

Mikhail Gorbachev' Speech at Kansas State University, October 28, 2005

Thank you very much. I'm very glad to see that you're all in good spirits. That stimulates me. Thank you again. I'd like to thank you for this wonderful, wonderful day, good weather. You live and study in a really wonderful place. In Moscow yesterday it was snowing. Just one example of the many differences of climate, differences of history, ethnic differences, political differences, mental differences and all kinds of differences and we have to respect all of them. And this is the key to my discussion, because unless we recognize this principle, the principle of cultural and the ethnic diversity, we will not be able to achieve success in this very complex, very complicated world in addressing the tasks — the extremely complex tasks that we are facing.

Twenty years after the inception of Perestroika. Perestroika started when we felt particularly acutely the problems facing not only our own country, but the problems facing the world. We were one of the superpowers. We needed to think about what we do next. So that was the incentive for us to start Perestroika.

In the history of Russia there were three events in the 20th Century that had a tremendous impact on the lives of people in my country and throughout the world. It is the 1917 revolution, the victory over Nazism in the great patriotic war in World War II, and finally Perestroika.

Starting in 1982, one after another three general secretaries of the Communist party died, and this was perceived in rather dramatic terms. This put on the agenda the question of generational change at the very top of government in the USSR. Our society was demanding change. This was, so to say, in the air at all times then. The main theme in the evaluation of the situation in our society was that we could no longer live as before, because the country that was extremely rich and intellectual and natural resources was not able to provide a decent living for its citizens. The economy was stagnant. The bureaucracy had stranglehold over the entire country. There was one ideology, one form of property. All of this impeded growth and impeded necessary change.

Our country was being stifled because of the absence of freedom. Stalinism and the system that it had generated was being rejected at the popular level, at the cultural level. Add to this the fact that the economy was stagnating and was more and more lagging behind the developed world. The rate of growth was getting lower and lower. The productivity was one-third of what it was in the west, and in agriculture, just one-fifth of what it was in the developed countries.

We were producing extremely costly products, because the cost per unit of production was greater, twice as high as the cost per unit of production in the advanced countries that were using modern technologies. The quality of those products was acceptable only in the defense sector and was comparable to other countries, whereas in all other sectors it was inferior. The slow pace of legislative, socioeconomic, political and cultural processes weakened the Soviet Union's foreign policy position. So changes were overdue and the attempts to start such changes had been taken before by Brezhnev, and by Khrushchev before him, but as soon it became clear that the system needed changing, any attempt stopped. So it was extremely difficult to start the process of change.

It had to be started from above. It all depended on whether at the top of power there would be people who would venture to start radical changes in this vast country, who would venture to start systemic changes in our country. But change was also needed in the world.

Change was necessary because in many parts of the world there was no democracy. Change was necessary because the world was facing problems such as poverty, and many other problems that we still face and that I will discuss later. But if you recall the period of the beginning of the 1980s the main thing that strikes you is that all of us were passengers on this deadly train that was called the nuclear arms race. This train had the kind of speed and momentum such that many people believed that it could not be stopped, that it could not even be slowed down. This was extremely dangerous, because the nuclear conflict could start perhaps not because of a political decision, but also because of a failure in command and control systems of these powerful weapons.

The ideological and political confrontation, the confrontation of the different social models, all of this together with the domestic and the external factors dictated to us a need for change — the policy of Perestroika. The philosophical underpinnings of Perestroika, the political thinking, were a response not only to the problems that we were facing in the USSR, but also to the problems of the world. On March the 11th, after the death of my predecessor, Konstantin Chernenko, the meeting of the central committee convened to decide who would become the new general secretary of the central committee. It was necessary not only to elect new leaders, it was necessary to undertake a radical renewal. You can imagine what kind of leadership we had at that time, given that I was at that time 54 years old and I was the youngest member of the Politburo. All the others were over 70 years old.

In this country the leadership was leaders who could not work at full speed, the system was not working, it was rusty, to say the least. So the central committee had several factions. Among those factions were people who wanted to preserve the status quo, and there was a group of relatively young members of the Soviet leadership who were supported by some people from the older generation, the leaders who understood the need for the generational change in the Soviet leadership. We also had to take into account

the feelings of the people: the people, the Soviet society was very critical of the leadership that it was getting from the Soviet Politburo.

