for a cautious time-table for his proposed change, culminating in a National Party Conference next year. He hopes to get a clearance in this conference for these and further changes in the party without waiting for the next Party Congress to come up in 1991. The conference would in effect, be an extraordinary session of the quinquennial Soviet Party Congress, the most recent of which occurred last year. Such special meetings have been held before but they are by no means regular events. The last one was called by Stalin in 1941.¹³ It appears that Gorbachev wants men and women of demonstrated ability to compete for leadership through secret votes and not by traditional public show of hands only to confirm decisions arrived at behind the scenes.

Gorbachev emphasized that the Soviet leadership had as its goal the "serious and deep democratization of society". "Democratization is not just a slogan, but the very essence of the reconstruction our society is living through", he told at a Central Committee meeting.

13. *Time*, 9 February 1987, pp. 4, 6

Gorbachev said development of "socialist democracy" would ensure that "the errors of the past will not be repeated, we need democracy like we need air."¹⁴ But one should not subordinate reality to hope. Gorbachev seems to define and apply democracy in his own way. "Socialist democracy has nothing in common with permissiveness, irresponsibility and anarchy. What I have in view is an organic combination of democracy and discipline, of independence and responsibility, of the rights and duties of every citizen,"¹⁵ said Gorbachev. This would not be allowed to undermine the principle of democratic centralism, he insisted, under which decisions taken by the Party supreme bodies must be carried out by the rest even if they do not agree. He however, added, "with all the importance of control 'from above' it is of fundamental importance in the conditions of democratization of society to raise the level and effectiveness of control 'from below' so that each executive and each official constantly feels his responsibility to and dependence on the electorate."¹⁶ But Given the Party's supreme role and its democratic centralism Gorbachev's call for democratization and open society does not mean to him what they meant to Thomas Jefferson. As a matter of fact, in the context of the Soviet Socialist structure of society, Gorbachev can not conceive of the concept of democracy as it is understood in the countries of the West.

A new wave of Soviet liberatization appears to be under way with the setting of many dissidents free. Andrei Sakharov, the most noted Soviet dissident scientist was released from his seven years in internal exile in Gorki. Following this, another 140 were set free. There are reports that a commission is going to be established to review the cases of all political prisoners still locked in the *gulag*, or serving sentences of internal exile. Although the Soviet authority does not accept that it has any 'prisoners of conscience', the Amnesty International holds an estimate of the current number between 1,000 and

14. Martin Walker, "Soviet Masses Offered Voting Choice", *The Guardian Weekly*, 8 February 1987, p. 9; *Bangladesh Observer*, 31 January 1987.

15. *The Guardian Weekly*, 8 February 1987, p. 9

16. *ibid*

2,000 'prisoners of conscience' and perhaps up to 10,000 religious prisoners, most of whom are Baptists or Jehovah's Witnesses who refuse to do their military service. There are also militant Jews, unauthorized Muslim preachers, and some Catholic activists. It might also include the refuseniks, the Soviet Jews who have applied for but not been granted exit visas.¹⁷ But as a step towards liberalization, the Kremlin authorized the establishment of an extraordinary commission to take over the central emigration and visa department, OVIR, to clear out the entrenched bureaucracy and expedite the flow of exit visas for tens of thousands of Soviet Jews.¹⁸

What Gorbachev seems to be banking on is the hope that in the dissidents, he may have found a kind of loyal opposition. In the absence of a formal opposition, the Soviet leadership appears to rely on honest criticism and self-criticism. The fact that Sakharov is giving a moral support to Gorbachev's policies, lends credence to such a presumption.

Economic Reforms

The Soviet economy is beset with severe problems. It frustrates attempts to improve the living standards of the population and hobbles Soviet efforts to match the technological innovations of the industrialized democracies. The economic backwardness of the Soviet Union has also profound implications for her relative strategic position with regard to its principal adversary, the United States and for its overall standing in world politics.

As a matter of fact, by inertia the Soviet economy continued to develop largely on extensive basis, with sights set on drawing additional labour and material resources into production. As a result, the rate of growth of labour productivity and certain other efficiency indicators dropped substantially. The attempts to rectify matters by building new plants affected the problem of balance. The economy, which has enormous resources at its disposal ran into shortages. A gap appeared

17. *The Guardian Weekly*, 4 January 1987, p. 1

18. *ibid*

between the effective demand and the supply of goods.¹⁹ But changes in productivity, the motive power of the economy, required corresponding reforms in production relationship and that meant reforms in the economy and in the management of enterprises. These were set on train by Gorbachev. So Gorbachev's policy and performance should be evaluated not only with regard to the superstructure but also in fact first and foremost, with regard to the base, the economy of the Soviet socialist state. As a matter of fact, reforms in other areas are subordinated to the purpose of those in the economic sector.

