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Mikhail Gorbachev and His Role in the Peaceful Solution of
the Cold War

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ABSTRACT

The role of a political leader has always been important for understanding both domestic and world politics. The most significant historical events are usually associated in our minds with the images of the people who were directly involved and who were in charge of the most crucial decisions at that particular moment in time. Thus, analyzing the American Civil War, we always mention the great role and the achievements of Abraham Lincoln as the president of the United States. We cannot forget about the actions of such charismatic leaders as Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Franklin D. Roosevelt when we think about the brutal events and the outcome of the World War II. Or, for example, the Cuban Missile Crisis and its peaceful solution went down in history highlighting roles of John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev in the tense negotiations during the confrontation.

This thesis is built as a single-case study discovering the personality of Mikhail Gorbachev as a leader and his role in the peaceful solution of the Cold War. It shows how particular social and political-economic backgrounds shaped certain features of his character, and how those features influenced his political decisions later on. Mikhail Gorbachev, the first and the last President of the USSR, is a perfect example of a leader who acted in a new unique historical situation without much of theoretical guidance from the past. Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union started to shift from socialism towards a new political regime that entailed significant changes in international politics.



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*There is nothing more difficult to take in hand,
More perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success,
Than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.*

Niccolo Machiavelli.

INTRODUCTION

The role of a political leader has always been important for understanding both domestic and world politics. The most significant historical events are usually associated in our minds with the images of the people who were directly involved and who were in charge of the most crucial decisions at that particular moment in time. Thus, analyzing the American Civil War, we always mention the great role and the achievements of Abraham Lincoln as the president of the United States. We cannot forget about the actions of such charismatic leaders as Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Franklin D. Roosevelt when we think about the brutal events and the outcome of the World War II. Or, for example, the Cuban Missile Crisis and its peaceful solution went down in history highlighting roles of John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev in the tense negotiations during the confrontation.

But to what degree is a leader (formal or informal) responsible for a course of events? Would every person with certain leadership characteristics make the same decisions in a particular situation? How long would World War II have lasted and what would have been the outcome if we had a different leader in the USSR or in the United States? Would the outcome of the Cuban Missile Crisis been different if we had somebody like George W. Bush instead of John F. Kennedy as president at that time? If Stalin had been in the place of Nikita Khrushchev at that time, would the decision-making been any different? Probably it would have ended differently but we will never know, we can only guess. But this kind of discussion raises the issue of a political leader's importance in international affairs and makes us reassess past and contemporary political events from a more psychological personality-oriented angle.

The role of personality in political events had not been seriously researched until very recently when political psychology became a scientific movement. Political psychology was formed as a merger between social psychology, a sphere that mainly examines behavior of people in groups, and political science. This new field of study focuses on the subjective side of political events and,

according to Jeanne Knutson, professor of political science and social psychology, the subject of political psychology is the psychological component in political behavior of a person, social group and/or a nation. Examining those subjects would allow us to explain politics by means of psychology.¹

While there is some debate about the usefulness of psychology in political science, there is no general agreement about the role of personality in politics. According to Russian academic Evgeni B. Shestopal,² there are two major opinions on the subject today. The first group of scientists puts personality as the most important factor in political affairs. Actual political views of a person are less important within this approach. The role of a leader is described based on his/her personal characteristics, usually the stronger sides, such as leadership talents, social skills, abilities, knowledge, level of authority, political influence, etc. There are researchers who also agree with the importance of a personality in politics, but they focus more on a leader's weaker sides, such as complex pathologies and other psychological difficulties, as the main factor in decision-making process. In this manner, James D. Barber³ offers the idea that an inferiority complex caused by psychological trauma in childhood, combined with attempts to compensate for it, can mobilize a person for greater achievements in the future. These achievements can be incomparable to the successes of his/her more fortunate peers.

The second approach, in contrast, tends to neglect the role of a leader in politics. There are several theoretical explanations to this idea. First, some political scientists believe that social factors play dominant roles and mainly determine the leader's behavior. Second, there are Marxist theorists who say that economic factors influence politics the most. Third, there is also functionalist

¹ Knutson J., *Handbook of political psychology*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. 1973.

² Shestopal E. B., *Political Psychology: textbook*, Moscow: Infra-M, 2002.

³ James David Barber (1930-2004) – prominent political scientist and expert in American presidential character, who predicted the downfall of Richard M. Nixon several years before it actually happened.

movement that focuses on the components of the political system (such as parties, organizations, factions) as its main determinants. Finally, there are political scientists who agree to explore some certain components of personality but do not consider a leader as a factor of influence on political life. As Alex Inkeles, professor of sociology at Stanford University, pointed out, the individual characteristics of a person are suppressed in international politics. Therefore, we should study mass patterns, such as group processes, rather than individual characteristics of a leader.⁴ The main idea that unites all these views is that a personality is not the main focal point as an explanation of events in politics.

This thesis is built within the first theoretical approach where psychological characteristics of a leader and his/her role are believed to be very important in understanding and analyzing the world of high-level politics. The purpose of this research is to show how individual characteristics of a person can influence political behavior and major decisions. The example of Mikhail Gorbachev and analysis of his social and political background shows the role he played in the peaceful solution of the Cold War.

This thesis aims to answer the following three questions:

- What is the current condition of political psychology as a science? What are the major assumptions regarding the role of personality in politics?
- What is the practical importance of research in the field of political psychology and how is it applicable to the study of international relations?
- What are the major biological factors that can define success or failure in political career?

⁴ Inkeles, Alex, *Sociology and Psychology*. In: Sigmund Koch ed. *Psychology: A Study of a Science*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963, p. 354.

- What are the major approaches in exploring the personality of a political leader?

Answers to the afore mentioned questions will help me prove or disprove the hypothesis, namely that in-depth analysis of a political leader would allow us to understand, predict, and, possibly, prevent undesirable behavior of high-level officials. Based on the analysis of Mikhail Gorbachev's personality and his decisions, I assert that Gorbachev's personality was critical in bringing the Cold War to the peaceful solution.

This thesis is built as a single-case study discovering the personality of Mikhail Gorbachev as a leader. It shows how particular social and political-economic backgrounds shaped certain features of his character, and how those features influenced his political decisions later on.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the first and the last President of the USSR, is a perfect example of a leader who acted in a new unique historical situation without much of theoretical guidance from the past. Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union started to shift from socialism towards a new political regime. The Soviet economy transitioned from a planned centralized order towards a free market based on competitive trade. No politician at that time had to deal with such turmoil before. The future of the country was very uncertain. According to the conclusions by Fred Greenstein, Emeritus Professor of Politics (Princeton University), Gorbachev's role in domestic and world affairs was very significant at that time.⁵

The example of Gorbachev's personality was chosen also because his role and achievements are very controversial and debatable for people in different parts of the world. In Russia and in most of the Former Soviet Union republics, he is still blamed by the population for the collapse of the USSR and for all the economic misery that followed during the 90s when the country

⁵ The ideas of Fred Greenstein are discussed further in the Review of the Literature chapter.

was adapting to free market. Thus, being asked in 2004 if Mikhail Gorbachev's governance was positive or negative for the Soviet people and the country as whole, 53% responded that it was "more negative," 21% said "equally positive and negative," 15% did not give any clear answer, and only 11% estimated his role as "more positive."⁶ At the same time in the West, Gorbachev is praised for the fall of the Berlin Wall, the unification of Germany, and for the end of the Cold War. As British political scientist and historian Archie Brown concluded in one of his books, Gorbachev "has contributed to the end of the conflict between East and West more than anybody else."⁷

In order to better understand Gorbachev's achievements and the role he played, one needs to realize the context of the political and ideological environment in the USSR. The communist system created by Lenin, and then further developed by Stalin, has been designed for a sole leader and party, the Secretary General of the Communist Party. The power of the leader was slightly limited by the Supreme Council of the USSR (Parliament) but did not really have to face any ideological opposition within the country. The communist system was closed for outsiders and thoroughly protected from inside dissidents by means of the secret police and intelligence. Josef Stalin, being the Secretary General, was the most extreme example of a menacing totalitarian leader who held practically all the power in his hand. All the intelligence and information went through him. His successors in the Soviet Union were less extreme but the general tradition of power monopoly and strict censorship was kept.

Realism-based ideology of the Cold War dominated in the Soviet Union for decades. The balance of power and the enemy image embodied by the United States justified constant arms race and heavy economic emphasis on military-industrial complex in the USSR. Competitive zero-sum game divided the world in two major geopolitical camps. The Soviet Union represented one of the

⁶ Accessed at <http://www.prosv.ru/umk/istoriya/4.html>

⁷ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, London: Bodley Head, 2009.

two camps constantly increasing its weapon arsenals and preparing for the worst-case scenario. When Gorbachev came to power, he offered much more liberal vision of international politics, seeking to transform the image of the USSR into that of a partner in solving all-human problems.⁸ The ideational change he proposed was revolutionary for both domestic and international societies and entitled even more serious changes than he originally planned.

Mikhail Gorbachev happened to be the very last successor and the last governor of the communist system. The future president grew up during the period of Stalin's governance, having the years of World War II and then period of starvation in his teenage memory. Gorbachev learned his first lesson of political dualism in his own family when one of the grandfathers was an active supporter and a member of the Communist Party, while another was strictly against the collectivization process⁹ and Stalinism. Nevertheless, both of the grandfathers suffered severely during Stalin's regime after World War II.

The paper examines in more detail how this political dualism, childhood in poverty, combined with his excellent education in Moscow and a number of other factors, influenced his thoughts that later gave birth to the ideas that have led to the end of the Cold War and changed the world of the international politics forever.

The study of political psychology in general and the development of a leader's personality is a very pertinent field for understanding contemporary international relations. This paper demonstrates its significance by analyzing the example of Mikhail Gorbachev and his role in world politics. The results of this research can be applicable in many aspects of foreign diplomacy.

⁸ Breslauer, George W., *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.278.

⁹ **Collectivization** - a policy pursued under Stalin between 1928 and 1940. The goal of this policy was to consolidate individual land and labor into collective farms (*kolkhoz*, plural: *kolkhozy*).

Among the sources of the literature there are books and articles about political psychology, personality in politics, and sociology. The case study uses a number of sources written by prominent historians about the Cold War. It includes but not limited to a biography and autobiography of Mikhail Gorbachev, contemporary analyses of the Cold War, Russian and Soviet politics, and personal diaries of a Gorbachev's aide. The books by Archie Brown, Robert English, Raymond Garthoff, Anatoli Chernyaev, and Michael Beschloss were especially helpful in building this thesis.



I. Review of the Literature

Political psychology is a relatively new field of science. Officially it became a separate field of study from psychology in 1968, when a Political Psychology sub-field was created within the American Political Science Association. At about the same time, a limited number of American universities, including Yale, started to offer a course on psychology within the department of political science. Prior to that, political psychology existed mostly in a form of non-systemized facts and hypotheses, without any unifying theoretical framework. The tasks it was trying to solve were sometimes incompatible and many methodological problems remained unresolved.¹⁰

Nowadays, political psychology is mainly a synthesis of political science and social psychology. However, it also employs other methods used by other Western psychological schools. Thus, it relies on principles of behaviorism, psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology and other disciplines.^{11 12 13}

The role of a person in politics is explored in two major aspects within the field of political psychology. The first aspect examines the personality of formal and informal leaders. Sigmund Freud was one of the chief architects of these studies when he wrote the first psycho-biographical portrait of the 28th president of the United States Woodrow Wilson. In this study Freud asserted that

¹⁰ Shestopal E. B.

¹¹ **Behaviorism** – a school of psychology that limits itself on studies of objectively observable and measurable behavior. The main idea is all learning is determined by our reactions to a certain stimulus.

¹² **Psychoanalysis** - a specific mind investigation method, introduced by Sigmund Freud, and a therapy based on this investigation. The method relies on the study of the unconscious mind and the “free associations” technique.

¹³ **Cognitive psychology** – is the school of psychology that studies cognitive processes such as the ways people perceive information, remember it, think and learn.

Wilson unconsciously identified himself with Jesus Christ.¹⁴ This tradition has been further developed by many other scientists, not only within a psychoanalytical approach. Their studies attempt to explore the motivation of political behaviors on a wider scale: decision-making processes, political reasoning, political charisma and mechanisms of influence towards the large groups of people.