At that time I had spent 30 years in politics already – first at the regional level, then I spent 7 years in the Politburo working with Breshnev on top of Chernenko, and I have to say that Chernenko was a very sick person and he was ill all the time and, therefore, I had to take over, to chair the meetings of the Politburo and to preside over the decision-making process. This was very important to me. This was the moment that played an important role because at that time I was in charge, I was, so to say, at the steering wheel of that great country, and I had a very good idea of what the situation was in the country, in the various regions and what was happening to the system.

So finally I was elected unanimously the general secretary of the central committee. At that time in the beginning of Perestroika we were getting tremendous support from the people and that was of great importance for me. Relying on that support I was able to take a risk to venture on the path of great, far-reaching changes.

To speak of the foreign policy – there, too, we understood that we could not continue as before. The world was seized with conflicts aflame in many parts of the world. The arms race was a problem that was not being addressed. So we understood that this was something that needed to be addressed and this was the context within which we were contemplating our decisions and our steps.

So we proposed a policy of Perestroika to our own people, and our people supported Perestroika. Together with our western partners and, in particular, the United States, we were able to engage a serious dialogue, a dialogue that resulted in a new vision of the world and in a new approach to building international relations.

For the USSR Perestroika meant overcoming totalitarianism and moving toward democracy, toward freedom. But this did not happen overnight. As we were moving forward, as we were taking steps in domestic policy we saw increasing resistance, particularly among bureaucracy, the party bureaucracy, the state bureaucracy and the military bureaucracy. And among some people too, among part of our society Perestroika was seen as some kind of gift from heavens that something — that things will change for the better overnight. We were saying that change is something that everyone needs to do. All of us, from an ordinary worker to the general secretary of the Communist Party, needed to change.

We had initial illusions, the illusion of being able to improve the old system, that we could give second wind to the old system without really changing it. But that failed and, therefore, toward the end of 1986 we began to contemplate political reforms. That was the first step along the path of reforming, replacing the system. We proposed a step-by-step approach to reforming Soviet society, moving gradually toward freedom and democracy and market economics.

This ideology, this philosophy of Perestroika would result in bringing together the interests of individuals on the one hand and of the whole of society on the other hand. The most important thing, of course, was to place the individual, the human being at the center of this change.

So let me now very quickly describe some aspects of that period, because I would like to give more time to the current situation. In August, 1991, an attempt was made to organize a coup d'etat. The coup d'etat weakened my position and as a result the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia agreed to dismantle the Soviet Union. They did that behind my back. So Perestroika is the period that started on March 11th, 1985, and ended on December 25th, 1991. What happened afterwards was a different history, was a different course.

Boris Yeltsin had a different strategy. That strategy included breaking up the country, for Russia to abandon the other republics and, as he hoped, to move forward more rapidly, without the burden of the other republics. That was an illusion, and illusion in public policy means misadventure, a reckless adventure that ended badly. The country disintegrated, the wealth of our nation was plundered, and the economy was opened up while it was not ready to compete with the more advanced economies. That virtually destroyed the economy, the savings of the people and the economic situation. As a result those policies brought country to the brink of catastrophe. It is only because of the enormous resources and also because of the efforts at the local and regional level that that blow was to some extent softened, but it was a heavy blow and we are still living the consequences of those policies.

And, therefore, I'm often asked whether Perestroika was defeated or it was victorious. Well, it is true that Perestroika was interrupted, it is true that we were not able to achieve all the goals that we had planned. However, we were able to do something fundamental, and that is ending the totalitarianism system, implementing a pluralistic economy, and creating opportunities for people to benefit from freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly. The country opened up to the world and the world opened to us. We also adopted a law on the freedom of movement, the freedom of emigration, and finally we prepared a union treaty for a new union of the republics. And what we were able to do, up until August, 1991, is what enabled us, what enabled the country to continue to move forward. Our country will not return to the past. This is not just a political statement, this is the view, this is the position, the opinion of our entire society and that is the greatest historical achievement of Perestroika.