The main targets of economic development in the Soviet Union by the end of the century are to (a) enhance its national income nearly two-fold while doubling the production potential and qualitatively transforming it; (b) increase labour productivity by 2.3 to 2.5 times; (c) reduce energy consumption per rouble of national income by 28.6 percent and meat consumption by almost 50 percent. It can be attained by a "sharp turn towards intensifying production towards improving quality any effectiveness" for which the main factors were (i) scientific and technological progress and (ii) fundamental transformation of the society's productive forces.²⁰ According to Gorbachev, it is impossible to effect cardinal changes with the previous material and technical foundations. The way out lies through modernization of the national economy on the basis of the latest scientific and technological advances, breakthrough on the leading avenues of scientific and technical progress (STP), restructuring of planning, management and investment, tightening of the organization and discipline.²¹

For decades the Soviet economy has been suffering from over-centralization in economic management. Gorbachev is in favour of reducing central control and increasing the role of enterprises and farms in the management of their units. Gorbachev deplored the over-centralization in cases that the central government is not always in a position

19. Sumit Chakravarty, *op. cit.*, p.6

20. *ibid*

21. R.G. Gidadhuli, "Economy, Breaking with the Past", *World Focus*, January 1986, p. 14

to properly appreciate and which are better left to be settled on the spot. In fact, in the last 2-3 years enterprises and associations are gradually being switched over to new conditions of management when their rights in planning and production and their responsibility for end results are increased.²²

A new draft law, meant for industrial reform was published for discussion on 7 February last. The law if adopted will give workers a say in how their factories are run and make those factories more responsible for their own profits and losses. The draft law says that firms should have more freedom to decide how many workers to employ and how much to pay to them. There is a hint that inefficient enterprises could even be allowed to go bust. Enterprises are also to do more trading directly with each other and with foreign firms, instead of through the central bureaucracy. These ideas draw on experiments begun in 1983, of which the two best-known examples are the Togliatti car plant and the Sumy engineering works.²³ These are apparently going well, though what works on a limited scale in high-profile enterprise will not necessarily succeed when applied to all Soviet industry.

The workers are to be given the right to elect their managers and have a say in the way their firms spend the money they earn.²⁴ Similar reforms in Poland and Yugoslavia have had mixed results, with some workers only too happy to vote themselves large pay rises. So it should serve the Kremlin authorities with some food for serious thought about their industrial reforms. Moreover two big pieces are missing from the changes so far. One is a price mechanism that could reflect real demand for goods and therefore give the firm managers some clues as to what goods to produce and in what quantity to satisfy their customers. The other is an end to state control over the supply of raw materials.²⁵ As neighbouring Poland has found to its cost, in an economy beset by shortages it is the minister who knows where

22. *ibid*, p. 15

23. *The Economist*, 14 February 1987, p. 38

24. *ibid*

25. *ibid*

supplies can be had, who has influence, not the factory manager who needs them. So, it seems that Gorbachev's reforms aim both to centralize and decentralize the economy. As a matter of fact, reform at present seems to be aiming at improving communication between government officials and workers. And as one of the defects of Soviet economic administration is the intervention of many ministries the reforms are designed to simplify intermediary controls.

Gorbachev has given emphasis on the role of workers and their constructive initiative in increasing their productivity. He also emphasized that economic incentives be used more widely so that workers are materially benefited for showing creative initiative and for increasing labour productivity. Moreover, there was a proposal to introduce extra wage payment for those industrial workers who are continuously working in one enterprise.²⁶ If this measure succeeds it will be a step forward in reducing the tendency among the youth to change jobs frequently which has become a major problem affecting labour productivity in the Soviet economy.

The Soviet economy has also run into rough waters because of mismanagement and corruption in the state-owned enterprises in a limited way and opened the way for foreign collaboration to improve its science and economy.²⁷ The Kremlin announced a new law (law on individual labour) encouraging individual enterprise last November. The law was supposed to have gone into effect on 1 May this year. The law allows all Soviets over 18 to offer goods and services after working hours for personal profit. (It is mainly for such homebound crafts as making artificial flowers or knitting socks).²⁸ The catch in the law is that more than half of the extra income stands to be taxed and local authorities have final approval over the list of "appropriate" services.²⁹ The new law will thus be a key test of Gorbachev's efforts to foster individual initiative and break the throttling grip of the Soviet bureaucracy.

26. R.G. Gidadhubli, *op. cit.* p. 15

27. *Holiday*, 13 February 1987

28. *Newsweek*, 4 May 1987, p. 35

29. *ibid*

After more than six decades of central planning, Soviet agriculture has not flourished. Now the need for agricultural reform is beyond question. While the Soviets farm more land than any other nation, 25 countries outrank them in terms of land and labour productivity, two significant measures of agricultural performance. In fact, Soviet productivity has declined by a third since 1960. For the last 14-15 years the Soviet Union has had to import grains to make up for shortfalls in domestic production.³⁰ If Gorbachev moves to reform his country's agriculture he might look to Hungary or East Germany for records worth emulating.