The second large aspect focuses mainly on the political behavior of an average person, as part of a large group. Here we have different issues to examine: the level of political activity of an average person (activity, conformity, or political apathy), the types of political activity (leader as an executive person), mechanisms of attachment to a political system, types of loyalty and other factors determining the role of a regular person as a part of political activity. In this paper we focus on the first aspect and take a closer look at the role of political elites.

According to Fred Greenstein, there are three major ways of conducting personality research. First, there is a method of single-case studies that implies the qualitative examination of concrete persons, both famous leaders and/or a simple person. Within this approach political psychologists created a number of individual psychological portraits, so called “psycho-biographies.” The main purpose here is to analyze a person by taking a look at the early social experiences and background, trying to understand the inner motives of the person’s adult decisions. Among the most prominent scientists within this approach we can mention Alexander George and Juliette George who wrote about Woodrow Wilson, Indira Gandhi, Vladimir Lenin, Lev Trotsky, or Eric Ericson with his analyses of Hitler, Luther and Eleanor Roosevelt. Nowadays, we can find almost every well-known politician in such a gallery of portraits, including Saddam Hussein, Boris

¹⁴ Kane, Joseph Natan. *Facts about the Presidents from Washington to Johnson*, New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1964.

Yeltsin, or Bill Clinton. Case studies generally concentrate more on the life experience of a public figure rather than political situations as a whole.¹⁵

Another way to study personality in politics is the “aggregation” of the facts of personal biography into the course of political events. As Greenstein says, it is “analyses of the collective effects of individuals and types on the functioning of political institutions ranging all the way from informal face-to-face groups through organizations and political patterns at the international level.”¹⁶ The main goal here is not to portray a character as such, but to use the personality component as a tool to explain historical events such as revolutions, wars, and/or to describe a political culture, behavior in groups or a national character. Such historians and political scientists as J. Cocks, C. Hughes, B. Brodie, A. Gurevich, and others, made their contributions within this approach.

The third major method is “typological,” or multi-case approach. It is based on building different kinds of typologies and attempts to classify leaders using various terms. Traditionally, the basic criteria for the classifications were certain psychological features of the leaders, their styles of behavior, thinking, decision-making and other. Political actors are given psychological terms “from mere classification of the members of a population in terms of the categories of a single psychological variable,... through complex typologies identifying syndromes of interrelated attributes.”¹⁷ Among a number of various classifications by different scientists one can distinguish the authoritarian-based typology by T. Adorno,¹⁸ the dogmatism-based theory by M. Rokeach,¹⁹ or the ideas of David Riesman who offered “traditional-inner-and-other directedness.”²⁰

¹⁵ Shestopal E. B.

¹⁶ Greenstein, Fred, *Personality and Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987, p. 14

¹⁷ Greenstein F., p. 15

¹⁸ T. W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York: Harper, 1950.

H. D. Lasswell and J. D. Barber divided politicians according to the political “roles” they played. Lasswell offered a division by “agitator-administrator-theorist” principle²¹, while Barber proposed his famous “spectator-advertiser-reluctant-lawmaker” classification.

Analyzing the problem of personality factors in politics, Greenstein made several important conclusions. He noted that the role of a politician becomes especially important when the person has to act in, firstly, a new unique situation that has never happened before in history; secondly, in a situation that is too complicated and unclear, and thirdly, in a situation where a leader has to choose between two or more political forces offering opposite political solutions. According to Greenstein, the role of a leader in politics grows proportionally (a) to the degree of the social environment’s receptivity to the leader’s decisions, (b) to the status of a man in a political system and (c) to the strength of personal Ego of a politician.²²

A special sub-discipline of political science that concentrates mainly on biological components of a person as of factors of political behavior is called Biopolitics. It examines aggression, violence, altruism, defensive mechanisms, dominance and other patterns of behavior in the context of politics.²³ According to E. B. Shestopal, the spectrum of determinants of successful political behavior includes and not limited to temperament, gender, age, genetic material, health condition, and even the type of the body constitution. Such features are not self-sufficient, but,

¹⁹ Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind*, New York: Basic Books, 1960.

²⁰ David Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965.

²¹ Harold D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

²² Shestopal E. B., p. 57-60.

²³ Somit A., Peterson S.A. *Biological Correlates of Political Behavior // Political Psychology. Contemporary Problems and Issues*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.

combined with personal characteristics and social skills, they appear as important factors of political activity and career of a politician.²⁴

One of the most important characteristics for a politician who is going to start an election campaign is his/her **age**. Younger or even very youthful leaders generally become popular at times of crises, when society is looking for a long-anticipated change, for radical reforms. People want to see a political leader who would not be associated with the old ruling class and therefore would be able to replace former political elites with a new team. As an example, the contrast between aging and constantly being in need of medical treatment Boris Yeltsin and much younger and healthier looking Vladimir Putin was one of the key factors of Putin's success during the presidential elections in Russia.²⁵ Becoming a President at the age of 48, Putin won over 50% of the electoral vote in 2000.²⁶ When Barack Obama was running for the presidential office in 2008, being in his forties, the main words of his campaign were "HOPE" and "CHANGE". The major competitor, Senator John McCain, who was twenty five years older, failed to win the race. After eight consecutive years of Republican Party rule, the society was ready to vote for a person who had less of international, political and life experience but for the one who was more energetic and willing for a change.

On the other hand, during a period, characterized by stable political development and economic growth, a country would most likely have an older leader who has been in power long enough to become old. In tradition-oriented political cultures venerable age is usually a symbol of wisdom and valuable life experience. As the examples, professor E. B. Shestopal refers to Iranian religious leader ayatollah Khomeini, aged Chinese leaders Mao Zedong, Dan Xiaoping, or North

²⁴ Shestopal E. B., p. 45-51.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Accessed at: http://www.bfm.ru/yellowpages/celebrities/Putin_Vladimir_Vladimirovich/

Korean leader Kim Jong-II, and others.²⁷ Age is a purely biological characteristic. It influences ability to memorize and adopt new information, flexibility towards new stereotypes and habits, thus affecting a person psychologically. But it becomes more valuable politically if we take into consideration such circumstances as current political and economic situation in the country, prevailing traditions and needs of the society.²⁸

Gender is also an important biological factor in political career. While women have traditionally been playing significant roles in politics, those roles have been mostly unofficial, “behind the scenes.” They often act as unofficial advisors and personal assistants to their spouses.

On the level of state leaders, marital status and the image of the first lady play important role in a leader’s reputation and political career. As an example of such influence we can mention Nikolas Sarkozy who kept his unsuccessful marriage until he got elected as the President of France and then got remarried less than a year after the elections. Many French voters found his choice of the non-French singer and former model Carla Bruni inappropriate and distasteful. Sarkozy’s divorce and quick second marriage drew tremendous attention to the President’s private life thus distracting people from actual political situation of that time.

As TIME magazine pointed out, the image of Michelle Obama and her activities periodically help to distract attention from criticism on her husband. “The Administration muddles along; the President’s popularity dips and dives – Mrs. Obama just puts her best outfit forward.”²⁹

Mikhail Gorbachev was criticized for not making any decision without consulting his wife Raisa, whose image appeared to be very different from what was traditionally expected from Soviet Union leaders’ spouses. Raisa Gorbacheva’s style and personality along with her advanced

²⁷ Shestopal E. B.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kate Betts, “Style Meets Substance,” in TIME, Vol. 177, No. 6, p. 48.

education contributed towards the growth of her husband's popularity in the West but it was not appreciated the same way within the Soviet Union.

All the above examples show the importance of women's role in politics when they act as a part of their husbands' political image. But there is a very limited number of women who actually managed to become high-level politicians themselves. Gender disproportion causes massive feminist movements who complain about discrimination and inequality in politics.

A woman who wishes to pursue political career generally has to possess typically male traits of character. Thus, British Prime-Minister Margaret Thatcher demonstrated severity, abruptness, and inability to compromise. Those qualities helped her to get and stay on her position. She was described as a person with "male character and manners of a street vendor."³⁰ Similar traits were demonstrated by many other female politicians including Yulia Tymoshenko, former prime-minister, the Orange Revolution activist and now prominent opposition leader in Ukraine.

Temperament and other genetically determined characteristics shape political behavior both on personal and mass levels. Politicians in Southern countries and regions are generally more spirited and vigorous comparing to their colleagues from the North. More energetic public speeches and actions allow politicians to ignite a crowd emotionally and stay memorable for the electorate. It is still remembered how Soviet Union leader Nikita Khrushchev was banging his shoe on a table during an United Nations session in order to get the attention of the audience to his words.³¹

Physical condition and appearance of a politician create the basic perception of him/her by mass public. External part of a person is compared to an image of an ideal politician that is fixed in mass minds. According to E. B. Shestopal, in most cultures massive glasses, flabby body or high-heel shoes (for a man) can potentially destroy politician's career despite his/her obvious public

³⁰ Shestopal E. B., ch. 10.2

³¹ Ibid.

achievements. As the exceptions, the author mentions F. D. Roosevelt, who managed to successfully rule the country being wheelchair-bound, and J. F. Kennedy who had to constantly wear a girdle due to his backbone problems. Despite their physical disabilities, both Presidents went down in history as far-sighted, determined patriots. But for the most part, physical disability or poor health appears a serious obstacle on the path of political career.



II. Case Study

The second chapter examines in detail Mikhail Gorbachev as a political leader and a decision-maker. By analyzing his biography, starting from his childhood, I will show how the key traits of Gorbachev's personality have developed and how significant his role was for the peaceful solution of the Cold War and the future of international affairs.

EARLY YEARS

Mikhail Gorbachev was born on March 2nd, 1931, in the small southern village of Privol'noye, Stavropol region, Russia. His ancestors were Cossacks who were pushed out of Ukraine and the river Don area in search of virgin soil. They settled in the southernmost territory of Stavropol, known as the Northern Caucasus.

Mikhail was born in a family of hard-working Russian and Ukrainian migrants. His beliefs centered on the experiences he learned from the two different political temperaments of his grandfathers.

His maternal grandfather, Panteley Gopkalo, was an active member of the Communist party and a collectivization³² participant. Being the leader of a *kolkhoz*, or a local collective farm, he was the most important person in the village.

In contrast, his paternal grandfather, Andrei Gorbachev was a staunch opponent of collectivization and Stalin's ideology. Andrei refused to share his harvest, even with his son Sergey since Sergey became a collective farmer. In his memoir, Mikhail described an episode during World War II, when the German Nazis occupied his village and were going to annihilate all the communist

³² **Collectivization** - a policy pursued under Stalin between 1928 and 1940. The goal of this policy was to consolidate individual land and labor into collective farms (*kolkhoz*, plural: *kolkhozy*)

families. Instead of hiding the grain, Andrew hid the twelve-year-old Mikhail on his farm. However, despite their very different political views, both grandfathers suffered from Stalin's repression during the 1930s. Panteley Gopkalo was charged as "an active member of provocative organization" and escaped execution by a miracle, spending some time in prison. For having hidden forty pounds of grain for his family, Andrei Gorbachev, was arrested and deported to Siberia for a few years. Despite the fact that repression affected both families of Gorbachev's parents, neither grandfather blamed Stalin for it. They considered zealous local executives responsible for their troubles. Later, Mikhail Gorbachev would say: "Stalinism demoralized not only hangmen but their victims as well. Betrayal became a very popular illness of the society."³³

Mikhail Gorbachev's first lessons of political pluralism and tolerance came not only from his politically polarized grandfathers but also from his family lifestyle. There were Lenin and Stalin portraits in one corner and Orthodox icons brought by his grandmother from Kiev Monastery in another corner of their house.

The conflicting roles that his grandfathers played contributed to the division in Gorbachev's character that allowed him to rise to the top of the ruling establishment as an active Communist and then to turn around and un-deliberately destroy the whole system.

World War II, that killed over 27 million Soviets, left a ten-year-old Mikhail with troublesome memories of starvation and extreme poverty. For almost five months, the Nazis occupied his village. In recounting his experience, Gorbachev wrote:

We were wartime children who survived. Nothing of the life and deeds of our generation is understandable unless we take this into consideration.

