

# **MIKHAIL GORBACHEV ON THE THIRD WORLD AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

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**These excerpts from "Perestroika" look at some of the problems faced by Third World countries in trying to assert their economic and national independence.**

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## **MIKHAIL GORBACHEV ON THE THIRD WORLD AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

THE emergence into the international arena of over a hundred Asian, African and Latin American countries, which have embarked upon the path of independent development, is one of the great realities of the present-day world. We acclaim this twentieth century phenomenon. This is a huge and diverse world with vast interests and difficult problems. We realise that the future of civilisation hinges on how this world develops.

The responsibility for these dozens of countries with their aggregate population of many millions, and the responsibility for harnessing their enormous potential for the benefit of world progress, does not lie with them alone.

On the one hand, in the Third World we see examples of rapid, albeit uneven and painful economic growth. Many countries are becoming modern industrial states, and several are growing into great powers. The independent policy of most Third World states,

which rests upon acquired national dignity, is increasingly affecting international affairs as a whole.

On the other hand, poverty, inhuman living conditions, illiteracy and ignorance, malnutrition and hunger, alarming child mortality, and epidemics remain common features of life for the two and a half billion people who inhabit these former colonies and semi-colonies. Such is the bitter truth. In the early eighties the per capita income in Third World countries was 11 times lower than in the industrialised countries. The gap is widening rather than narrowing.

Nevertheless, the rich Western states continue to collect neo-colonialist "tribute". Over the past decade alone, the profits US corporations have siphoned off from the developing countries have quadrupled investments. Americans may call this profitable business. We appraise the situation differently. But I'll go into that later.

The developing countries bear the burden of an enormous external debt. When combined with the volume of the profits taken out every year, the growing debt spells one thing - a bleak development outlook and the inevitable aggravation of social, economic and other problems that are already extremely serious.

I recall a conversation I had with President Mitterrand (of France). It boiled down to the following. Clearly, each capitalist enterprise strives for maximum profit. However, a capitalist or a company are forced, largely under worker pressure, to reckon with the fact that, if the enterprise is to function effectively, it is imperative that employee's incomes are guaranteed, and, despite their low level, are sufficient to enable them to restore their production capacities, maintain their health, upgrade their qualification and raise their children. The capitalist is forced to do this, realising that in doing so he is ensuring himself profit today and tomorrow. But capitalism taken as a whole, represented by the Western countries, does not want to understand even this simple truth in its relations with its former colonies. Capitalism has brought economic relations with Asia, Africa and Latin America to a point where entire nations are doomed to economic stagnation, unable to meet their own essential needs, and bogged down in monstrous debts.

These countries will be unable, of course, to pay back the debts under the present conditions. If a fair solution is not found, anything could happen. The debt of developing countries has turned into a time bomb of sorts. Detonation could have desperate results. A

social explosion of tremendous destructive force is accumulating.

The developing countries' debt is one of the most serious problems in the world. It has been in existence for a long time. But it was either put off, overlooked or discussed in general terms. Western leaders underestimate the danger; they refuse to see the seriousness of the economic upheavals that may happen. That is why they propose half-baked measures and attempt to salvage the situation with palliatives. There is a patent reluctance to take real, substantial steps to normalise economic co-operation with the developing countries.

Extensive efforts are required if genuine changes are to be made and a new world economic order established. It will be a long and hard road, and one has to be prepared for any unexpected turn. The restructuring of international relations demands that the interests of all countries be considered, it requires a balancing of interests, but many do not want to give away anything of their own.

## REGIONAL CONFLICTS

THE dire strait of the developing countries is the real reason for many of the conflicts in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Discussing this with President Reagan (of the United States) at our meeting in Geneva, I told him first of all one had to realise where regional conflicts come from.

The truth is that, although they are dissimilar in essence and in the nature of the opposing forces, they usually arise on local soil, as a consequence of internal or regional conflicts which are spawned by the colonial past, new social processes, or recurrences of predatory policy or by all three...