On the one hand, Hungary's success in agriculture reflects policies that promote market incentives for farmers. East Germany, by contrast, has successfully exploited central control to maximize productivity. As a matter of fact, the issue is not one of private ownership but rewards for individual initiative. Because, in nearby Poland, for example, three-fourths of the agricultural land is in private hands, yet Hungary produces two-thirds more grain per hectare than

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Poland.³¹ Gorbachev has also the benefit of the results of experiments and reform conducted in other socialist countries on the issue of decentralization. While on the one hand (as mentioned earlier) the Hungarian economy has flourished by implementing economic reforms the Yugoslav economy with experiments of self-management socialism (SMS) and basic organ of associated labour (BOAL) has

30. William U. Chandler, "Soviet Food for Thought", *Holiday*, 5 December 1986.

31. *ibid*

had a poor performance.³² Deng Xiaoping began unshackling China's 800 million peasants in 1978, and in the next two years real farm incomes rose by more than they had during the previous 20 years of Maoism. But since the beginning of this year the promised hope has been fading.³³ In reforming the Soviet economy, Gorbachev is therefore cautiously striving for an optimal relationship between central bodies and lower level units while applying the principle of democratic centralism in economic management.

In order to achieve better integration of production, agricultural processing plants and the livestock industry five ministries were collapsed into one "superministry".³⁴ Although Gorbachev's initiatives have already given the Soviet economy a temporary boost, the reforms are, however rather piecemeal. The Stalinist economic model if it was meant to be characterised by high level of centralization in planning and management, over-emphasis on heavy industries, autarky in economic development and STP, then it has been undergoing some change for nearly two decades. Gorbachev's policies and programmes might speed up the process of change. But the essence of the Stalinist model—predominance of state ownership of means of production, comprehensive planning, party control and supervision may not be altered by Gorbachev since these are basic to a socialist society and not specific to the Stalinist economic framework.

Socio-cultural Reforms

Gorbachev's measures for change provided liveliness in media, art and literature. Soviet media is much more open today. High party and government officials may be criticized without the fear of dismissal. In the early days of *glasnost* newspapers began printing reader demands for honest economic and social statistics. Even more surprising, the Kremlin has begun answering such letters. Reports

32. R.G. Gidadhubli, *op. cit.*, p.16

33. *The Economist*, 28 March 1987, p. 13

34. *Asian Security 1986*, Research Institute for Peace and Security, Tokyo, 1986, p. 58

(hitherto unheard of) on Soviet agricultural shortcomings, crime statistics and data on national health have been published. Soviet Television has also come under official and public pressure to loosen up. Television viewers criticized Soviet pop groups and clamoured for more Western music. Other writers complained "stereotyped" news from the West concentrating on exploitation, unemployment and political unrest only.³⁵ Under the new policy, Western reporters have had unprecedented access to Soviet officials and to certain sensitive Soviet installations. They have been allowed to visit the Baikonur space centre, the Semi-Palatinsk nuclear-testing site and even some bases in Afghanistan.³⁶ But the information at such media events remains tightly controlled.

The mood of political tolerance has gone well beyond the newspaper columns and television screen. On the cultural front, the new line has created a "literary pre-Renaissance", as poet Yevgeni Yevtushenko calls it. Publishing houses have been allowed to distribute works of long banned authors, and theaters have produced plays examining Jewish emigrations and shedding favourable light on life under the Czars. The Soviet film is changing too.³⁷ A recent official exhibit of young artists in Moscow included various artistic approaches: realism, surrealism, hyper realism, pop art, abstract art. Barriers have been removed from the development of jazz and rock music. Besides, Kremlin officials were also making an effort to tempt famous exiled artists living in America to be back home. Rock musicians are the latest beneficiaries of Gorbachev's cultural thaw.³⁸

Gorbachev lauded the role of writers at a meeting in the Kremlin with a group of leading Soviet writers. "The word of the writer and the voice of the artist are especially important and especially influential. Literary people can play a considerable place in implementing the

35. *Newsweek*, 12 January 1987, pp. 21-22

36. *ibid.* p. 23

37. *ibid.*, pp. 17, 21-22

38. *Time*, 9 February 1987, p. 8; Syed Zillur Rahman, "Revolution in a Revolution", *Holiday*, 20 February 1987.

psychological and moral reshaping of life in the struggle against negative phenomena."³⁹ Gorbachev's indications were eagerly followed by many Soviet writers during their next congress. The General Secretary's statements on behalf of truth in social life permitted such writers as Yevgeni Yevtushenko, Andrei Vosnesensky, Daniel Granin, Grigory Baklanov, and Sergei Zalygin to air their worries about bureaucratic abuses in the field of culture, the impending ecological crisis in the USSR, the aberrant architectural policy, the degradation of human relations, and the devolution of ethical criteria.⁴⁰ However, the boundaries of criticism and the thrust of reforms are established by the same party bureaucracy which is now ostensibly under fire. Nevertheless, by liberalizing the press, literature and arts, Gorbachev has already enlisted support among the intellectuals which is very crucial for the success of his *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

Reforms and Liberalization : Paradoxes

The central thrust of Gorbachev's reforms remains in the Soviet economy which is of strategic importance to the Soviet Union. The Soviet leader made it clear that his plan for domestic renewal aimed at upgrading the system of management of national economy based on centralized planning and application of economic methods of management as well as encouragement of initiative and enhancement of the autonomy and responsibility of amalgamated as well as individual enterprises and local bodies. But a debate looms as to whether Gorbachev is going to institute radical reforms or he will follow a more moderate path trying to refurbish rusty dogmas and restore old mobilizational techniques. In other words, the question as to how far Gorbachev himself wants to go along with his reforms is still a matter of conjecture. Because, although most of his colleagues on the party's ruling Politburo seems to agree that criticism and new ideas have to flow if the country is to haul itself out of its economic morass, there

39. *Pravda*, 22 June 1986

40. Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Neo-Stalinism and Reform Communism", *ORBIS*, Summer 1986, p. 278

seems to be no agreement amongst them on how far reform of the system should go.

