It is beyond question that the entire vast Asia and Pacific region is on the move and making a turbulent and rapid transition from its traditional forms of life to forms which will be appropriate for the next, as well as the current century. This transition involves extremely important political shifts of global significance.

Asia (particularly East and South-east Asia), the Pacific Rim and the Pacific islands are currently the scene of socio-economic processes which are at least as significant or, perhaps, even more so, than those which took place in Europe and North America several decades ago and which radically changed not only those regions but also the shape of the entire world civilization. These are the regions which are home to more people than the rest of the world combined. In the Soviet view, 'the evolving political face' of the Asia and Pacific region today is the result of two main tendencies.

On the one hand, ways have emerged for a sustained process of improving the regional political climate, defuzing conflicts and enhancing bilateral relations.

The processes in the region have been strongly affected by the implementation of the Geneva Accords and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which had a favourable effect on the search for settlement of other regional conflicts. Yet, at the same time, the difficulties and obstacles which hindered the progress of the Afghan settlement based on the strict compliance by all countries with the Geneva Accords, have had a very negative effect on other regional crisis situations. This Paper is being written during the initial stage of the Paris Conference on the Settlement in Cambodia which, despite the difficulties and obstacles to be overcome during its work and possibly later, represents a landmark in the efforts to defuse this complicated and involved conflict. Promising opportunities for a solution are gradually emerging. There are also signs of a possible defusion of tensions on the Korean Peninsula. And active hostilities between Iran and Iraq have ceased.

There are encouraging signs of change in the political atmosphere of the Asia and Pacific region itself. The old stereotyped perceptions of one country by another are now beginning to disappear. The perception of friend-or-foe is gradually being replaced by one of partnership. Petrified structures and stereotypes of international relations are being eroded, not only in Europe but also in the Asia and Pacific
region, although the resistance to that process on the part of traditionalist conservative forces is stronger in the latter. Important changes are taking place in the public consciousness of many counties with regard to the Soviet Union, although we in the USSR are well aware that much constructive work remains to be done both within the country and in the foreign-policy sphere, in order to consolidate those changes. Until very recently, our leaders believed that, since we are close to perfection, our image could only be improved by stepping up our propaganda. Now that nobody in our country any longer hides the fact that we are, to say the least, far from being perfect, it is plain that only real deeds can have a positive effect on our reputation. And we have tried to act accordingly during the three years since the Vladivostok speech by Mikhail Gorbachev. These moves have brought about good results and have drawn an increasingly improved response.

In circumstances in which a process of general improvement in the world situation – including the fields of Soviet-American and Sino-Soviet relations – has begun, the countries of the Asia and Pacific region are seeking to intensify their participation in international affairs. This is a new and important positive factor in world politics. It is also necessary to note such positive trends as the unfolding dialogue in the spirit of the new political thinking, contacts at higher interstate levels, and the desire to pool efforts in the struggle for enhanced security and stability. The increasingly apparent intention of many countries of the region to seek ways to ensure their security and regional stability, above all by political means and by renouncing military methods and force, deserve most careful consideration and must be commended.

These recent developments have convinced us even more of the correctness and the urgency of raising the issues of military security in the Asia and Pacific region. Our approach to the search for their solution envisages a dialogue which is open for democratic discussion of any ideas and proposals designed to create conditions for building confidence and promoting comprehensive and mutually beneficial co-operation. Our proposals on that score are well known, but it is important to note that we are not demanding that they should be accepted or rejected right away; we are merely putting them forward as a basis for discussion and debate.

It is sometimes said that our proposals concerning Asia and the Pacific, as formulated in Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk, are insufficiently specific and that we must make them more concrete. We are saying in response: ask questions aimed at making our initiatives more specific. We shall consider the questions and answer them. And we shall be asking questions in our turn and would also like to receive considered and concrete replies to our questions, rather than general propaganda statements. In other words, what we are proposing is a serious dialogue on the question of military détente in the Asia and