Let us take a volatile area of the globe - Central America. What is the conflict all about here? The unpopular Somoza regime has been overthrown in Nicaragua, and the popular revolution has emerged victorious. The Sandinista revolution was declared out of hand to be the "work of Moscow and Cuba". Such is the standard, hackneyed ideological substantiation for an undeclared war against a small country whose only "fault" is that it wants to live in its own way, without interference from the outside. Incidentally, what has happened in Nicaragua shows what can be expected in other countries. We find it preposterous when we hear allegations that Nicaragua "threatens" US security, and that Soviet military bases are going to be built there - bases which the Americans are supposed to

know about but which I, for one, have never heard of.

Margaret Thatcher (British prime minister) and I had a lively debate on this point. I said that unbearable living conditions had forced the Nicaraguans to carry out the revolution. These conditions had been created by Britain's American friends, who have made all of Central America into their backyard, mercilessly scooping up its resources, and are now wondering why the people revolt. What has been happening in Nicaragua is the business of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan people. Our talk was a straightforward one. I asked Mrs Thatcher: "You accuse us of solidarity with Nicaragua, but do you consider it normal to render assistance to apartheid, or racists? Doesn't the way you look in the eyes of the world public opinion bother you? We sympathise with the liberation movements of people fighting for social justice, while you, as I see it, do not. Here our approaches differ."

Really, if the United States left Nicaragua in peace this would be better for the US itself, for the Latin Americans, and for the rest of the world.

Explosive problems cannot be shelved; they will not go away by themselves. The situation in Southern America has long been tempestuous. The South African population opposes both apartheid and the immoral oppressive regime whose international isolation is growing. But many in the West see a communist plot and Moscow influence behind that conflict situation, too, though there isn't a trace of a Soviet presence in South Africa, which can't be said of the US and its allies...

Such is the assessment of all regional conflicts as seen through the prism of Soviet-American confrontation. We have the impression that the United States needs regional conflicts so as to always have room to manoeuvre by manipulating the level of confrontation and by using a policy of force and anti-Soviet propaganda. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, holds that these conflicts should not be used to engender confrontation between the two systems, especially when they involve the USSR and the USA.

## **NATIONS HAVE THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN WAY OF DEVELOPMENT**

**EVERY** nation is entitled to choose its own way of development, to dispose of its fate, its territory, and its human and natural resources.

International relations cannot be normalised if this is not understood in all countries. For ideological and social differences, and differences in political systems are the result of choices made by the people. A national choice should not be used in international relations in such a way as to cause trends and events that can trigger conflicts and military confrontation.

It is high time Western leaders set aside the psychology and notions of colonial times. They will have to do this sooner or later. As long as the West continues to see the Third World as its sphere of influence and continues to exert its sway there, tensions will persist, new hotbeds will appear and anti-imperialist resistance mounts.

Our Western opponents do not like it when we talk to them in this way. They lose their composure and grow indignant when we call a spade a spade. They interpret our evaluations as encroachment on traditional links between the United States and Western Europe, on the one hand, and developing countries on the other. They say we want living standards to fall in capitalist countries.

I have explained on many occasions that we do not pursue goals inimical to Western interests. We know how important the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, other Third World regions and also South Africa are for American and West European economies, in particular as raw material sources. To cut these links is the last thing we want to do, and we have no desire to provoke ruptures in historically formed, mutual economic interests.

But it is high time to recognise that the Third World nations have a right to be their own bosses. They have attained political independence after many years of hard struggle. They want to be economically independent as well. These countries' leaders (I have met many in person) enjoy the support of their people and want to do something for them. They want their countries to be genuinely independent and be able to co-operate with others on equal terms. The desire of these nations to use their vast natural and human resources for national progress is understandable. They want to live no worse than people in developed countries. What they have now is undernourishment and disease. Their resources are exploited by developed states and incorporated into the latter's national incomes through the channels of a non-equivalent exchange. Developing countries won't put up with the situation for much longer.

Such is a contemporary reality which not all in the West wish to

take into consideration, even though they are well aware of it. But it is something to be reckoned with, especially since dozens of countries are concerned.

The sooner this reality is brought home to everyone, in all continents, the sooner international relations will become normal. The global situation will thus improve. That's crucial. That's the key issue.