However, while no one knows how far Gorbachev's reforms will eventually go it may be safely said that any Socialist society and for that matter Soviet Socialist society will inevitably place limits on sweeping measures for reform of the system. As a matter of fact, there are certain basics to a socialist system, viz, the supreme role of the Communist Party in the society associated with a principle of democratic centralism; predominance of state ownership of the means of production; centralized planning; principle of minimum wage differentials; 'absolute welfarism,' etc. etc. With these things given in a Soviet socialist state, Stephen Cohen remarks that introducing radical reforms—human rights improvement, large-scale encouragement to private initiative, genuine decentralization—would mean

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jeopardizing the ideological monolith and subverting the structure of the prevailing political authority. This is the excruciating dilemma confronting the current Soviet leadership. As a result, one can barely expect Gorbachev to launch those broad reforms that would lead to the "revitalization of the Soviet political life."⁴¹ Another observer of the Soviet scene has opined that under current Soviet conditions, genuine reforms would mean increased autonomy for the government, improvement of the economic performances in both industry and agriculture, limitation on the KGB, loosening the party stranglehold over spiritual life, a new approach to the issues of legality and human rights and cultural and ideological relaxation.⁴² These are,

41. Stephen F. Cohen, "Sovieticus", *The Nation*, 18 January 1986, p.40

42. Vladimir Tismaneanu *op. cit.* p.; 270

by and large unlikely to take place in the Soviet system. Revitalization of Soviet society is certainly Gorbachev's goal, but the area of reform he can envision is quite limited, and it is not at all possible that the Soviet General Secretary would be attracted to the reformist programme initiated by Alexander Dubcek in Czechoslovakia after January 1968.⁴³ It is significant, however, that Gorbachev has shown more interest in Honecher's "technocratic socialism" than Kadar's more market-oriented economic experiments. For fear of alienating his supporters in the highly centralized party apparatus, the Soviet leader may find it inconvenient to emulate the Hungarian model with its emphasis on a less authoritarian pattern of political leadership.⁴⁴

Gorbachev seeks reforms of the Soviet socialist system. This is not, however, to say that he is anyone's closet bourgeois liberal or, in the Chinese parlance, capitalist-roader. His struggle is not an ideological one. It is practical to make a lethargic, corrupt apparatus spring to life. But life implies movement and movement implies pace. That is where China has run into trouble. So Gorbachev is expected to take utmost caution in proceeding with reforms of a system, that does not deliver the goods, with in the Marxist canon certainly, in so far as that can be stretched to accommodate what is needed. But, as Martin Walker from Moscow observes, it is important to understand that the new passion for democracy Soviet-style is not being presented by Gorbachev as a long-held personal conviction, but partly as a logical development of the Gorbachev economic reforms and partly as something forced upon the leadership by the failure of the system to respond to those economic reforms as fast as Gorbachev requires. Gorbachev himself pointedly says that he is not out to smash the Soviet political system but rather wants to develop full its potential.⁴⁵ Where the party is concerned, he has barely touched the structures even though he did refer to a better distribution of responsibilities

43. *ibid.*

44. *ibid.*

45. Martin Walker, "An Uncanny Sound of Dissidence at the Top". *The Guardian Weekly*, 8 February 1987, p. 9.

among its bodies and the tasks of the administration and industrial enterprises. But he is trying to improve their operation basically by encouraging a better choice of candidates.

Gorbachev is no more a "democrat" than is Deng Xiaoping and there is nothing to suggest that he is ready either to allow the ruling position that the Communist Party plays in his country to be challenged. His aim is to inject a little more vitality into the Communist Party even if it means upsetting numberless vested interests and in this way win its support for vast reform projects that will themselves make so many readaptations necessary.

Discipline, order, effectiveness, and productivity appear to be the core values of Gorbachev's approach. In other words, the last thing he would readily promote would be a spectacular reconstruction of the Soviet political system along the lines of a pluralist evolution. Liberalism could bring about large-scale criticism, uninhibited assaults on the system itself, questions about the relevance of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy—all inextricably associated with the spectre of anarchy. Thus the limits of change are still prescribed by the basic value of stability. Gorbachev is thus a prisoner of the tormenting dilemma between loyalty to tradition and commitment to innovation, and most likely he is still looking for an appropriate tactic to deal with renewal without catalyzing a major political crisis.