³³ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Ponyat perestroiku. Pochemu eto vazhno seychas. Understanding of Perestroika. Why it is important now*, Moscow: Alpina Busines books, 2006, p.56.

Because we shouldered the responsibility for our families' survival and for our own subsistence, we little boys became instant grownups. Peace, and with it our ordinary lives, collapsed before our eyes.³⁴

The postwar way of life, close to serfdom, combined with his curiosity and unrestrained energy paved Mikhail's way for changing his life completely. Young Gorbachev engulfed himself in the world of studies. All subjects interested him, including math, physics, and literature. In high school, he joined the theater program, playing many different roles. He enjoyed theatre so much that he considered acting as a possible future career.

As a leader of *komsomol*, (or *Young Communist League*)³⁵ during his school years Gorbachev was very strict with those who were late or undisciplined, but he also showed respect for adults and goodwill for classmates.

Right after the War, at the age of fourteen, Mikhail started helping his father with work on the collective farm. When he was seventeen, Mikhail was awarded the Order of Red Banner of Labor for his job as a combine operator. This honorable insignia made him special among his schoolmates and helped him in his future career.

Hard labor in the field strengthened Mikhail's relationships with his father Sergey. Till the very end, they were close friends, spending a lot of time together. Mikhail inherited his father's chivalrous respect for women and passion for any kind of information. Sergey Gorbachev had only four years of secondary school education but always enjoyed reading newspapers, watching the news on TV and then discussing it with his son.

³⁴ Archie Brown, *Seven Years That Changed The World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 281.

³⁵ **Komsomol** – Young Communist League, the youth wing of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. The organization was officially established on October 29, 1918.

Relations with his mother, Maria Gorbacheva, were more difficult. She was a very strong and outspoken woman in contrast to her intelligent and mild-mannered husband. In one of his interviews, Gorbachev, talking about his “constant hesitations” during decision-making process, mentioned that his “mother has never had any doubts. She never went to any kind of school and everything has always been clear to her.”³⁶ Maria Gorbacheva was very conservative and refused to change her way of life and habits under any circumstances. She never wanted to leave her village in the Stavropol region even though her son became Secretary General. Only in 1992, after Gorbachev resigned, was she convinced and finally agreed to leave the village where she had spent all her life and move to Moscow.

The image of a strong woman around Gorbachev explains why he conceded so much power to his wife, Raisa. He regarded her as an instructor at times and saw her as a full partner, referring to his wife as “my General.”³⁷

Maria Gorbacheva was partly of Ukrainian descent. Her Russian speech was constantly mixed with Ukrainian words. This cultural dualism made Gorbachev feel very close to the Ukrainian people. Later, in December 1991, he would mention his Ukrainian roots in an interview for Ukrainian television, desperately trying to keep Ukraine within a new fledging union that was designed to replace the USSR.³⁸

In 1950, when Mikhail was nineteen, he asked his father’s permission to apply to a university. His dad was very brief and said, “If you’re enrolled, we will help you as much as we can. Otherwise you can always come back and continue working together in the farm.” The will to get out of peasant life and his endless thirst for knowledge were so strong that Mikhail applied to five schools at the same time, including engineering, diplomacy, and finally the law department of

³⁶ Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev*, Moscow: Vagrius, 2001, p. 67.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 27.

Moscow State University (MSU), one of the most prestigious and highly competitive programs in the country. In high school Gorbachev received a silver medal, a special award given to excellent students after the whole period of studying. The medal and the Order of Red banner of Labor given to him earlier contributed to the fact that he was admitted by MSU without any exams. Hedrick Smith, a famous American journalist who had been working in Moscow for long time and wrote a book about Gorbachev, said that for a guy from a small southern village to get admitted by the famous Moscow university is like an African American kid from Louisiana to become a Harvard student.³⁹

In September 1950, after traveling more than 1,500 kilometers (about 930 miles) by train, Mikhail arrived in Moscow. A completely new period of his personal development was about to begin.

STUDENT YEARS AND MARRIAGE

Talking about his origins in his memoirs, Gorbachev says: “In order to make the reforms you have to live the life I’ve lived and see the things I’ve seen. To be from the family that went through the drama of collectivization and repressions of 1937. To graduate from Moscow University is one of the most important things in this to-do list.”⁴⁰

Studying in Moscow significantly affected Gorbachev’s intellectual and social development. The law program in MSU was very hard and intense. Some of the professors had been working there since before the Revolution. In addition to Marx-Lenin theories, Gorbachev studied Roman law, political science, oratory, and the constitutions of great bourgeois states, such as the United States. This intellectual atmosphere contributed to Mikhail’s political pluralism and tolerance

³⁹ Grachev, p. 130.

⁴⁰ Grachev, p. 133.

of non-Communist ideologies. Many years later, Gorbachev would be criticized for his sympathy for the Western way of life. He would be blamed by the Soviet people for “giving up” to American culture and would be informally named Michael Gorby, in an Americanized manner.⁴¹

The future president lived in a dormitory where, due to global poverty, there were fifteen to twenty people per room. As one of his former roommates recalls, there were constant discussions about philosophy, political ideologies, Lenin, Stalin, and other leaders, in the room. Some of those men were arrested and sent to exile later for not being careful enough in their jokes and thoughts about Stalin.

Gorbachev in his memoirs says that education transformed his passion and curiosity into a stable interest in philosophy, politics and theories. Being from a small village, he had trouble at first adapting to the big city. Gorbachev overcame some lack of knowledge by his purposefulness and persistence. Having an amazing thirst for studies, he spent most of the time in a library reading books. Such qualities were not rare for students of that time. After the war, many young people considered education the only way to succeed in life, and Gorbachev was one of them.

The individual traits of everybody in the dormitory were especially visible due to the severe economic conditions of students at that time. Young men were sharing food and gifts from home with each other. It was not abnormal to borrow a warm coat from a friend. A “student’s wardrobe never was personal, we all were sharing with each other,” recalls Gorbachev about his student life.⁴²

During his university years, Mikhail was known as a friendly and open person. His former classmates point out his spontaneous democratism, provincial openness, and leadership qualities. He was elected as a *komsorg*, komsomol leader, and then, in 1952, a Communist Party member.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Grachev, p. 175.

High level education gave him certain advantages in the future, but on the other hand, he had to learn how to deal with his less educated colleagues. Most Soviet leaders, who worked during the Brezhnev era, had received a very poor education from provincial technical institutes or obtained it through external study only. None of Gorbachev's Politburo peers had spent a full five years studying in a major Russian university.⁴³

In 1953, Mikhail Gorbachev married Raisa Titarenko, a girl from a small city of Rubtsovsk in the Altai region of Siberia. She was the eldest of three children of a Ukrainian-born railway engineer. Raisa's family also suffered greatly during the repression of the 1930s. Her mother's family was categorized as "rich peasants," and their house and land were confiscated. Raisa's grandfather was accused of "Trotskyism" and "disappeared without trace."⁴⁴ For a long time the family thought he died in a labor camp, and only in 1993 were Raisa and Mikhail Gorbachev able to find out that Raisa's grandfather was actually executed for the fact that he used to own private land. Raisa Gorbacheva's grandmother "died of grief and hunger as the wife of an enemy of the people," and her four children "were left to the mercy of fate."⁴⁵ Since the family was very poor, Raisa could not always afford even warm clothes and shoes while living in Moscow. She looked very modest, and, as her husband certifies, did not start to use lipstick until after she turned thirty.

Mikhail and Raisa had a lot in common. Both spouses were half-Russian and half-Ukrainian. Both had come to Moscow from poor, diligent families, and considered studies as a logical continuation of their hard-working way of life. Both were provincial and foreign to the big city. Raisa spent all her early years in the Ural Mountains region and came to Moscow to study

⁴³ Brown, 1997.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Raisa Gorbacheva, *I Hope*, London: Harpercollins, 1991, p.16-17.

philosophy at MSU. They shared the same common habits and interests. For example, both loved evening walks, and it became their sacramental ritual for many years.

Despite all those similarities, Raisa was much stronger, much more organized, and a more pedantic person than her husband. All the books in their home library were placed in alphabetical order. She could leave a theater in the middle of a show and go home if she had to finish reading a book or to prepare for an upcoming exam. When Mikhail got promoted and the couple started going abroad, Raisa was preparing for their first trips as for an exam – reading historical literature, visiting museums and taking notes there. When the couple came back to Moscow in 1978, after twenty three years spent in Stavropol, Raisa organized for her and her husband a more thorough exploration of the capital. Every Sunday they visited historical places in chronological order starting from the earliest.

Raisa's high-level discipline and extreme orderliness crystallized during the years of studies in Moscow and then as a teacher in Stavropol. Those qualities were her means to compensate for the lack of knowledge and "universal culture" that she did not receive from her family and that made her feel inferior in Moscow.

However, Raisa Gorbacheva created a furor in the international political arena when she appeared in the mass media as an elegant, independent, and up-to-date first lady, which was not expected from the Soviet Union at that time. Despite spending twenty-three years in provincial Stavropol, Raisa followed all the current political and fashion trends. She also became her husband's personal image-maker, though the word "image" was not known to Soviet people at that time. Raisa played the role of his unofficial political advisor, being his so-called "personal minister of international affairs." During the years of political transition in the Soviet Union, as Gorbachev later recognized, the Secretary General, accompanied by his "educated, energetic wife" was a "second

revolution.”⁴⁶ It indicated both close personal ties between the spouses at one hand, and “a strong Westernizing element in Gorbachev’s political style” on the other hand. According to the Western standards, contrary to the Soviet ones, it was absolutely normal for a political leader to be accompanied by his/her spouse in public.⁴⁷

Gorbachev was broadly criticized for his inability to make political decisions without conferring with his wife first. Once being asked during an interview what kinds of issues of public life he discussed with his wife, Gorbachev replied, “We discuss everything.” When a journalist inquired if the discussions include Soviet affairs at the highest level as well, Gorbachev said: “I think I answered your question in toto. We discuss everything.” This last part of the interview was not broadcasted in the Soviet mass media, but was translated by the Moscow World Service in English.⁴⁸

Everyday walks together became their unbreakable family tradition. Partially, it was caused by the fact that outdoors they could discuss all the political issues and be sure nobody else was eavesdropping. As Anatoly Lukyanov, who was working closely with Gorbachev during his time as the Secretary General, recalls that Mikhail, if reminded by the end of the day about the need for an urgent decision, would often say “Let me call you later.” As Lukyanov assumes, it meant the issue was going to be discussed in the “family *politburo*” with Raisa during their walking. And closer to midnight, Gorbachev would always call him back with the decision.⁴⁹

According to Alexander and Juliette George’s theory, the roles of a strong principled mother and tractable intelligent father in his family contributed to the fact that Gorbachev felt quite

⁴⁶ Gorbacheva Raisa, p. 7. See also Gorbachev interview, *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, 28 June 1995, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Brown, 1997, p. 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴⁹ Grachev, p.193.

comfortable with the super-organized and active Raisa, jokingly referring to her as the “secretary general in their family.”⁵⁰

Like millions of Soviet people, Gorbachev and his wife felt devastated after Stalin’s death in 1953 and asked themselves, what will happen to us? Though both of Mikhail’s grandfathers suffered under Stalin’s regime, and Raisa’s grandpa was executed in Siberia during the ‘30s, none of them found Stalin guilty for these actions. People of the Soviet Union used to deeply believe in Stalinism and cherished the idea of building a new society. Even though many personally knew someone who was innocent but was persecuted by the Stalin regime, people still were deeply convinced that “Stalin did not know about it.”⁵¹ As some of Gorbachev’s former classmates certify, Mikhail never was a big fan of Stalin’s personality, but never showed any signs of criticism or disagreement. His anti-Stalinism and intolerance of the political environment showed up much later while working in Stavropol after graduation.

Since education in the Soviet Union was totally sponsored by the government, recent graduates were unable to freely choose their place of work right after the completion of their studies. Most of the students after graduation were distributed to various locations and positions based on their major, GPA, state needs, and other factors. There was an option to continue studies in graduate school, but Mikhail, as a native farmer, was offered to study peasant law instead of law and political science, which he desired. Gorbachev, a non-compromiser, refused to sacrifice his major and professional interests for a life in Moscow. And even though Raisa was offered the chance to stay in graduate school, they decided to move to provincial Stavropol, the capital of the region where he was from.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.205.