It is high time to consider the problem on a global scale, to seek a way to solve it on a basis of balanced interests and to find organisational forms for its solutions in the framework of the world community. The United Nations is the best forum to discuss the issue. We are preparing our proposals on that score. I informed UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar about this during our meeting. He approved of bringing up the issue in the United Nations.

Most developing countries adhere to non-aligned policies. The non-aligned movement arose on that platform to unite over a hundred countries, which account for the bulk of the world's population. The movement has become a mighty force and a major factor in world affairs.

It helps to form a new kind of international relations, whatever special features and nuances the movement has. The non-aligned movement personifies the desire of newly free nations to co-operate with others on an equal basis, and to abolish dictat and hegemonistic attempts from international relations. The Soviet Union understands the goals of that movement and is in solidarity with it.

Quite recently, many non-aligned countries thought that disarmament and the elimination of nuclear weapons were the prerogatives of superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, and were of little concern to developing countries. However, the movement displayed profound understanding of the interconnection between disarmament and development at the eighth conference of heads of state and government of the non-aligned countries in Harare.

Its stand was officially voiced there: a well-grounded stand. If the arms race is stopped and disarmament effected, enough funds will be saved to settle the Third World's gravest problems.

I discussed the connection between disarmament and development with Mr Perez de Cuellar. We agreed that the issue deserves the United Nation's close attention. The Soviet Union tabled specific proposals at the UN Conference on the Relationship Between Disarmament and Development. It can only be regretted

that the United States refused to take part in the conference.

Today, not just the socialist countries but even capitalist states note the *non-aligned movement* as a major and positive factor in world politics. The Soviet Union welcomes this fact and takes it into consideration in its foreign policy.

## **ON SOUTHERN AFRICA:**

### **AT A DIFFICULT WATERSHED**

I have met many African political leaders in the last year and a half or so (some of them more than once), and have had thorough discussions with them. These were Robert Gabriel Mugabe, Mengistu Haile-Meriam, Marcelino dos Santos, Oliver Tambo, Moussa Traore, Mathieu Kerekou and Chadli Bendjedid, to name but a few. All of them are influential, widely recognised national leaders. I got the impression from our talks that Africa is going through an active period in its development which requires responsibility. Africa is in ferment. Vital changes are under way there, and many acute problems face that part of the world.

We don't see Africa as a homogenous continent where all processes evolve to one and the same pattern. Like every other country in the world, every African country possesses its own inimitable features and conducts policies all its own. African leaders also are different. Some have been at the helm for relatively long periods of time, so that the world knows them. Others have only lately appeared on the African and world scenes, and are gaining practical experience.

We fully appreciate the formidable tasks facing progressive regimes in Africa. The fact is that their countries have historically been linked with their former colonial mother countries, and some of them continue to be dependent on them economically. And although imperialism is out to retain its positions by economic and financial means, even by resorting to arms, they are determined to pursue a course towards consolidating gains.

The Soviet Union supports these efforts and these policies, for only inviolable political sovereignty and economic independence can provide a sound basis for international relations in today's world. Every African nation is lawfully entitled to a free choice of a way of development, and we resolutely condemn all attempts to interfere in

their domestic affairs. Our country has always acted, and will continue to act, in support of the national liberation struggle of African nations, including those in Southern Africa, where one of the last bastions of racism is situated.

When I met Oliver Tambo, President of the African National Congress, I said to him: " We side with you in your struggle against the apartheid regime and its henchmen, for a democratic state and independent development, for equality of all races and ethnic groups. Significantly, more and more white South Africans are condemning apartheid, voicing support for the ANC's goals, and seeking contact with it. That proves once again that there is no future in apartheid.

We have bonds of friendship with the frontline states in Southern Africa. We support their just stances and strongly condemn South Africa's hostile actions against them.

The Soviet Union has no special interests in Southern Africa. We want only one thing: nations and countries in the region must at last have the chance to settle their development issues, their home and foreign affairs independently in peace and stability.

**Excerpts from Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's book, 'Perestroika - New thinking for our country and the world'**