Implication of Reforms

Even if Gorbachev's reforms are not radical in spirit they have generated an avalanche of hope inside the country and a lot of speculation outside. For Gorbachev, his initiatives have been a challenge that few communist leaders have dared to face. Yet he shows little inclination to slow down. The steps taken by the Soviet leadership to overcome their country's current predicament will have important consequences beyond the Soviet national boundaries.

The changes Gorbachev is introducing in the Soviet Union will invariably have their impact in the East European countries. A

Dubcek-style abrupt renewal would certainly result in the resurgence of revisionist tendencies in Eastern Europe. The established bureaucracies in those countries would leave the scene, and genuine reformers would come to power to resume the suppressed projects of national communism. In other words, a probable effect of radical reforms in the USSR would be the revival of the revisionist neo-Marxist alternative to Stalinism and the emergence of pluralist institutions in East European countries.⁴⁶ Such an occurrence would not be welcomed by Gorbachev and hence his changes are modest and approach is cautious. Nevertheless, the shockwaves of the *glasnost* campaign are bound to exert influence on East European political and intellectual elites who can not be long denied the rights to follow the pattern emphatically proclaimed by the Soviet General Secretary.

In Czechoslovakia and East Germany there is growing evidence of deep misgivings about the Gorbachev phenomenon. There are signs that the Gorbachev reforms are rumbling into Czechoslovakia. The row in the Czechoslovakian Politburo between those (notably the Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal) who favour a change of course and those (notably the chief ideologist Vasil Bilak) who oppose it had grown sharper, and more public in recent months. It now seems to have been settled. "Reform", once virtually a banned word, became official policy on 18 March 1987. President Gustav Husak told his Party's Central Committee about preparations for a "restructuring or reform" which he described as "the biggest intervention into the system of economic management since nationalization". Husak has now promised to give more decision-making power to factory managers.⁴⁷ Gorbachev will probably bless all this, though with caution, because Czechoslovakia is ripe for the sort of shake-up Gorbachev is doing in his own country. Its grey leaders, installed by Brezhnev, preside over Brezhnevite inertia and corruption. Its factories, among the oldest in Europe, are also among the rustiest. A revitalized Czechoslovakia could become a valuable supplier of advanced techno-

46. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *op. cit.*, p. 271

47. *The Economist*, 28 March 1987, p. 17

logy to the Soviet Union, instead of an inefficient guzzler of Soviet energy.

The worries about Gorbachev in East Germany are rather different. There the party leader, Erich Honecher thinks his country has been doing just fine and he has been flattered by Gorbachev's occasional suggestion that the Soviet Union might have something to learn from the way East German industry is organized. But Honecher is clearly uneasy about the Soviet leader's enthusiasm for criticism, which jars with his own rhetoric of success. He insists that the "specific conditions" of each Socialist country required difference of approach.⁴⁸

Although Hungary has introduced certain liberal measures in its economic sector, genuine political liberalization remains a far cry. These are getting tense in Hungary's Writers' Union. The increasing outspokenness of many of its members has raised official eyebrows. The Hungarian Minister of culture has said that the writers had gone

Gorbachev has so far sensibly avoided heavy-handed interference in Eastern Europe. With so much to do at home the last thing he wants is trouble among his allies.

beyond the pale of socialist democracy.⁴⁹ But the Hungarian authorities will have to think twice before closing down the Writers' Union at a time when Gorbachev is calling for greater cultural freedom in the Soviet Union. However, it is not to suggest that Gorbachev will tolerate an East European version of his *glasnost* and *perestroika* campaign. Gorbachev has yet to demonstrate any willingness to lessen Soviet control over Eastern Europe, where the first stirring of hope inspired by the changes in Moscow would easily give way to new discontent. Furthermore, any attempt to question the prevailing interstate relations system is bound to engender a fast Soviet reaction. National communism remains an unforgivable heresy and the Soviet

48. *The Guardian Weekly*, 21 February 1987, pp.50-52

49. *The Economist*, 7 February 1987, p. 45

Union will not allow any of its allies to indulge in such adventurous experiments.

There is thus a constant tension between the Soviet General Secretary's reformist experiments and his hard-line approach to liberal experiments in East European countries. Hence, it is legitimate to wonder how long this disjunction can last between efforts to advance even a modest internal renewal and the refusal to accept any serious liberalization in Eastern Europe. Of course, Gorbachev has, so far, sensibly avoided heavy-handed interference in Eastern Europe. With so much to do at home the last thing he wants is trouble among his allies. However, it is in his interest to ensure that the next generation of leaders in these countries is to his liking.

The communist ideology of the Soviet Union, its great-power ambition and poor economic performance have for over last four decades, kept the Western alliance together. Mikhail Gorbachev is a compelling, and 'disturbing' figure because he wants to change the Soviet Union in ways that might start separating them. But the different members of the alliance have been differently affected by these things. The Americans loathe communism, the Europeans and Japanese are less anxious to do anything about it. Soviet geopolitical ambition, by contrast, presses closer on them than it does on America.