⁵¹ Brown, 1997, p.30.

EARLY CAREER AS A YOUNG POLITICIAN

Stavropol in the 1950s was “more than provincial,” as Raisa characterized it later.⁵² The whole city did not even have a reliable water supply. There was one major street and almost no public or personal transportation. People commuted mostly on foot. After five years in Moscow, Stavropol seemed too undeveloped for the young couple.

A few unsuccessful attempts to get employed as a lawyer made Mikhail go to the local office of the komsomol. Because of Mikhail’s impressive qualifications and merits he was immediately hired there. It was a position where energy, responsibility, and communicative skills were much more important than his special knowledge.

Mikhail’s abilities made him distinct among local komsomol workers and brought him to the attention of the local leadership. Gorbachev’s career developed dramatically. In March 1961, at the age of thirty, he was already elected as the first secretary of the komsomol in the Stavropol region and was given his first separate apartment instead of a room in a dormitory.

Meanwhile, Raisa was not so successful during their first four years in Stavropol. Having graduated with distinction from MSU, she was considered overqualified for regular positions in the province. In 1957, she gave birth to their only daughter, Irina, finished her Master’s degree, and then became a lecturer in a local university. Raisa’s example inspired Mikhail to continue his education and write a Master’s thesis as well. Gorbachev passed the initial exams but never accomplished his scientific dreams. His political career went on, and in 1969, his former chiefs, who had moved to Moscow by that time, decided to promote the young promising secretary. In April 1970, Gorbachev visited the Moscow office of the Secretary General, having no idea he was going to run it in fifteen years. The same year, at the age of thirty nine, he was appointed First Party Secretary of the

⁵² Grachev, p. 64.

Stavropol *Kraikom*, regional Committee. This distinction made him one of the youngest provincial party chiefs in the nation. The Stavropol region was considered one of the most economically important in the country, and its territory was as large as Belgium, Switzerland, and Cyprus combined. In this position, he helped reorganize the collective farms, improve workers' living conditions, expand the size of their private plots, and give them a greater voice in planning.

He soon became a member of the Communist Party Central Committee in 1971. Three years later, in 1974, he was made a Representative to the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union and Chairman of the Standing Commission on Youth Affairs. Mikhail was subsequently appointed to the Central Committee's Secretariat for Agriculture in 1978, replacing his main supporter and political protector Fyodor Kulakov, after Kulakov died of a heart attack.

While being a high-ranked person in the Stavropol region, Gorbachev saw how primitive the living conditions of simple hard-working people in small towns were. The fifteen year period when Gorbachev's political career in Stavropol developed successfully, was very important in the context of the Soviet politics. Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the Twentieth Party Congress in early 1956 dethroned Stalin's image that had been cultivated for decades in the Soviet Union. The speech was not published for the Soviet people, but quickly leaked to the Western press. Facts disclosed by Nikita Khrushchev had a profound effect on Gorbachev's party members then. In one of his later interviews, in 1993, Mikhail said:

The document containing Khrushchev's denunciations circulated briefly within the party, and then it was withdrawn. But I managed to get my hands on it. I was shocked, bewildered and lost. It wasn't an analysis, just facts, deadly facts. Many of us simply could not believe that such things could be true. For me it was

easier. My family had itself been one of the victims of the repression of the 1930s.⁵³

Khrushchev's speech definitely brought some "rebel thoughts" to the educated youth of that time, including Gorbachev, but remained unacceptable for the majority of aged Party members. Nobody acted on it back in 1956. It became well-known for the Soviet society much later, when Gorbachev himself became the Secretary General.

Being the most important person in the Stavropol region, Gorbachev denied many benefits given him due to his position. Even though he had a personal service car, he always walked to his office. People used this habit in order to approach him right on the street and ask him for something in person. His daughter Irina attended regular school instead of the only special English school for VIPs. The question whether the service car and a personal driver should be used for her was not even opened for discussion – the idea itself was considered inappropriate. His biographers describe Mikhail's desire for a normal life is as an attempt to keep family traditions and not to forget where he came from.⁵⁴

The first ideas for his future *perestroika*, policy of economic and political reformation of the country, Gorbachev had heard from docent Fyodor Sadykov, who attempted to present his prescriptions for renovation of the system in 1968, soon after the Czechoslovakia's attempt for political liberalization.⁵⁵ As Gorbachev recalls in his memoirs, political elites, including himself,

⁵³ Brown, 1997, p. 39.

⁵⁴ Grachev, p. 168.

⁵⁵ The events were called **The Prague Spring**, a period since January till August 1968, when reformist Alexander Dubcek came to power and tried to grant additional rights to the citizens and partially decentralize the

tore down all Sadykov's ideas, but later on Mikhail felt bad about this situation, recognizing that the docent was right. All these "bad feelings" combined with childhood memories of collectivization, repression of his family, and extreme poverty multiplied by his university knowledge of political science became a springboard for changes in his internal ideology.

International delegations and his first trips abroad provided him with elementary lessons in political pluralism and a better vision of what was going on in other countries. While on a delegation trip to Prague in 1969, he realized that the events of the Prague Spring were misinterpreted by the Soviet media. Moreover, Gorbachev later described that trip as a "painful" experience admitting that "They [Soviet media] doled us with very little information of what was going on."⁵⁶ He realized that the people of Czechoslovakia were more than unhappy because of the Soviet intervention in their domestic affairs. And Gorbachev as a member of the delegation experienced all the resentment and discomfort while being there.⁵⁷

In 1957 Mikhail organized the participation of an Italian delegation for one of the youth festivals in Moscow. The Italians' vision of time, protocol, and discipline appeared to be very different from what punctual and responsible Gorbachev was used to.

Trips abroad, especially to the West, were not allowed to regular, non-privileged, Soviet Union citizens. Gorbachev and his wife were lucky enough to be granted the permission to go abroad not only as part of a political delegation, but also privately. His first trips to the Western block countries (France, Italy, Belgium, FRG) were surprisingly different from the social block countries such as Bulgaria or GDR. The future Secretary General made at least two very important

economy. The Soviets, after failed negotiations, sent troops to occupy the country. While there was no military resistance Czechoslovakia remained occupied till 1990.

⁵⁶ Gorbachev interviewed by Jonathan Steele, *Guardian*, 24 Dec. 1992, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Brown, 1997.

conclusions for himself after visiting Westernized countries. First of all, he realized that Soviet people were not living in the best of worlds, as the Party had been convincing them. Not only the Western leadership class, but also simple people lived and worked in conditions that even USSR hegemony had never even seen. Second of all, Gorbachev and his wife were amazed by the relaxed atmosphere of the imperialistic environment. The Soviets were investing most of the budget in the military block to protect themselves from the capitalist threat, but the people representing this threat were surprisingly friendly and benevolent with them. The Soviet propaganda regarding capitalist countries and the reality of the Western world appeared to be very different. After one of those trips, Raisa, who was also impressed by the beauty and culture of Western Europe, asked her husband an anti-Soviet question: “Why do we live worse, Mikhail?”⁵⁸ While residing in Stavropol, Gorbachev could not find an answer to this question. Things started to change when the family moved back to Moscow in December 1978.

BACK TO MOSCOW

From the moment Gorbachev’s family was transferred back to Moscow in 1978, Mikhail already had made a successful *Komsomol*-Party career. He became the first secretary of one of the most important regional committees. He already felt comfortable entering offices of high-ranking leaders, though in his 40s he was the youngest secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist USSR Party at that time. His wife Raisa was ambitiously thinking about a scientific career in a university, but had to recognize that as her husband’s personal advisor and consultant, she had much more opportunity to realize her strengths.

The USSR during the ‘70s was experiencing the period of so-called “Brezhnev stagnation,” the time of socio-economic slowdown under Leonid Brezhnev that started in the 1970s and

⁵⁸ Grachev, p. 177.

continued during the short administrations of his successors Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko.

As Archie Brown noted in one of his books, Brezhnev was building his leadership style as differently as possible from Khrushchev's. If Khrushchev was more impulsive and decisive, Brezhnev was then a very circumspect and consensus-seeking leader. If Khrushchev was able to criticize Stalin and demote party officials, Brezhnev was famous for his "stability of cadres" policy. The party apparatus was very stable, people did not have to worry much about losing their jobs within the party. By bringing and keeping in power people who were personally indebted to him, Brezhnev gained even more political power by the end of his life, despite very poor health and mental problems. He cherished the basic norms of the Soviet system and was very careful about protecting it from undesirable political thinking.⁵⁹

Anatoly Chernyaev, Gorbachev's former close aide, described the following story. Leonid Brezhnev loved to watch a very popular movie series "Seventeen Moments of Spring" about a Russian intelligence agent in Germany. He saw it about twenty times. Once, at the end of the film when the main character was told that he has been awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev asked his advisors: "Has he received it yet? I'd like to hand it to him myself." Everybody praised Vyacheslav Tikhonov, the actor who played the main role, and Brezhnev demanded to bring him to the Kremlin. A few days later the Secretary General personally awarded Tikhonov the Hero Star and the Order of Lenin, under the full impression that he was in fact the main character, the agent. Another aide who attended the ceremony noted, "Everything that Leonid Ilyich [Brezhnev] said indicated that he was absolutely convinced that Tikhonov had actually performed all of Shtirlitz's [main character] deeds."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Brown, 1997, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Anatoli Chernyaev, *My Six Years With Gorbachev*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, p. 11.

This example indicates the declining state of the country and its leadership.

Brezhnev passed away in November 1982. After five days of national mourning, he was buried in the Kremlin Wall together with all his medals.⁶¹ Yuri Andropov, long-time KGB⁶² chief, succeeded Brezhnev. Andropov began some modest reforms and gave hopes for the forthcoming end of the “stagnation era.”

Andropov died in February 1984 of kidney failure after less than two years in power. He was succeeded by seventy-two-year-old Chernenko who lasted for thirteen months. Finnish intelligence predicted from the beginning that this new Secretary General will be only a “transitional figure” for the Soviet Union. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) characterized Chernenko as the man who had lighted Brezhnev’s cigarettes for him when Brezhnev was trying to quit smoking.⁶³ According to Anatoli Chernyaev’s book-diary, physically declining Chernenko was shown on TV only twice. The first time, supposedly voting at a polling station, and then again at the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Republic. The second time he even tried to pronounce something. “It was a humiliating, mortifying sight.”⁶⁴ When Chernenko passed away in March 1985, “the eulogies about the general secretary’s outstanding accomplishments, contributions, and virtues were forgotten faster than the candles by his coffin burnt out.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Brezhnev was famous for his love for awards and decorations. By the end of his rule, he received over 200 which was an object of widespread ridicule.

⁶² **KGB** is the abbreviation for the Russian *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* or *Committee for State Security*.

⁶³ Michael Beschloss, *At The Highest Levels: The inside story of the end of the cold war*, Canada: Little, Brown&Company, 1994.

⁶⁴ Chernyaev, p. 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Political leaders from other countries who regularly gathered in Moscow for funeral ceremonies were joking among themselves: “See you again, same time, next year!”⁶⁶ Members of George H. W. Bush’s party (who was Reagan’s vice-president back then) knew the routine very well by 1985: “the viewing of the corps, the military parade on the Red Square, the reception in St. George’s Hall, the spaghetti dinner prepared by the excellent Italian chef at Spaso House.”⁶⁷

According to Michael Beschloss, while attending Chernenko’s funeral, Vice-President George H.W. Bush and the CIA Soviet analyst Robert Blackwell were shocked by how excited people seemed to be about getting rid of their “doddering old men.” “Not more than thirty minutes after the funeral procession, they saw workmen tearing down Chernenko posters and throwing them into the trash.”⁶⁸

Due to a lucky consequence of conditions, such as the decades that the country spent under over-aged leadership, with three Secretary Generals in less than 3 years, Andropov’s protection of Gorbachev, and the following favor of other authoritative people, Mikhail’s career rose dramatically. After many years living like in “a nursing home,” Soviet people were pleasantly surprised to see a young, educated, and lively leader on the political stage. In March 1985, the next day after Chernenko’s death, Gorbachev was elected the Secretary General of the USSR.