I always need to take a glass of water. And I recall my old professor — not vodka, water. You know that I

instituted an anti-drinking campaign when I was the Soviet leader. And that campaign unfortunately didn't work, but nevertheless, it is now remembered. It is now remembered. People remember that at that time the Soviet Union had the highest life expectancy among men and women in our history. We had a higher birth rate at that time. Millions of lives were saved because those additional deaths because of drinking did not happen. Productivity grew, discipline improved in the transportation sector, etc. etc.

I recall that my university professor because he like me had a throat problem and he always had some water on his lectern in order to drink some water. And one day he was not given that water. One day — one day, as they say, those episodes are sometimes very important in our lives. So then they brought the glass of water and we were fourth-year students at that time and we laughed and joked when water was brought in. The professor looked at us and he said, "Colleagues —" he recognized us as people who would become his colleagues soon, so he said, "Colleagues, even the best speech and even the best lecture needs to be watered down."

So let's look at Russia today. During the first presidency of President Putin, he was able to stabilize the situation in the country and now there is a chance that we can continue changes, we can continue reforms. Had Putin been able to do that alone had he been able just to overcome the chaos that he inherited from Boris Yeltsin, that alone would make him go down in Russian history. Even though Putin is being criticized in Russia and in Europe and in the United States, he continues to have support from the people. He has very a high popularity rating because he has proposed some very important priorities, some very important programs which if implemented can significantly improve people's lives. Many people still live in poverty and that is happening at a time when there are perhaps as many billionaires in Russia as in America. Putin is trying to change things for the better, to redirect the economy for the benefit of the people, and that's why people support him.

At this time we are facing really important choices. If the goals set by President Putin becomes the agenda, the agenda for the whole country, then Russia will have a healthier future. If, however, these changes are prevented, if they are impeded, and there is a lot of resistance to the president's agenda, then we might see a disastrous turn of events. And, therefore, when the president is being criticized I always defend him. I do sometimes criticize him. Of course, that's normal to criticize. When the opposition criticizes I understand that. When, however, Putin is criticized from abroad then I ask why is it that our foreign partners do not like Putin's policies.

So again, we are facing a moment of choice for Russia and the near future will show how things will proceed, in which direction they will go.

Let's go back to not only the domestic policy, but the important changes that Perestroika produced in international affairs. We were able to establish dialogue and normal relations with the United States of America, and I would like to pay tribute to President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State Schultz. They did a great deal. They also had to overcome some resistance, including resistance among their own people, to meet us halfway. I believe that President Reagan was a great president and I pay tribute for his contribution. This is what I say wherever I go, even though, of course, one can criticize President Reagan, one can criticize anyone, but as they say, from above it was decided that our paths should cross and together we were able to redirect the affairs of the world away from the Cold War.

For 30 years we had had a hostile relationship with China. We normalized those relations. We had excellent relations with India, with all European countries we established close cooperation. Germany was reunified. After the velvet revolutions in central and eastern Europe, those nations too were given a right to choose. We never interfered. On the very first day of my leadership I said to my colleagues, "You should develop your own policies, we will not interfere in your affairs because it is your responsibility." Many of them later regretted that we took that position. They tried to make us intervene, but we continued to avoid that, we continued to provide overall security, but the rest of it was in their hands and that was of great importance. Our forces, our troops, our politicians never intervened, never interfered in what those countries decided.

It is sometimes said that I gave away Poland, I gave away Hungary, I gave away the Czech Republic. Well, I gave it to their people, I gave Hungary to the Hungarians, Poland to the Polish. That's how it should be.

The achievements of Perestroika were possible above all because of the proper evaluation of the situation of the world, of the situation in our country. Our fundamental assessments and our fundamental decisions turned out to be correct. We stated that our country needed change, and in the second phase of our change we concluded that we needed to replace the old system and we dismantled and replaced that system. We also stated that in addition to the national interests, class and corporate interests there are also universal interests of all mankind. This is because we live in a different world, in a world where we have nuclear weapons capable of destroying our planet, and a world where we're facing the global challenges that we cannot address alone, in a world where no country can achieve security alone.

