

The Twenty-Seventh Party Congress opened on 25 February 1986, thirty years to the day since Khrushchev's historic denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress and just under a year since Gorbachev had been selected as General Secretary. In his lengthy report to the Congress, Gorbachev sounded a number of themes that had either not previously been articulated at a Party Congress or which had only been alluded to in a far less prominent and compelling fashion.

First and foremost, Gorbachev articulated what might be viewed as a new conception of the Soviet Union's security interests, one that constituted an implicit critique of Brezhnev's approach to foreign policy. Under Brezhnev, there was an exaggerated preoccupation with the military dimension of Soviet power. The Soviet leadership believed that its prolonged buildup of military forces during the 1960s and 1970s was the critical factor that ensured the Soviet Union's superpower status, produced a much-desired "sobering" of US policymakers, and was bringing about a continuing shift in the international "correlation of forces" in favor of the Soviet Union. As far as military hardware was concerned, the general assumption in Soviet policy-making circles was the more, the better. The Soviet Union was in pursuit of "total security" through the piling up of military strength.⁸⁰

It appears that some of Gorbachev's comments at the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress may have been directed against precisely this kind of thinking. He stated:

The nature of current weaponry leaves no country with any hope of safeguarding itself solely with military and technical means, for example, by building up a defence, even the most powerful. To ensure security is becoming more and more a political task, and it can only be resolved by political means.⁸¹

⁸⁰ The Soviet Union's quest for total security is discussed in Seweryn Bialer, "Lessons of History: Soviet-American Relations in the Postwar Era," in Arnold Horelick, ed., *US-Soviet Relations*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 94-95.

⁸¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, "Politicheskii doklad tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS XXVII s'ezdu," *Kommunist*, 1986, No. 4, p. 54.