DOMESTIC REFORMS. CHERNOBYL DISASTER

The year 1985 became the year of big changes in the Soviet Union. The Brezhnev epoch of stagnation was over, and energetic Gorbachev started his famous innovative project of perestroika. The word literally means “reconstruction” or “rebuilding” and meant the improvement of socialism and the economic system that was on the brink of bankruptcy. As soon as he became the Secretary

⁶⁶ Beschloss, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

General, Gorbachev realized the urgent need for political and economic change. It was planned to be a reform within the system by means of democratization. The idea of perestroika was complex and included many politically and economically crucial decisions for which Gorbachev is still mostly blamed within the former USSR and praised in many foreign countries.

Gorbachev began with the famously unsuccessful large-scale anti-alcohol campaign. It included attempts to educate the population against alcohol abuse typical for the Soviet people. The campaign also contained complex measures to limit the production, distribution, sales and consumption of liquor. Many famous vineyards were cut down, significant number of shops were not allowed to sell alcohol anymore, and a majority of vodka distilleries were shut down. Liquor drinks were not allowed to be served in restaurants before 2 p.m. Even high-level Soviet receptions became alcohol-free, unthinkable for many hosts and guests.⁶⁹ The alcohol ban brought a slew of problems. The price of liquor increased, and retail sales were very limited. The consumption of home-made low-quality vodka increased dramatically, and so did cases of alcohol-poisoning. The state budget incurred losses from liquor industry revenues, and people were forced to stay in long lines outdoors for licensed alcohol, criticizing the government for the inconvenience.

The fight against alcohol was happening in a country still shocked by the disaster at the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine. In April 1986, one of its nuclear reactors exploded in the middle of the night, causing an expulsion of highly radioactive fallout into the atmosphere, killing and mutilating thousands of people. The Chernobyl accident became the worst nuclear disaster in world history and indicated the need for *glasnost*, Gorbachev's policy of openness and democratization of all the sides of social life. The word *glasnost* is derived from Russian *golos*, voice, and can be translated as policy of openness. The idea of *glasnost* originally was perceived by Communists as freedom of constructive criticism or self-criticism but not the absence of censorship

⁶⁹ Brown, 1997, p. 141.

in mass media. However, during perestroika years, due to efforts of progressive journalists and activists, glasnost was realized mostly as freedom of speech. The press law, passed in March 1990, allowed the Soviet mass media to reach some certain level of independence from the Party's control. Most likely, Gorbachev could not imagine back then that the unleashed glasnost would bring unpredictable changes to the country. New political forces that appeared as the result of democratization, took perestroika far beyond its original purpose of perfecting socialism.⁷⁰

The Chernobyl disaster highlighted all the ugliness and ineffectiveness of the Soviet system. The real scale of the tragedy was realized by the leaders only a few days after the explosion. During those days, local Ukrainian leaders were understating the real number of victims in order "not to distress Moscow," and the central government was not sharing any clear information about the case with its citizens and the world press. Gorbachev kept silent for fourteen days. It took him a while to overcome the psychological barrier developed by the Communist system and honestly tell the country the truth, exposing the internal reasons for the disaster. "It's all because most of our 'closed' ministries and scientific centers stayed out of control. That's where monopoly in politics, science, and industry led us. Closeness entails the spirit of servility, fawning and corruption." Gorbachev's words said after the tragedy indicated both his attitude toward the Communist system as a whole and his romantic faith in openness and glasnost as a means of real socialism.⁷¹

The Chernobyl tragedy had a colossal effect on both domestic and foreign policy. Not only did it cost the country thousands of lives and billions of rubles, it also exposed all the ugliness and corruption of the Stalinist system. The disaster uncovered the flaws of central planning with its haste, sloppiness, and disregard of "the human element."⁷² Gorbachev later said that "Chernobyl 'mercilessly reminded us' of what nuclear war would really mean, although in fact there was

⁷⁰ Chernyaev. p. 113.

⁷¹ Grachev, p. 158.

⁷² Robert English, *Russia and the idea of the West*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

nothing like it in Soviet memory.”⁷³ In terms of foreign politics, the disaster explicitly showed that the iron curtain would not offer protection from a radioactive cloud. If anything similar would ever happen in Europe full of chemical plants, the outcome would affect everybody and would be close to nuclear war. As Gorbachev put it, “even a limited conflict would mean so many Chernobyls that you can’t even imagine.”⁷⁴ The disaster pushed Gorbachev toward “a great, instinctive leap to break the old cycle of secrecy, stubbornness, and deadlocked negotiations.”⁷⁵

Half a year later, during the famous Reykjavik summit in October 1986, Gorbachev shocked Reagan and the American delegation by the proposal of total nuclear disarmament. Even more shocking was the fact that Ronald Reagan agreed to do so within a ten year period.⁷⁶ The American president also shared Gorbachev’s attitude towards destructive weapons and was ready to consider eliminating all nuclear weapons from military arsenals.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the summit in Reykjavik was considered mostly a failure due to disagreements on the ABM Treaty.⁷⁸ Reagan and Gorbachev failed to reach a final solution regarding the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and no treaty was signed back in 1986. Despite this, the summit still can be considered as a great step forward. It was the second meeting for Reagan and Gorbachev after the Geneva summit in 1985. Not much had been achieved in Geneva except the first personal contact between the two leaders in over six years. Two days after the meeting in Iceland, Reagan explained, “Believe me, the significance of that meeting at Reykjavik is not that we didn’t sign agreements in the end; the

⁷³ English, p.216.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.216.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.217.

⁷⁶ Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994.

⁷⁷ Brown, 2007.

⁷⁸ **ABM Treaty** – The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Treaty was signed in 1972, it was in force for the next 30 years until the US unilaterally withdrew from it in June 2002.

significance is that we got as close as we did. The progress that we made would've been inconceivable just a few months ago.”⁷⁹

After the disagreements in Reykjavik, Reagan and Gorbachev's relationship became surprisingly warmer. Both leaders trusted each other more than before and spoke more respectfully in private of each other after the summit. A few years later, when his presidency was over, Reagan said:

Looking back now, it's clear that there was chemistry between Gorbachev and me that produced something very close to a friendship. He was a tough, hard bargainer. He was Russian patriot who loved his country. We could – and did – debate from opposite sides of the ideological spectrum. But there was a chemistry that kept our conversations on a man-to-man basis, without hate or hostility. I liked Gorbachev even though he was a dedicated Communist and I was a confirmed capitalist.⁸⁰

THE WASHINGTON SUMMIT

In December 1987, the problems of Reykjavik were corrected during the next meeting in Washington DC. It was the first US-Soviet summit in the American capital in fourteen years and only the third ever. The meeting began with Reagan's proposal to address each other by first names only. “I'm Ron,” said the older host, “I'm Mikhail,” Gorbachev responded. Since then, it was Ron and Mikhail.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Garthoff, p. 290.

⁸⁰ Brown, 1997, p. 233.

⁸¹ Garthoff, p.325.

The very important historical outcome of the Washington summit was signing of the INF⁸² Treaty on December 8. The summary of the 127-pages treaty was the following: “each side would, during the next three years, destroy all of its intermediate- and shorter-range land-based missiles and their launchers.”⁸³

The completed treaty made Reagan’s rating higher after the Reykjavik stalemate and also made him feel better personally. Such success was unthinkable back in 1981. Secretary General Gorbachev, his new thinking policy combined with the two leaders’ will to negotiate with each other contributed to the signing of the historic INF Treaty.⁸⁴

The Washington summit showed that the Soviet Union was serious about arms reduction. Gorbachev was willing to negotiate with the United States. The new thinking policy in the military sphere was real. Moreover, the two countries were able to reach an agreement on such important issue. The Treaty gave hope not only to arms control in the future but also to warm up the relationships between the two super-powers. Gorbachev expressed his belief to dispel the image of the Soviet Union as an “enemy” of the United States and to show the Soviet’s real interest for peace.⁸⁵

As the result of the Washington summit success, Gorbachev’s popularity in the West grew rapidly. Actually, the first signs of “Gorbymania” were apparent back in late 1985, when Gorbachev came to New York to give his famous speech at the United Nations. As Anatoly Chernyaev, one of his close advisors recalls in his diary, nobody expected people in New York to be so excited to meet Gorbachev on the streets. Cynical and always busy New Yorkers would have no time for exalted

⁸² **INF** stands for Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces: land-based missiles and aircraft with a range between 500 and 5000 km (312.5 and 3125 miles).

⁸³ Garthoff, p.326.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Garthoff, p. 325-335.

guests, even the Pope did not impress them. Those expectations were completely wrong. New York City streets were filled with thousands of people who were “shouting, waving their hands and handkerchiefs, throwing hats and caps, holding homemade signs, nearly falling out of windows,” when Gorbachev’s cortege was passing by.⁸⁶ After the Washington summit people saw that his UN speech about the importance of nuclear disarmament and freedom of choice were not only empty words. Once Gorbachev’s actions resulted in serious successful talks with the United States, the so-called Gorbymania became even more impressive.

While Gorbachev’s star abroad increased dramatically, the pressures and dissatisfaction within the Soviet Union also rose significantly.

Gorbachev’s domestic innovations became subject to mass criticism. His anti-alcohol campaign brought about a complex of new socio-economic issues that failed to solve the original problem of excessive drinking. The Soviet Union was on the edge of a serious political and, especially, economic crisis. When he started the economic reform, Gorbachev neither had a strong program for transitioning towards a market economy, nor enough investments to stimulate such a transition. A significant part of the budget had been spent on an arms race and on the anti-alcohol campaign. The shortage of day-to-day goods was dangerously increasing.

Some political opponents considered his reforms too slow and inconsequential while others blamed him for hastiness. All the critics mentioned the contradictions in his actions. For example, right after the law of cooperation development, which gave birth to the spread of a shadow economy, an act against “speculation” passed. The act meant additional restrictions on any kind of private retail business. Following a law supporting democratization in corporate management,

⁸⁶ Chernyaev, p. 203.

another law increasing central planning passed. A law reforming the political system and allowing free elections preceded the law of “consolidating the role of the Party.”⁸⁷

In order to understand how and why Gorbachev was able to change so much, it is important to realize how the Soviet political system functioned. I agree with Archie Brown, who argues that the elements and norms of the Communist system, that Gorbachev was trying to change so vigorously, were actually working to his advantage until a certain moment. Even though the whole system of Stalin-Lenin socialism resisted the reformation, its rigidity actually allowed Gorbachev to stay in power long enough to make the process of reforms irreversible and unstoppable. The authority of the Secretary General was enormous. The Central Committee’s opinion played a significant role, but was far less important than the Secretary General’s opinion. Political pluralism or any sort of open opposition was unknown to the USSR. Even Gorbachev’s predecessors, who were much older and therefore very limited physically and sometimes mentally, were still treated with respect. According to the established rules of the political game, members of the political leadership did not express any doubts and just followed the policies pursued by Gorbachev, even though the policies were driving them further and further away from the established norms. Even though the new thinking⁸⁸ policy assumed some sort of discussion within the top leadership, party members who wished to disagree with Gorbachev generally did it in a very respectful way, avoiding any serious clashes.⁸⁹

Once the reforms went too far and the system started to fall apart, the communication in Politburo changed dramatically. The rise of separatist movements within the Soviet Union and Yeltsin’s growing popularity in 1990 and 1991 made it clear that agreeing with Gorbachev on

⁸⁷ Grachev, p. 234-238.

⁸⁸ **New Thinking policy** – new ways of thinking and speaking about Soviet Politics as well as new ways of behaving that emerged under Gorbachev’s rule after 1985.

⁸⁹ Brown, 2007.

everything may be political suicide. At the Politburo meeting on November 16th, 1990, which dissolved the Presidential Council established by Gorbachev earlier the same year, heavy criticism of the current situation overflowed. It was the moment when the Secretary General was blamed for everything.⁹⁰

REFORMS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Being constrained on domestic affairs, Gorbachev had the most freedom in the international arena. He created his foreign policy team by promoting Aleksandr Yakovlev, Anatoly Chernyaev, Yevgeniy Primakov, Eduard Shevarnadze, and others. Most of them kept playing significant roles in politics after Gorbachev resigned.⁹¹ With the help of his team Gorbachev acted vigorously and fruitfully abroad.