However, what would the West do if Gorbachev's reform succeeded in making his country a lot richer? Would a fat bear necessarily be cuddy? Will Gorbachev's reforms spell good or ill for the Western democracies? Analysts say, that depends mainly on two things.⁵⁰ Whether Gorbachev succeeds in making the Soviet Union a lot richer without making it much more democratic and decentralized; and whether the military ambitions of a rich Soviet Union would shrink or grow.

The West may not have to face such questions this century. But Soviet Union's scope for a remarkable surge of economic growth

50. *The Economist*, 14 February 1987, p. 13

should not be underestimated. It has huge potential natural resources and one of the world's best educated populations. Opinion is divided among Western Sovietologists about the character of economic reforms envisaged by Gorbachev as an important plank of his drive for domestic renewal. To American scholar Jerry F. Hough the main thrust in these reforms is towards overcoming the technological backwardness of Soviet economy for reasons of strengthening the country's defence, of increasing national power and of raising the influence of the Soviet power in the domain of foreign policy. According to him these reforms are unlikely to succeed, for Gorbachev refuses to go beyond the generalities and their successful implementation requires political decisions. Harvard economist Marshall I Goldman also holds almost the similar views.⁵¹ But S. Frederick Starr, former Secretary of Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies has struck a discordant note. In his opinion the sceptics who think that Gorbachev's economic reforms will be superficial and will pre-empt significant change through simple administrative adjustments overstate their case. He further holds that Gorbachev's course of domestic renewal is not bad for the United States". In his opinion, it encourages pragmatism, discourages xenophobia and links the Soviet Union with the open-ended discourse of the modern world. "There is less to fear from a Soviet Union that is able to deal with its problems than from a Soviet Union frustrated by domestic failures".⁵²

Like China's Deng, Gorbachev wants to loosen things up, but without calling the Communist Party's political monopoly into question. The calls for more openness suggest that he recognizes that there is some connection between new economic ideas and fresh thinking on other subjects. Gorbachev referred to the West while saying "Our enemy has figured us out. They are not frightened of our nuclear might. They are not going to start a war. They

51. Devendra Kaushik, "Domestic Renewal : A Refined Approach", *World Focus*, January 1986, p. 11.

52. *ibid*, pp. 11-12.

are worried about one thing—if democracy develops under us—if that happens, then we will win.”⁵³ Soviet poet Yevtushenko says, “sometimes it seems that in the West and especially in the US, there is also room for opening and restructuring. Armchair warriors exist not only in our socialist world but in the capitalist one. The difference is that ours build their careers on uncritical pro-Sovietism and yours build their careers on blind anti-Sovietism. They do not want *glasnost* and freedom to develop in the USSR because they need an unfree Soviet Union as a bogeyman to frighten their voters and to prevent more talented democratic and tolerant people from gaining control of the country’s destiny”⁵⁴ Although it is debatable whether a democratic Soviet Union would be truly welcomed by the West, it remains a passion for the Soviet people to taste true democracy in their country.

The greatest risk for the West if Gorbachev’s reforms succeed is that a richer Soviet Union will simply be a fitter fighter.⁵⁵ A seriously reforming Soviet Union will be absorbed in its task for a while and chastened by having to discard so much ideological baggage. Whether that would be enough to make it uninterested in flexing its muscles remains an open question. Because it is not obvious that self-confident and wealthy societies lose their taste for thrusting themselves on the world, as nineteenth century Britain and twentieth century America have both shown. Analysts hold the view that Gorbachev’s policies are aimed in part at encouraging Western Europe to put pressure on Reagan on star wars and such things. But Gorbachav tends to overestimate European leverage on American policy just as the Europeans think they should have leverage than they actually do. For all the attention paid to Gorbachev’s Soviet Union, Western Europe is still by and large gazing at it with furrowed brows.⁵⁶ Never-

53. *Newsweek*, 12 January 1987, p. 16

54. *Time*, 9 February 1987, p. 8

55. *The Economist*, 14 February 1987, p. 13

56. *ibid.*, p. 38

theless as Jeane Kirkpatrick says, there is small movement but large hope in the Soviet Union. There is clearly a will to new approaches although the specifics are still less clear. But this new thinking should be taken seriously.⁵⁷

In striking contrast to previous congresses, the 27th Party Congress paid little attention to the third world. However, a contraction of Soviet ambitions on the world scene is different for the politburo consensus to accept because Soviet presence and influence around the world, while considerably greater than it once was, is still weaker than that of the United States and far weaker than that of all Soviet Union's adversaries combined together. To accept and legitimize the present world constellation of political forces is thus, to legitimize a Soviet permanent position of geopolitical although not military inferiority⁵⁸. This is not likely to be tolerable for long. There may, at best, be tactical withdrawal by the Soviet Union from some selective parts of the world but a richer and mightier Soviet Union will, as expected, invariably resume its global ambitions.

Problems of Change

The reforms and liberalization outlined above are indispensable if the Soviet Union is to overcome its difficulties and obtain what it wishes to. But many impediments lie in the way of implementing and furthering them. The Soviet leadership encounters resistance from certain entrenched groups and vested interests that thrived in a system not accustomed to change. A section of the Party and government *apparatchiks*, KGB is posing problems for Gorbachev's reforms.

