

**On Mikhail Gorbachev's new article:  
"Perestroika and the New Thinking: a Retrospective"**

Much of Gorbachev's new article, "Perestroika and the New Thinking: A Retrospective," is familiar. The piece does not constitute a substantial rethinking by him. But it does offer several useful new slants.

First, it provides a brief, clear overview of the origins and evolution of his domestic and foreign policies — sharper and more succinct than I've seen elsewhere.

Second, it highlights and wrestles (albeit very briefly) with key problems he encountered in trying first to reform and then to transform the USSR, particularly resistance by the party nomenklatura and failures of the intelligentsia, which Gorbachev and his wife had idealized: its failure to "understand the simple fact that freedom is inseparable from responsibility," and its inability to fill the shoes of the party nomenklatura in the sphere of management, lacking the necessary knowledge and experience." [8]

Third, it clarifies some of the tactics he employed to cope with opposition (real and potential), from party hardliners, for example, his decision to reserve one third of seats in the new Congress of People's Deputies for representatives of public organizations like the Communist party so as to "avoid a 'mutiny on the ship' by weakening the resistance of the party's upper echelons and at the same time bringing in new people who would otherwise have little or no chance to be elected." [19]

Fourth, the piece admits more directly than Gorbachev usually does what he regards as his mistakes. "We should have told the people the painful truth [about the economy in 1985-1986] and they would have understood us. Instead, we allowed an unjustified delay in structural transformation of the economy and missed the train of reforms in 1987-1988, when it was politically and economically the right time to undertake them. That was a strategic misstep." He also has to

“admit that when we started Perestroika my colleagues and I did not see the full extent. of the difficult situation in interethnic and federal relations.” {11] In sum, “we should have started to reform the party and decentralize the Union earlier than we did; we should have been bolder in reforming the economy.” [34]

Fifth, Gorbachev’s overall assessment of his years in power of course includes his usual listing of accomplishments: “the end of the cold war, unprecedented agreements on disarmament, human rights and freedoms of speech, assembly, religion and emigration, contested elections on a multi-party basis. ” [34-35] But by comparing his reforms to “those of under Alexander II in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which were a milestone in the country’s history,” [21] he concedes that while his own accomplishments were considerable, they fell far short of transforming his country to degree that he hoped.