Mikhail had a good relationship with the United Kingdom leadership. Back in 1984, acting as the second most important person in the USSR, Gorbachev established contact with the UK Prime-Minister Margaret Thatcher. She played an important role later, persuading Ronald Reagan that Gorbachev was a different Soviet leader who “was much less constrained, more charming, open to discussion and debate, and did not stick to prepared notes.”⁹² In one of her interviews in late 1984, Mrs. Thatcher said: “I like Mr. Gorbachev. We can do business together.”⁹³ This famous quote meant that Mikhail was opened to political discussion and more flexible than his predecessors.

Starting from 1985, Gorbachev met annually with the United States leadership, which was a major breakthrough for the both countries’ relations. The Geneva summit, when Gorbachev and

⁹⁰ Brown, 2007, p. 255.

⁹¹ Thus, Shevarnadze who was Gorbachev’s Minister of International Affairs later became the President of Georgia. Yevgeniy Primakov was Yeltsin’s Prime-minister in the nineties.

⁹² Brown, 2007, p.231.

⁹³ *Financial Times*, 22 December 1984, p.26.

Reagan met each other, was the first one in over six years. Nobody expected them to meet three more times and then again in Malta, when George H.W. Bush became the President.

The first two summits (in Geneva and Reykjavik) were not easy for both parties. The third meeting in Washington DC resulted in the intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) Treaty, a very important step towards the end of the Cold War.

Six months after the Washington meeting, it was Gorbachev's turn to host the next U.S.-USSR summit in late May of 1988. The U.S. delegation to Moscow totaled more than 700 people, which was even more than the Soviet delegation to Washington of 500 people. Gorbachev worked very hard to provide a high level of hospitality. He even agreed to Reagan's wish to meet a group of dissidents and to address the students of Moscow University.⁹⁴ According to R. L. Garthoff, Reagan's personal interest in seeing the Soviet Union and meeting people there was combined with the purpose of complimenting Gorbachev on his accomplishments in domestic and international affairs. The American president also urged him to move on, especially in the field of personal freedoms and human rights. Even though it caused some defensive reaction from Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership, Reagan considered this goal quite successfully accomplished.⁹⁵

When Reagan was asked in Moscow if he still considered the USSR the Evil Empire, he said, "No. I was talking about another time, another era."⁹⁶ On his way home, Reagan gave a major speech in London. It was very different from his challenging speech in Helsinki on his way to the Soviet Union. In London he was speaking of Gorbachev as "a serious man, seeking serious reform," of glasnost and perestroika, of a growing personal friendship with the Soviet leader, and similarities between Russians and Americans. Reagan also remarked with cautious optimism, that "quite

⁹⁴ Garthoff, p. 351-372.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 352.

possibly, we're entering a new era in history, a time of lasting change in the Soviet Union. We will have to see."⁹⁷

AFGHANISTAN

The year 1989 was very eventful for both the Soviet domestic scene and especially international politics. By the middle of February 1989, the last Soviet troops were finally withdrawn from Afghanistan. The process took longer than it was planned. Since 1985, Gorbachev was trying to persuade the Politburo that the military presence in Afghanistan was a serious mistake. However, the major breakthrough in this operation was achieved only by Spring of 1988, when two bilateral agreements called "the Geneva accords" were signed, and the Soviet withdrawal began.

THE BERLIN WALL

Meanwhile, the events in Eastern Europe were rapidly changing. In August 1989, 130 East Germans were granted political asylum at the Western mission in East Berlin. The next month, 5,500 did the same at the mission in Prague. When Hungary opened its borders, a thousand East Germans fled into Austria.⁹⁸

In the first week of October, Gorbachev visited East Berlin to participate in the 40th anniversary of the Communist regime. By that time, demonstrations spread though the whole Eastern Germany. During the anniversary ceremonies, Gorbachev encouraged East Germans to follow the course of Soviet-style perestroika. The East German Communist leader, Erich Honecker, knew that the Soviet economy was on the brink of collapse, and that the Soviet people were nearly fighting in stores to get basic goods. He was convinced that least of all Eastern Germans, the

⁹⁷ Garthoff, p.358.

⁹⁸ Beschloss, p. 128-135.

wealthiest citizens of the socialist world, would want to follow the Soviet course of reforms.⁹⁹ Gorbachev, in turn, understood that the regime in Eastern Germany was about to change. He ordered his General Staff to make sure that the local Soviet troops did not get involved in the coming strife. Right after the weekend of October 7, Honecker was removed from his office and replaced with state security chief Egon Krenz. Krenz won the people's trust by opposing Honecker's decision to suppress demonstrations throughout the country.

On October 25, in Helsinki, Gorbachev had publicly declared that the Soviet Union had “no right, moral or political,” to interfere in the events in Eastern Europe, adding, “We assume others will not interfere either.”¹⁰⁰ Gorbachev clearly denied use of force in order to suppress anti-Communist movements in Germany. Thus, he let people continue destroying the existing socialist order. It was in direct contradiction to the Brezhnev Doctrine (the claim of 1968, when the USSR invaded Czechoslovakia) that the Soviet Union had the right to provide “assistance, including assistance with armed forces,” to any Communist country where “the people's socialist gains” were in danger.¹⁰¹ After Gorbachev's speech in Helsinki it became clear that the Brezhnev Doctrine was dead.

Meanwhile, the new Eastern German leader Krenz still thought that massive demonstrations in his country would lead towards “renovation of socialism.” He insisted that the Berlin Wall was needed to protect the “two political systems” and “two military blocks.” People were acting more vocally against the division, and Krenz's conciliatory measures were not helpful. He fired the entire cabinet and most of his Politburo, but it did not improve the situation. Krenz

⁹⁹ Beschloss, p. 128-135.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.134.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.134.

called Gorbachev over the phone seeking advice. Gorbachev suggested Krenz to open the borders in order to “let off steam” and “avoid an explosion.”¹⁰²

On November 9th, the Eastern German government officially announced that the citizens could now freely leave the country. The same day East and West Berliners were climbing over the Wall and dancing and cheering with champagne and beer. The Berlin Wall was no longer the barrier separating Eastern and Western Germany.

THE MALTA SUMMIT

Less than a month after the Berlin Wall fell, in December 1989, Gorbachev had his fifth summit with the United States leader. By that time, Vice-President George H.W. Bush had succeeded Ronald Reagan and had become the president.

The summit was scheduled near the island of Malta, on warships of the two countries. A strong sea storm changed the original plans. The Soviets had to move from the original vessel to a heavier cruise ship anchored at dockside, and the American delegation boarded the Soviet ship later.¹⁰³

President Bush was thoroughly prepared for the Malta summit. Considering the rapidly changing situation in Germany, he was seeking to establish “a better understanding of and rapport with Gorbachev.”¹⁰⁴ In turn, Gorbachev desired to resume the dialogue of arms control, so he could “gain U.S. support for perestroika by ending discriminatory trade restrictions and facilitating Soviet integration into the world economic system, and to assure himself and others in the Soviet

¹⁰² Beschloss, p.134.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Garthoff, p. 404-406.

leadership that the United States would not seek to exploit the fast-moving situation in Eastern Europe to undercut Soviet security interests.”¹⁰⁵

Both leaders were satisfied with the results of the meeting. There were no treaties signed or negotiated during the Malta summit. However, Bush and Gorbachev exchanged their political views and started the strategic arms reduction talks (START), agreeing to reduce sharply arsenals of chemical weapons. The meeting also initiated an important agreement on reducing Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE).¹⁰⁶

The Malta summit is often referred to as the end of the Cold War. It did not stop the confrontation itself, but it happened at the time when a number of significant changes just occurred. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the Brezhnev Doctrine denial, Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and political reforms within the Soviet Union changed the image of the USSR for the rest of the World. The relations of the two super-powers reached a level when prospects of the future cooperation became more important and valuable than the constant competition.¹⁰⁷

While taping his New Year’s messages to the Soviet people, Gorbachev named 1989 the year of the ending of the Cold War saying that: “During the Malta meeting, President Bush and I agreed that it was essential to get away from the Cold War and also to abandon the weapons of the Cold War, so that the 1990s can open a period of genuine cooperation.” He also expressed hope that in 1990, Americans would not be distracted by “hesitations, wait-and-see attitudes, doubts, and suspicions.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Garthoff, p. 405.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 406.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Beschloss, p.172.

Two weeks after the summit, Eduard Shevarnadze visited NATO headquarters in Brussels. Such a symbolic step seemed unthinkable even at the beginning of 1989. It was obvious that the Cold War, which had lasted for more than fifty years, was fading fast.¹⁰⁹

The West gradually recognized that Gorbachev was serious about reducing the military's power. The culmination was achieved on November 21, 1990, when the "Charter of Paris for a New Europe" and other agreements were signed in France.¹¹⁰

COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

Meanwhile, the situation within the Soviet Union intensified. While he had the best intentions, Gorbachev destroyed the Communist system and his own career by not realizing that the ideology of the Cold War was the main support needed for the Party's domestic policy. With the image of an "enemy," the Soviet people were willing to sacrifice their comfort and wealth in order to support the military complex and the national interests. Nobody asked the Party government to report the expenses. Realizing that the threat of the war was over, and the potential aggressor was becoming a partner and a possible friend, people started asking themselves questions that were uncomfortable for the government.¹¹¹

By opening the Soviet economy to global competition, Gorbachev made people realize that their way of life can be compared not only to the Russian or Soviet past but also to the achievements of advanced capitalist countries.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Garthoff, p. 408.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 599.

¹¹¹ Grachev, p. 315.

¹¹² George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.277.

In January of 1990, McDonald's opened its first restaurant in Moscow after fourteen years of negotiations with Soviet bureaucrats.¹¹³ With a capacity of 900 seats, it was the largest outlet in Europe back then. However, its popularity among the Soviets challenged the philosophy of McDonald's as a fast-food establishment. Hour long lines outside the restaurant became typical in its early days. People were amazed by the newly introduced Big Macs, Westernized interior, and the quality of service. The restaurant became a cult place of interest in Moscow for the next few years.

The appearance of McDonald's in the capital, televised images of Western living standards, and opened discussions of the progressive economic reforms in China stimulated consumer appetites. Further cultural Westernization, stimulated by Gorbachev, undercut traditional images of "capitalist hell" that was helpful for the ruling class to justify the backward socialist system. Reduced international threats from the West created preconditions for lowering the Soviet defense budget and questioned the need for the economic domination of the military-industrial complex. Gorbachev's reforms and emphasis on the priority of "all-human values" paved the way for arms control and other forms of political cooperation. It also undermined the rationale for the Communist Party's long-lasting monopoly on power.¹¹⁴

Fundamental changes in the Soviet domestic and international politics, initiated by Gorbachev, were impossible without the destruction of old elements and inevitable social conflicts.

The political system started to fall apart in 1989 when the Soviet Union republics began to declare their independence. Attempts to prevent the separation using military force led to counterproductive results and increased the dissident tendencies, especially in the Caucasus and Baltic republics. By the middle of 1990, almost all the Soviet Union republics declared their independence. The Russian Republic did so on the June 12, 1990. Overwhelmed with all the

¹¹³ The final agreements were signed as early as April of 1988. Due to political reasons, it was a Canadian subsidiary of McDonald's that built the first restaurant in the USSR.

¹¹⁴ Breslauer, p. 277.

domestic events, Gorbachev sent his deputy instead of himself to receive his Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

In the summer of 1991, a new Union treaty was ready to be signed to replace the USSR. But the attempt of a coup against Gorbachev in August of the same year made it clear that the new Union would never be functioning. As the events were spinning out of Gorbachev's control, on December 8th, 1991, the leaders of Ukraine, Belorussia and Russia (represented by Boris Yeltsin) met in the place called Belovezhskaya Pushcha, Belorussia, and signed the treaty of liquidation of the USSR and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States instead. After that, Gorbachev had nothing to do but to announce his resignation on December 25, 1991.

MAIN ACTORS OF THE COLD WAR ENDING

Even though Gorbachev's contribution towards the peaceful solution of the Cold War is hard to overestimate, it is also important to evaluate the roles of other politicians and their advisors who took part in the events. The most important names are George Shultz, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Eduard Shevarnadze. Despite their obvious achievements, it is still doubtful that without Gorbachev we would have the Cold War ended without massive bloodshed.