Gorbachev faces resistance from bureaucrats and regional leaders who do not favour his attempts to reenergize Soviet economic and cultural life.⁵⁹ A growing resistance to the *glasnost* and *perestroika* ethos exists within the Soviet Union's bureaucracy. The

57. *Time*, 16 February 1987 p. 19

58. Harry Gelman, "Gorbachev's Dilemmas And His Conflicting Foreign Policy Goals", *ORBIS*, Summer 1986, pp. 242-243.

59. *Newsweek* 12 January 1987, p. 19

managerial-bureaucratic system that has developed over the years can not be subdued by Gorbachev so easily. The problem of bureaucracy is that it gets too bogged down by the needs of the present time. It is reluctant to learn from the past mistakes and afraid of change in the future. As a matter of fact, bureaucracy is the strongest 'trade union,' Gorbachev himself conceded that bureaucratic opposition was strong when he told a private meeting of Soviet writers in June 1986, "Between the people who want these changes, who dream of these changes, and the leadership, there is an administrative layer: the apparatus of the ministers, the party apparatus, which does not want alterations and does not want to be deprived of certain rights connected with privileges.⁶⁰ It was precisely this group that ultimately defeated past attempts at reform, those of Nikita Khrushchev and former Premier Alexei Kosygin. Today many top bureaucratic posts are still held by people who were appointed in the Brezhnev era. Often they simply do not want change and are in a position to block Gorbachev's reforms. There is a wide gap between the conservatives and the reformists which Gorbachev has to eliminate or at least, narrow down, if he wants to push through his measures for change.

Many Kremlinologists question whether Gorbachev will be able to win over the bureaucracy. Jonathan Sanders, Assistant Director of the Harriman Institute for Russian Studies at Columbia University says that *Glasnost* is a lever to break up the static formations of the entrenched interests and corrupt groups that have been so powerful. But the implementation of these policies is hindered because Gorbachev has not had time to develop the support among mid and lower level officials. It is a huge machine, and its very hard to get a handle on it. Jeremy Azrael of the Rand Corporation, a West Coast think tank, says that regional party bosses have become 'feudal barons' and that Gorbachev has to gain control over them before he can be master of the national party.⁶¹

60. Nasir U. Ahmed, "Gorbachev is in Great Hurry", *Holiday*, 1 May 1987; *Time*, 9 February 1987, p. 6

61. *Time*, 9 February 1987, p. 6

Reforms in the USSR are determined by the willingness of the apparatus to accept a certain curtailment of its power monopoly.⁶² The inner dynamics of change may break up the current apparent consensus and precipitate the polarization of forces in the Politburo and the Central Committee. Paradoxically, Gorbachev, who rose to prominence as a faithful man of the apparatus, may have to confront the plots fomented by the conservatives, for whom another Khrushchevite experiment is ruinously counterproductive.⁶³ So Gorbachev will have an acid test next year when the 'National Party Conference' will be held to deal, *inter alia*, with the sensitive questions of party reform. In the Soviet Union, the Communist Party is the only engine Gorbachev can use to push his reforms along.⁶⁴ But most of the committee members are conservatives and are reluctant to change. So Gorbachev has to write the conference rules in a way that lets him clear more of them out. He can expect a fierce fight on this count. Gorbachev has to win yet another round against his opponents in the central committee which goes into session in the offing. The session will tackle the question of economic reforms. The session is, for obvious reasons, very significant for Gorbachev, for if his economic reform programme can not get through, the General Secretary will have to navigate in the Kremlin's troubled waters.⁶⁵

The party machine is frustrating Gorbachev because the hundreds of thousands of *apparatchiks* who comprise it have learned their own kind of caution. They do not want to see Stalinism revived, because party officials like themselves were the victims of the purges. But they do not also want to take risks, to assume a responsibility that may

62. Richard Pipes, *Survival is not Enough. Soviet Politics and America's Future*, New York : Simon and Schuster, 1984, pp. 199-208

63. *ORBIS*, Summer 1986, pp. 279-280

64. *The Economist*, 4 April 1987, p. 43

65. *ibid.* According the latest reports the Committee has approved Gorbachev's reform proposals which were promptly enacted as law by the Supreme Soviet. See *Bangladesh Observer*, 3, July 1987

have to be paid for if and when the Party pendulum swings back.⁶⁶ They seem to know that the reforms initiated from the above may be rescinded from the above.

Analysts hold a view that Gorbachev can not avoid some sort of clash with the KGB. He needs the security police to push through his anti-corruption drive. But the KGB is one of the Soviet outfits that has been threatened with Gorbachev's shake-up and he has served notice that bent KGB-men will be answerable to the law. Diplomats in Moscow say that many working level KGB people were furious at Gorbachev's decision to release Sakharov and few other dissidents.⁶⁷ So Gorbachev has to walk a tight rope if he sticks to what he held out for the Soviet people.