This, I think, is what America should bear in mind too: if things are bad in the world, things are bad for everyone. We will not be able alone to solve environmental problems. No country alone can solve the problem of the environment, the most important problem today. So it is very important that we evaluated correctly those challenges that were facing the world at that time. We believed that the universal interests of

all mankind should be the greatest priority. We also noted and stated that we live in an interdependent and interrelated world, where no country can solve its problems alone.

So based on that, we took strategy decisions, the decision in favor of democracy, freedom and the rule of law, the decision in favor of ending the arms race and the global confrontation.

The lessons of those times are relevant now. We see that the world is changing very rapidly. We see that some changes have made the world really different beyond recognition compared to twenty years ago. If I asked you, for example, to raise hands those with cell phones, you would all raise your hands, but just 10 years ago we didn't have that. So things have changed over the past, not just 20, but 10-15 years.

Today, as 20 years ago, the most important thing is to correctly evaluate and assess the main trends in the world today. We are facing a very complex, a very contradictory and rapidly changing world with a tremendous flow of information, and that results in great uncertainty, and wherever I go I see that people are worried, they're worried about the future. Today the interdependence and the interconnectedness of the world, what we call globalization, has increased more than ever before. Globalization is pushing the world toward the future, but nevertheless we see that globalization does not include billions of people. Finally, we see in the world today the emergence of new giants, China, India, Brazil. The world feels that those countries are making an increasing impact on all economic and political processes. They are becoming important decision makers and we each should rethink the world in view of these new trends in the world today. And, of course, solutions are not military solutions, solutions are intellectual, solutions are political, solutions are that we should build a new relationship that would include, integrate those new giants into the global processes.

The United States has a special role and position in the world today. It is the only superpower in the world today. We also see that Europe is uniting and is becoming an increasingly positive factor in the world today. I believe that the emergence of the united Europe is a very positive factor. It is a factor for peace and democracy in the world. We also see the democratic transition of Russia and of the former Soviet republics. We generally see a democratic process in the world today, but at the same time the adaptation of the Islamic world to the challenges of the world, and this is a very problematic process.

The Islamic world has been a factor in the world developments for many centuries, but today the Islamic world has been marginalized in the global process, and that means that one billion people have been marginalized, and I believe that could result in a lot of trouble if that situation continues.

So this is the world that we are facing, the world in which we live today. In this world mankind is looking for responses to the new challenges of the 21st Century, the challenge of security, the challenge of poverty and environment, the challenge of the global environmental crisis.

In the mid 1980s we regarded the ending of the arms race as our greatest priority, as our highest priority. And at that time we united our efforts and we were able to succeed in ending the arms race. The thinking at that time was not some kind of epiphany, it didn't come out of nowhere, it was consistent with the main principles of international law and international cooperation. I believe that today as then we need a new thinking, a new thinking for the new century. The political problem today is that politics is lagging behind. Politics is lagging behind because, first of all, it's important to understand the world to develop a vision, a strategy, and then to move forward within that framework.

Of course, I do not have any ready-made philosophy for this new century, for these new problems. It would be presumptuous of me and I don't want to be presumptuous at my age. I will be 75 years old next year. So I want my recommendations to be serious, so let me share with you some thoughts in this regard.

First of all, whereas globalization is inevitable and an objective process, we should understand that billions of people have not yet benefited from globalization. Globalization has benefited mostly the rich, wealthy nations. The gap between the wealthy nations and poor countries has grown. Three billion people live on less than two dollars a day. One billion people in the world live on less than one dollar a day. This could mean a lot of trouble for the world, and therefore, we have to overcome the uncontrolled nature of globalization and we have to give globalization a human dimension, a human face. Let us listen to those who are calling for globalization with a human face.

If globalization is only meant to increase profits without paying attention to the social problems, ethnic problems and environmental problems, globalization is dangerous. And let's bear this in mind when we think about this global world.