As many historians believe, Reagan's Secretary of State George Shultz precipitated the changes in the international climate. A former Stanford professor of economics, Shultz gave Gorbachev some very important lessons in economics. As early as 1985, Shultz began educating Gorbachev that a closed society would never become prosperous. "People must be free to express themselves, move around, emigrate and travel if they want to... Otherwise they can't take advantage of the opportunities available. The Soviet economy will have to be radically changed to adapt to the new era."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2005, p. 233.

Gorbachev joked that Shultz should have taken over the planning office in Moscow. In a way, it actually happened. Over the next few years, Shultz used his trips to the Soviet Union to educate Gorbachev and his advisors. Employing charts and diagrams, the Secretary of State tutored the Soviet leadership about the trends in global economy and development. His main argument was always the same: as long as the Soviet Union remains a command economy, it would fall further and further behind the rest of the developed world.¹¹⁶

Gorbachev was a careful listener. He even reflected some of Shultz's lessons in his book of 1987, *Perestroika*, "How can the economy advance, if it creates preferential conditions for backward enterprises and penalizes the foremost ones?"¹¹⁷

Due to his natural thoughtfulness and lack of economic foresight, Gorbachev never leaped directly towards a market economy. He hoped to improve socialism and "purify" the ideas of the October revolution by borrowing valuable ideas from capitalism.¹¹⁸ At that time, Gorbachev had neither knowledge, nor experience in improving socialism by capitalist means. No one in the world did.

A very short time after, the course of reforms went beyond his control and brought the country into a chaotic and disorganized market economy. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Gorbachev recognized his failure, "The Achilles heel of socialism was the inability to link the socialist goal with the provision of incentives for efficient labor and the encouragement of initiative on the part of individuals. It became clear in practice that a market provides such incentives best of all."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 233.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.233.

¹¹⁸ Gaddis, p.234.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.234.

As Don Oberdorfer, the Washington Post correspondent, summarized in his book, the Shultz's role was of central importance. Given the endless disputes on Soviet policy within the Reagan administration, the Secretary of State helped the president to implement the unexpectedly visionary political views. Reagan wanted to have a less dangerous and more businesslike relationship with the USSR but did not know how to achieve it. Shultz suggested two major ingredients for a better dialog. Firstly, he argued that a persistent and practical drive forward was possible through the accomplishment of evident mutual objectives. Among such objectives were: arms control pacts, the settlement of regional conflicts, and human rights accords. Secondly, Shultz had enough organizational skills to mobilize some parts of the U.S. leadership to interact with the Soviet leaders on a regular basis. Reagan wished that to happen, and, according to Oberdorfer, Shultz was the key figure on the American side who made it happen.¹²⁰

Another remarkable figure by the end of the Cold War was Eduard Shevarnadze, Gorbachev's foreign minister. He was an intensely idealistic, outgoing, native Georgian without any prior experience or commitments in the area of foreign policy.¹²¹ Eduard was a total antipode of his predecessor Andrei Gromyko in terms of political experience, personality and, most importantly, attitude towards the West. Gorbachev promoted Shevarnadze mostly as his fellow new thinker and a personal friend. It turned out to be a good choice. Secretary of state Shultz immediately initiated a personal contact with his Soviet counterpart. Before long, the two had a remarkably open relationship where position-taking progressively yielded to reciprocal efforts at problem solving.¹²²

¹²⁰ William C. Wohlforth, *Witnesses to the End of the Cold War*, Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 217.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., p.208.

It was Shevarnadze who strongly recommended Gorbachev to abstain from using military force in East Germany.¹²³ Both of them, accompanied by another aide, Aleksandr Yakovlev,¹²⁴ chose to shift Soviet policy from competition to cooperation, to rely on cooperative security, and to end the Cold War. Gorbachev's new team shared the idealistic idea of moving from a conflict of adversarial camps towards a single interdependent world. Not only were Gorbachev's people open-minded enough to recognize the need for reforms; they went beyond that and adopted a liberal foreign policy despite a slow and cautious reaction from the West.¹²⁵

Shevarnadze and other members of Gorbachev's team represented a new image of the Soviet leadership. Very little did they resemble the "medal-bedecked apparatchiks" of the past. Their appearance in the international arena reduced the tendency of the West to make provocative statements about the Soviet Union.¹²⁶

The role of President Reagan in the solution of the Cold War was also of high importance. Despite opposite political views, Gorbachev and Reagan had some values in common. Reagan not only shared Mikhail's horror of nuclear weapons but, like him, considered efforts to eliminate them entirely from their military arsenals.¹²⁷ This intersection of interests was crucial for the success of the Washington summit where the INF Treaty was signed.

A prominent Sovietologist, John Lewis Gaddis, suggests that Reagan was the most important figure in establishing the dialog with the Soviet Union. The writer recalls the situation when a demented man, John W. Hinckley, attempted to murder Reagan in order to impress his own

¹²³ Beschloss, p.134.

¹²⁴ Aleksandr Yakovlev, a liberal *apparatchik*, one of Gorbachev's closest and most radical aides. Yakovlev had also served ten years as Ambassador to Canada.

¹²⁵ Garthoff, p. 773.

¹²⁶ Wohlforth, p.209.

¹²⁷ Brown, p.268.

idol, the actress Jodie Foster. Gaddis believes that if the bullet had killed Ronald Reagan back in 1981, the Cold War would not have ended because “there probably would not have been an American challenge to the Cold War status quo.” The most probable Reagan successor in case of his sudden death was George H.W. Bush. According to Gaddis, Bush would not have changed much in the U.S.-Soviet relationship, since he belonged to the generation of foreign policy experts who considered the Cold War inevitable and a permanent feature of the international landscape.¹²⁸

Gaddis goes further and suggests that the “Brezhnev doctrine” had already been dead before Gorbachev came to power. This assumption derives from the fact that the Soviet leadership had a strong preference for a domestic Polish crackdown over an invasion by their forces in 1981.

Archie Brown, along with many other writers, strongly contradicts this approach. Firstly, he argues that the Poles, and not only the Poles, would definitely have tested their options in the early 1980s, had they felt that the “Brezhnev doctrine” had been abandoned. Secondly, Brown finds it too pessimistic to think that no other American president at that time would have reacted to the changes in the Soviet leadership as progressively as Reagan did. The reforms in Soviet domestic and foreign policy made it hard for the American leadership to stay impervious. Brown argues that either George H. W. Bush or a Democratic alternative would have responded to the new opportunities offered by Gorbachev in case of Reagan’s assassination. And finally, Brown gives special credit to Gorbachev and his team for their ability to realize the need for serious changes both domestically and internationally. “None of the possible alternative leaders of the Soviet Communist Party was remotely as reform-minded or as open-minded as he [Mikhail Gorbachev] was.”¹²⁹

If we briefly analyze the leadership of the two super-powers during the 1980s, we will see that by 1981, the Soviet Union was ruled by old and weak people. Brezhnev was in a very poor

¹²⁸ Gaddis, p. 222.

¹²⁹ Brown, 2007, p. 271-274.

health, and his successors, Andropov and Chernenko, lasted in office barely more than a year each before passing away. Those people and their aides were mostly closed-minded, ideologically ossified bureaucrats.¹³⁰

In contrast, Ronald Reagan, who took office in January 1981, was vigorous and ideological. He openly supported hard-line anti-Soviet policy: a massive military build-up; a high-technology threat by means of SDI; willingness to help anti-Communist “freedom fighters” around the globe; renewed emphasis on Soviet violations of human rights; and a diplomacy focused more on public opinion than on real negotiation.¹³¹ In March of 1983, during one of his most well-known speeches, Reagan denounced the Soviet Union as “the focus of evil in the modern world.” He declared that the Soviet leaders were “good Marxist-Leninists” who recognized “the only morality...that would advance their cause is world revolution.”¹³²

Following the strategic direction of his policy, Reagan was unusually distant from the daily implementations of it. He was not fully aware of foreign and even domestic politics relying heavily on his advisors. For example, he could not believe a reporter at a news conference who informed Reagan that the United States had become the world’s greatest debtor nation under his rule.¹³³ Such ignorance of simple facts and reliance on presumptions did not contribute towards a better dialog with the USSR. As L. Garthoff put it, Reagan’s policy “was too gratuitously hostile to serve usefully in an effective competition.”¹³⁴

In order to better understand the roles played by Reagan and Gorbachev, one has to be aware of the ideological context of their personalities. The Cold War and its ideology had

¹³⁰ Garthoff, p. 757.

¹³¹ Wohlforth, p. 193.

¹³² Ibid., p.204.

¹³³ Garthoff, p. 759.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 758.

destructive effects on both the American image in international arena and the values of human rights and democracy. The division of the world into a communist Evil Empire controlled by Moscow and a Free World led by Washington D.C. allowed American policymakers to support numerous antidemocratic regimes all over the globe. As long as their corrupt and authoritarian leaders declared themselves anti-communists, they were promoted into the members of the Free World. Besides massive loss of lives and enormous military investments during the Vietnam conflict, the Cold War ideology justified assassination plots, negotiations with war lords, drug dealers, and even terrorists.¹³⁵

This is not to say that the Soviet Union was never engaged in similar deeds. Akin to the U.S., USSR also hoped to expand its geopolitical and ideological influence by participating in proxy wars all over the world. Some dictatorial leaders (in Somalia and Ethiopia, for example), who cynically proclaimed themselves “marxist” or “socialist,” became the recipients of the Soviet aid and support. Some liberation movements, who chose to join the socialist bloc, included elements of terrorism.¹³⁶

The prolonged geopolitical fight, left many victims in its wake and brought up a few generations of people who were taught to always fight and be suspicious of their ideological enemy. For decades, the two super-powers were governed by people who knew no other foreign policy except the policy of the Cold War. When Ronald Reagan came to the White House in 1981, he was not an exception. His blistering anti-Soviet rhetoric directed against closed-minded aged Soviet leaders did not contribute to any sort of productive cooperation between the two countries in the early 1980s.

¹³⁵ Garthoff, p.756.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.756.

The situation changed dramatically after 1985, with the new Soviet leader who was able to reassess the reality in a new way, and was ready to adapt domestic and foreign policies to this new perception. Gorbachev's new thinking led to the destruction of the Berlin Wall by the end of 1989. Divided Europe had been the symbol of the ideological and geopolitical confrontation between the two blocs since the end of the World War II. Once this division was over, international politics had no chance to remain the same. The consequential changes were so significant that even the most devoted cold warriors in the West had to recognize that the Cold War had ended.¹³⁷

Reagan did not have a chance to continue the peacemaking process, as he had to leave office in 1989. His successor, George Bush the elder, continued contributing to the peaceful solution of the conflict. Once he became the president, he used advanced diplomatic skills to coax the Soviet Union towards worldwide surrender. The atmosphere of the Malta summit favored the relationship of confidentiality between Bush and Gorbachev. They developed mutual trust and could discuss things privately without disclosing everything to public. At the summit, Bush convinced Mikhail that if he withdrew Soviet forces around the world and reformed his society, the United States would not see it as weakness of the USSR or take advantage of it. Bush's influence was skillful enough not to cause defensive reaction from the Soviet leadership. It also allowed Gorbachev to save face by the end of the arms race. Bush's diplomacy facilitated the end of the Cold War to a large extent.¹³⁸

Neither Reagan nor Gorbachev used the word "victory" while talking about the end of the Cold War. Both of them did not wish to open discussions about "the winner" in order to avoid possible tensions. G. Bush was the first one to claim that the United States **won** the War. In August 1992, Bush began his speech in Houston with a hymn to himself as the hero of the end of the Cold War:

¹³⁷ Garthoff, p. 757.

¹³⁸ Beschloss, p. 469.

I saw the chance to rid our children's dreams of the nuclear nightmare, and I did... Germany is united, and a slab of the Berlin Wall sits right outside this Astrodome... The Soviet Union can only be found in history books. The captive nations of Eastern Europe and the Baltics are captive no more... This convention is the first at which an American president can say, "The Cold War is over, and freedom finished first!"¹³⁹

Later, Bill Clinton ironically compared Bush who claimed to have ended the Cold War, to a rooster who takes credit for the dawn.¹⁴⁰

Most likely, back in 1992, Bush's overstated speech was the president's tool for the coming elections. But it also brought about the discussion about winners and losers of the Cold War.