Beyond all the talk of *glasnost*, Gorbachev's ambitious objective is to get average Soviet citizens to support reform. But the general reaction has been cautious, and verging on scepticism. They appear to accept Gorbachev's reforms in a fatalist way, as they talk of the frustration of reforms of Khrushchev and Kosygin, and shrug their shoulders. It is evident from the comments of a Moscow teacher, who offers tutoring lessons in her free time, who says, what if the party line changes and goes against private enterprise? If you register, they will have list of 'capitalists' to arrest.⁶⁸ However, Gorbachev would overcome all this if his reforms in society and in the economy could yield the improvements he promises.

Beside the political hurdles, the reforms must overcome technical difficulties of staggering size if they are to succeed. Directors of enterprises, blessed with new powers to take decisions, are at a loss how to use them. They have been trained to take orders, not give them. Enterprises now have the power to make their own business deals

66. Martin Walker "Stalin's Ghost Hovers Over Gorbachev's Democracy", *The Guardian Weekly*, 15 February 1987, p. 7

67. *The Guardian Weekly*, 21 February 1987 p. 14 ; *Holiday*, 13 February 1987.

68. *Time*, 9 February 1987 p. 6

a broad, and to use any hard-currency profits that result to import machinery they need. But the experts who know how to do such trading are in the foreign trade ministry, not the factories. They have so far been reluctant to move to where the work is.⁶⁹ Since pay is now more closely tied to performance, there are press reports of wages

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falling in some factories, in at least one case by as much as a third. For them, the demand for harder work has not yet been matched by a taste of the better life. And for those who really believe what they have been told for decades - that socialism means equality, not widening wage differentials and the like—the directions in which Gorbachev is pushing them is disturbing.⁷⁰ This kind of thing is to be expected when a system kept for so long under the planner's thumb is being changed. But there is more to come. According to Professor Leonid Abalkin, the Director of the Institute of Economics at the Soviet Academy of Sciences, the progress made so far will be lost unless it is soon joined by more realistic prices and less state control of credit.⁷¹ But price rises could spark real anger in a country where the price of a loaf of bread has not changed in last 30 years.

Prof Abalkin reckons that "Marx willing, the laws to back Gorbachev's reforms will be on the books by about the time the next five year plan starts in 1990. Even if they are, he says, it will take three or four five-year plans", in other words 15-20 years, for the economy

69. *The Economist*, 4 April 1987, p. 43

70. *ibid.*, p. 44

71. *ibid.*

to be transformed.⁷² Will ordinary Soviet people have the patience and enthusiasm to wait that long?

Conclusion

It is beyond any doubt that Gorbachev wishes to turn his country into a model of a highly developed state, into a society with most advanced economy, democracy, the most human and lofty ethics, where the working man would feel he is a master, would enjoy all benefits of material and spiritual culture, where the future of the children would be secure, where they would have everything that is necessary for a full and interesting life. For this broad objective, Gorbachev intends to restructure and rejuvenate the Soviet economic and political system. The restructuring of the Russian revolution through *glasnost* and *perestroika* in production, education science, technology, literature, arts and culture is being undertaken to breathe new life into all cells of social organism. But changes in any system is generally opposed by conservative-orthodox leaders and vested interests. Gorbachev is also encountering mounting resistance in pushing forward his reforms. Although, so far he has been successful in getting rid of many important personalities and bureaucrats belonging to the orthodox school, he has still a long way to go. In his own words during his last November trip to India: "Reorganization, acceleration and democratization are no stroll on a smooth, asphalt road in running shoes. This is more like ascending a steep mountain with obstacles, when climbing it takes both strength and skills."⁷³ Gorbachev still has a long climb and many obstacles ahead.

On the other hand, Gorbachev will change little if he shouts for openness while only tinkering with the system. *Glasnost* will then remain only a tantalizing crack in a very heavy door. If he has real reforms in mind, he must perform a formidable balancing act of

72. *ibid.*

73. *Nesweek*, 12 January 1987, p. 23.

urgency versus patience, entrepreneurship versus central planning, change versus stability.

Gorbachev's success in liberalizing the Soviet society is dependent on how successful he is in building a new generation of leadership in the Soviet Union, and a popular support from below. To build a Soviet society he envisions, Gorbachev is in need of Bolsheviks who are supposed to be selfless, dedicated, and committed to redefining communism in adjustment with the 1980s and beyond. Whether Gorbachev's policy and programme succeed or not, will be judged by the inevitable march of history. But his sincerity of purpose and determination appear to provide his countrymen a beacon of hope for a better life, if not a workers' paradise.

N. A. Bhutto in his book *The Myth of Independence* says, "Sino-Pakistani relations are not primarily based on the differences of the two countries with India. That factor forms only a part, important though it be, of the rationale. China is Pakistan's neighbour and it is essential for us to maintain good relations with all our neighbours on the basis of friendship and equality."

It has been maintained that the ideologies of Pakistan and China are incompatible and that a friendly working management cannot therefore be sustained between them. It is further argued that Pakistan's friendly relations with China being of a subjective character, will be unable to withstand the stress of time. These, however, appear to be

1. N. A. Bhutto, *The Myth of Independence*, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p. 131.