Let me also speak about the role of the United States. America has a right to claim leadership because of its power, because of its democratic traditions, because of its cultural and economic influence, but this leadership should be exercised not through domination but through partnership with other nations.

The past few years have shown that people in the world do not accept attempts to dictate to them, or attempts by any country to be a world policeman. And I think that it's very important that after the recent very difficult years, we have seen that in the administration, in the American political community, there is a growing understanding of this, and I believe this is very important and I think that this will move this great country to get a better understanding of its role and responsibility in the world.

As for the European role I believe that we should recognize its positive potential, we should not divide Europe into the old Europe and the new Europe. We should respect the choices made by the European

nations. At the same time Europe itself should, it must, take very important decisions, very responsible decisions as regards the model of development in Europe and as regards unification, because we don't want this very important project to fail.

The democratic transition in Russia and other countries is — has been more difficult, more painful than people had thought. But let us trust the new democracies, let us understand that they should find their own model of democracy, their own democratic structure. Let us not try to impose democracy by means of interference or military intervention or by means of imposing economic models from advanced countries to other nations.

Finally, the Islamic world requires understanding and respect. We see that it can move toward adjusting, toward adapting to the global world and we in other nations should understand the aspirations of those countries where Islam is their religion. If we achieve that, that could be very important in stabilizing the overall situation in the world. Let us not think of the Islamic world as just a supplier of terrorism. After all, there are other terrorists as well and also I believe that they did not represent that faith. Those are disoriented people who were recruited by the terrorist centers, recruited by those who exploit and speculate on religion. Any religion has fundamentalists, so let us not accuse just Islam of these. So a respectful dialogue with the Islamic world is the only correct path.

So we are facing a different world. In this context there is a great need for rethinking the role of the west in the global process. I believe that we should act now, we should act quickly in order to unite our efforts in the face of the global challenges that I described.

The main problem is the problem of governance, and I'm not speaking of a world government. I believe that we need a system at the national level, the regional level, at the level of international organizations, and a new role of the United Nations.

It is easy to condemn the United Nations, what is more difficult is to reform the United Nations in order to make that organization consistent with the needs of our time. We need the political will in order to successfully do that.

We need to have a kind of global compact on the principles of new world institutions. I believe that those institutions should provide for peace in a world of ethnic and cultural diversity. We need a mechanism that would help us to address the problem of overcoming poverty and backwardness by accumulating the allocation of 0.7 percent of the GDP for development assistance to overcome poverty and backwardness. Up until now that goal, set by the United Nations and accepted by all the nations, has been achieved by only three countries. So we need to work step by step.

We need to make a transition to a new world order. The late Pope John Paul II said that we need a world order, a world order that would be more stable, more just, more equitable and more humane. Indeed, no one knows the details of the new international order, but I believe that the goals set by His Holiness the Pope are very important to all of us and let's bear those goals in mind.

To conclude my remarks on the future of the world, let me say that we need an answer to the question of what kind of world we should strive for. Certainly it should not be based on the position of one country. It should be a world which is good for all nations. This is something that I believe will be achieved.

So let me quote from a very interesting speech that was made on June 10, 1963, by the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy. This is what he said speaking at American University in Washington. I quote, "The most important subject is peace. What kind of peace am I speaking about? What kind of peace should we strive for? It's not a Pax Americana imposed by American weapons of war. It's not the peace of the grave, and not the safety of a slave. I'm speaking of a true peace, a peace for which one wants to live, a peace that enables every nation, every person, to grow, to hope and to build a better life for their children.

It is a peace not just for Americans, but a peace for all people. It is a peace not only for today but also for tomorrow. A true peace should be the result of the efforts of many nations, a sum of many actions. It should be dynamic, not static, it should be changing in order to respond to the challenges of every new generation, because peace is a process, peace is a way of addressing problems."

Today we are facing a situation that is as important for mankind as the situation when these prophetic words of President Kennedy were spoken. I believe that perhaps he died for those words.

So a new vision, a new policy, we need a political will and responsibility that he mentioned at that time and I very much share this view of John F. Kennedy. We need that approach today more than yesterday. Thank you.