Caspar Weinberger, U.S. Secretary of Defense in 1981-1987, said in an interview on October 20th, 1998:

We were able to sustain a major peacetime build up for about five years, which was longer than had ever happened in our history, and which gave us the necessary strength so that Gorbachev, whose I think only real contribution to the Cold War was recognizing that they couldn't win a war, recognized that and then began to change his rhetoric. I don't think he ever changed his philosophy. He

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 468.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 468.

talked a lot about perestroika, glasnost, all of those things, but he never really changed.¹⁴¹

Such opinion is in sharp contrast to the analyses by Jack Matlock and George Shultz. Matlock, who worked for the national Security Council in Washington from 1983 until 1986 and then became the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, knew more than anybody about the way Soviet politics worked on the ground. Shultz saw the evolution in the thinking of Soviet key players having discussions with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze. Matlock does not support the myth that Ronald Reagan “brought the Soviet Union to its knees” and left Gorbachev with no alternative except to recognize the independence of Eastern Europe, reduce arms, and end the Cold War. Like Shultz, Matlock notes that Reagan wished to negotiate from strength, but he did wish to negotiate. The president was willing to “engage with the Soviet Union in negotiations which protect and enhance U.S. interests and which are consistent with the principle of strict reciprocity and mutual interest.”¹⁴² According to Matlock, Reagan “was in favor of bringing pressure to bear on the Soviet Union, but his objective was to induce the Soviet leaders to negotiate reasonable agreements, not to break up the country.”¹⁴³ It was very important that Reagan, in the final analysis on US-Soviet relations, preferred the advice of Secretary of State George Shultz to that of Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and CIA Director William Casey. Weinberger and Casey had “more elaborate schemas of the Soviet Union” and considered Gorbachev’s new thinking policy in international arena as

¹⁴¹ Brown., 2007, p.254, n.38; see also Hoover Institution Oral History Project, Acc. No. 98067-16.305, HIA, Weinberger interview, p.7.

¹⁴² Brown, 2007, p. 268.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 268.

“clever and duplicitous” strategy designed to “weaken the West by appealing to the antiwar sentiments of European and American public opinion.”¹⁴⁴

Boris Yeltsin, the first president of post-communist Russia, had a tendency to portray Gorbachev as only a very partially reconstructed Communist. Presenting himself as a real democrat and better friend of the West, Yeltsin firmly captured the political space created by Gorbachev’s perestroika.¹⁴⁵ Mikhail had the ability to see the absurdity of the old system and enough courage to begin tearing it down. But when it was time to finally replace it, he wavered. Boris was more willing to follow the course of the reforms Gorbachev had begun.¹⁴⁶

Yeltsin built his tremendous popularity in the early ‘90s campaigning for greater equality, market democracy, opposing corruption and the use of military forces against secessionist movements. However, during his almost eight years of presidency he tolerated quite different things. He favored the creation and indulgence of plutocratic elite, growing levels of political corruption, ignorance of widespread social misery, malfunction of the political system, and the wanton military invasion in the republic of Chechnya.¹⁴⁷ Unfortunately for Russia, Yeltsin’s duplicity in many important aspects became clear much later.

In contrast to Yeltsin, Gorbachev was committed to his rhetoric of a peaceful management of the reformation at home and abroad. Being naturally averse to any use of force, he did not allow bloodshed even at the cost of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and of the USSR itself. Gorbachev also rejected both free capitalism and abolition of the Communist Party, even though this decision cost him his political career.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁴⁶ Breslauer., p. 472.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 315.

GORBACHEV'S PERSONALITY

People who used to work with Gorbachev admire his high sense of morality most of all. His ethical positions and aversion to the traditions of Soviet leadership, combined with his romanticism and idealism, caused him to play a unique historical role. On an international level, those traits helped him not only to build trust with other leaders and end the Cold War, but also contributed to the future more peaceful image of the country. At the same time, this idealism and a too optimistic point of view doomed his domestic reforms to failure. Gorbachev's unrealistic belief in his ability to reform socialism and the Communist Party without changing the whole system is considered by historians one of his major mistakes.

Another of Mikhail Gorbachev's important characteristics, recognized by both his friends and opponents, is his inability to make risky but necessary decisions and affect them sequentially. As famous political journalist and activist Egor Gaydar noted, Gorbachev was very good in the proposal of innovative ideas and always tried to reach a consensus. Many times he ended up with quasi-decisions while the situation in the country demanded more firm and unambiguous actions.¹⁴⁸ Chronic inconsistency and a lack of any kind of strategy affected the process of perestroika most of all and caused what many would call a fiasco.

Except for "unpredictability," Gorbachev's favorite expressions were "the processes have started," "life will show," and "history will judge." A gifted orator and professional lawyer, Mikhail was excellent in public speaking using interesting words to express his many ideas, but if a situation required fast and crucial decisions, he usually preferred to wait until the "processes" would finish their job and "life would show."

¹⁴⁸ Grachev, p. 182.

Gorbachev's leadership style can be characterized as collegial. It was typical for the Soviet leader to open major questions for discussion with his team and to share responsibility for decisions with the group of advisors. He used democratic means, giving his people the right to freely express their opinions and involving them in group problem solving. His wife Raisa played the role of his special political and personal advisor until the day she passed away in September 1999. Despite his faults as a leader, Mikhail Gorbachev is a good example of how to remain idealistic and not to lose personal dignity in the world of high politics.

Nowadays, Mikhail Gorbachev is still active in political and social life. In 1992, he became the President of the Gorbachev Foundation, known as the International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies, a non-profit educational organization. Since 1993, Gorbachev has been the President of the environmental fund, Green Cross International, with branches in more than twenty countries. He is a prolific writer, the winner of many various awards from all over the world, and the holder of academic ranks of honor from a solid number of international universities.

The evaluation of Gorbachev as a leader remains highly controversial and depends on when and where such evaluation was made. In Russia public opinion about Gorbachev has changed significantly over the past two decades. In a survey conducted in December 1989, respondents were asked to name the ten greatest people of all times and nations. Gorbachev was fourth in this rating with 22.6 per cent, following only Lenin (68 per cent), Karl Marx (36 per cent), and Peter the Great (about 32 per cent).¹⁴⁹ During the '90s, when Yeltsin's disappointing regime was seen by many Russians as the direct consequence of perestroika, Gorbachev's rating fell rapidly.

¹⁴⁹ Brown, 2007, p. 325. See also *Obshchestvennoe mnenie v tsifrakh* (VTsIOM, Moscow), No. 2 (9), January 1990, p. 6.

In the year of 2000, another public opinion poll asked Russian citizens to name the most outstanding politician of all who have led the country in the twentieth century. Stalin topped the list (with 19 per cent), followed by Lenin (16 per cent). Gorbachev was sixth among the most outstanding leaders of Russia with 7 per cent of the vote. However, among respondents with higher education, Gorbachev and Stalin had equal support (14 per cent), and Mikhail was only one percentage point behind Lenin (15 per cent).¹⁵⁰

The majority of the former Soviet Union population blames Gorbachev and perestroika for the collapse of the country. In 2005, another survey showed that 66 per cent of the Russians regretted the breakup of the USSR, and only 23 per cent had no regrets. About 57 per cent of the respondents thought the collapse of the Soviet Union was avoidable, and 34 per cent said it was inevitable.¹⁵¹

In the West, however, Gorbachev's achievements have extremely high grades. A Harris poll in 2006 found that "59 per cent of respondents in the European Union still consider Mikhail Gorbachev the best Soviet/Russian leader in the past twenty years." Boris Yeltsin was named by only 4 per cent of the respondents, while Vladimir Putin scored 12 per cent.¹⁵²

The contrast between Russian and Western opinions about Gorbachev could also be clearly seen in March of 2011 when the former Soviet leader celebrated his 80th anniversary. There were two ceremonies: one in Moscow and one in London. In Moscow Gorbachev received the Order of St. Andrew, a belated tribute from his country for his service as the last Soviet leader. During the award ceremony in the Kremlin, President Dmitri Medvedev recognized that governing the Soviet

¹⁵⁰ Brown, 2007, p. 326.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 327.

¹⁵² Ibid., 327.

Union during a “very complex, dramatic period” was a tough job. “It can be assessed differently but it was a heavy load,” Medvedev said.¹⁵³

In Russia, Gorbachev gathered with his close friends and family only, and three weeks later there was a glitzy gala in Great Britain. The London Royal Albert Hall hosted a charity event where the list of VIP guests included famous Hollywood stars (including Sharon Stone, Kevin Spacey, Goldie Hawn), actor and politician Arnold Schwarzenegger, former Polish President Lech Walesa, Israeli President Shimon Peres, CNN founder Ted Turner, and many others. Outstanding Russian and Western performers, including the London Symphony Orchestra, Shirley Bassey, and the Scorpions, paid their tribute to Gorbachev at the event. All proceeds from the concert were shared between the Gorbachev Foundation and the Raisa Foundation named after his wife who died from cancer.¹⁵⁴

The contrast between the two ceremonies clearly reflects the opposite views on Gorbachev’s place in history in Russia and the West.

¹⁵³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/02/mikhail-gorbachev-honour-80th-birthday>

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.royalalberthall.com/tickets/gorbachev-80th-birthday-celebration/default.aspx>

CONCLUSION

Mikhail Gorbachev grew up as a typical product of Lenin-Stalin system. Being its active supporter and wishing to improve it, he was the one who tore the system down. Drastic reforms within the Soviet Union entailed changes in the international climate and resulted in the end of the Cold War.

Describing Gorbachev's early political career, one can say that he was in the right place, in the right time. Brezhnev's epoch of stagnation, three Secretary Generals dying in less than four years one after another, and the serious need for a socio-economic reformation favored the election of young, energetic Gorbachev in 1985. By that time, Gorbachev already had realized that something was wrong with Soviet socialism and the country needed serious changes.

Mikhail launched his course of fundamental reforms aiming to make the Soviet Union a more human and acceptable member of the world community. While criticizing Stalin's personality cult, Mikhail had created his own cult of reforms, promoting perestroika and glasnost. He used the power of this cult to reduce the authority of the Communist party and the Moscow apparatus. Very soon it became clear that the process of perestroika was hardly reversible even in case of Gorbachev's sudden death or resignation. As Condoleezza Rice noted back then, "It would be hard for anyone who replaced Gorbachev to put all that back into the bottle."¹⁵⁵

The Chernobyl tragedy in 1986 was a terrifying reminder that any sort of nuclear attack might destroy the whole human society. The consequences of the Chernobyl disaster indicated the need for glasnost and precipitated Gorbachev's decision of arms control and disarmament.

Domestic economic and social reforms were inconsistent and lacked a thought-out strategy. The anti-alcohol campaign became a famous failure. Long lines in stores and shortage of basic

¹⁵⁵ Beschloss, p. 22.

goods were the main reason of mass criticism that people could express publicly thanks to the new policy of openness.

Abroad, however, Gorbachev's popularity turned into a phenomenon of Gorbymania. Regular meetings with the United States leadership, speeches about human rights and need for disarmament, signing of peacemaking treaties with Reagan made Gorbachev a real hero for thousands of people in the West. In the United States and Western Europe people cheered on streets when Gorbachev's motorcade was passing by. His outstanding international reforms culminated in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell and Germany became united again. Decline of the Communist regime in Eastern Europe made it clear that the Cold War had lost its meaning. After the Malta summit in December of 1989, Gorbachev and George Bush announced that the two countries opened "a period of genuine cooperation." The Cold War entered its very short final stage.

Having no more fear to be prosecuted and no more faith in communism, the Soviet republics began the so-called parade of independence that led to the collapse of the USSR and Gorbachev's resignation in late 1991.

As his former advisor, Anatoly Chernyaev noted, "Gorbachev was not a great person, but he performed a great mission liberating Russians from a totalitarian communist regime which is more important for history."¹⁵⁶

Despite the wide range of view points, Gorbachev has definitely occupied a unique place in both Russian and the world history and will always be remembered for contributing more than any other politician on either side in ending the Cold War.

¹⁵⁶ Grachev, p. 178.

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