

WORLD LEADERS FORUM

## Address to Seton Hall: Democracy in Russia and the World Today

by Mikhail S. Gorbachev

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am very pleased to have this opportunity to meet with you because I see present here two very important institutions of society. The first institution is religion, whose role in the life of nations is enormous, and which we felt once again when we were saying farewell to the person whom I knew very well and with whom I was in constant contact and with whom I was in correspondence, Pope John Paul II.

Of course, the other institution is the institution of diplomacy. Diplomacy can lay claim to a very important role in the world. I will be speaking a little more about this in my remarks, but let me say from the start, that whenever there is a problem, we do not need missiles, cannons or guns, but diplomacy.

When it was suggested that I speak on the subject of visions for democracy, I thought that indeed this is an important theme and a subject with which I am very familiar. The problems of the development of democracy are problems that are very familiar to me and of great concern to me, but it is not easy to develop this theme and say something to you on this subject that would be of real importance and of real relevance.

The problem of democracy is a problem that has concerned me from the time I was a student at Moscow University. I am a lawyer by education and I studied not only the history of law in my country, but also the constitutions of foreign countries. At that time, it was called the Constitutions of Bourgeois States. We also studied subjects such as the history of diplomacy and the history of political movements from ancient times to the modern era.

That is when I started to study this subject, and I continued all my life. My diplomacy work, my thesis at the university, was called "Participation of the Masses in the Government." Again, this is a key problem for democracy.

Let me start by quoting from Vladimir Lenin before the 1917 Revolution. He said that the proletariat will gain power by democratic means and will govern the country by democratic means.

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**Mikhail S. Gorbachev**, former President of the Soviet Union and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, visited Seton Hall University on April 19, 2005. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Gorbachev presidency and the beginning of glasnost and perestroika. As leader of the Soviet Union from 1985-1991, Gorbachev is credited with introducing a new age of openness and decentralizing the country's government. In 1990, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his leading role in bringing an end to the Cold War.

Of course when he acquired power, or seized power to be more precise, he abolished the Constitutional Assembly in which other parties had more voices than the Bolsheviks. Instead of democracy, the Bolsheviks chose the dictatorship of the proletariat and rejected democracy. Whenever there is a dictatorship, whether you call it a dictatorship of the proletariat or of the people, it is still a dictatorship. All dictatorships are alike.

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Because of the situation that prevailed for years after the Revolution and because Lenin was a large personality, he concluded that the Bolsheviks had made a mistake. He felt that they had taken the wrong path, and therefore, the entire political course had to be reexamined. This is when he proposed a new economic policy. This is when he proposed to reestablish private property, economic concessions, cooperatives, and certain elements of democracy.

However, after Lenin's death in 1924, things returned to the way they were in the past. The clock was turned back to the first years of the Revolution, and a group, led by Stalin, seized power. They held power for a long time by using dictatorial methods of repression and deception. By exploiting ideology, that group established a totalitarian regime that existed for thirty years in the Soviet Union.

Democracy is the theme that permeated the perestroika that started twenty years ago, in March 1985. Perestroika faced a most important task for our country and for all of our people. Because the Soviet Union was a country in which all religions were present, whose people spoke 225 languages and dialects, was full of social as well as other problems, and was so heavily militarized, it needed to go back to the ideas of democracy. We needed to liberate our country and our people from the fetters of the totalitarian regime and move the country from a situation of a lack of freedom to a state of freedom.

Attempts to get rid of the legacy of Stalinism were started by Khrushchev. He started in 1956 at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party where he criticized Stalin's personality cult and the results of that cult. This was the beginning of attempts to change the situation after the death of Stalin.

However, when Leonid Brezhnev became the Soviet leader, we returned to a kind of neo-Stalinism. It was a more humane kind of Stalinism, a Stalinism without massive repression, but a situation similar to a party controlling all aspects of our life, ideology, politics, economy, the social sphere, and religion and the church, to the point that every matter of a citizen was under the control of the party. When, for example, a person was baptized or christened, that person, and his or her parents, were expelled from the Communist Party. In a way, another kind of religion, a dictatorial religion, supplanted the religion of Christianity, and this religion rejected

democracy and humanity.

Because of this situation we started perestroika. The new leadership that came to power with me initiated the perestroika in 1985. We knew our country from within. My own career was in Soviet politics. I was the leader at various levels of government and in various areas.

I was the leader of a rural district, then of an urban district. I was governor for seven years. Then I worked in Moscow with Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko. We thought that we knew everything about our country and our system. At least we understood the need for a change that could be implemented by a new generation, a generation that replaced the veterans.

However, the situation turned out to be a lot more difficult than we imagined. As soon as we started to take the first specific steps, we realized that the burden of history, or the legacy of history, was a tremendous pressure on us. Historians know that Russia lived for 300 years under Mongol domination, followed by centuries of serfdom. Then, it experienced seventy years of the communist regime. This certainly affected the culture and the mindset of the people. Given the size and the scale of our country, which is a vast territory covering nine time zones, managing this country in a European way would not be possible.

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We knew that it would be difficult, but we probably did not know how much the mindset of the people was affected by history. What is more, we made our own mistakes. Our initial view was the illusion that we could preserve the old system by improving it. But after two years, we understood that the system itself resisted any attempt to reform, to go the way of perestroika, to go the way of democracy, glasnost, or to go the way of creating a market economy. We acted too late to reform our union state.

We did not take the opportunities we did have to better control the situation in the consumer market. We took a number of steps to improve the social situation, which increased the income of the people and increased consumer demand. But the supply of consumer goods was not sufficient, and as a result of this, the money mass exerted tremendous pressure on the consumer market and disorganized this market. As a result of this, the attitude or sentiment of the people became rather harsh because they didn't like this situation. They had expected reforms to improve their lives.

We had some ideas about how to do it, but we did not have the courage to implement those ideas. We had the courage to start perestroika for example, but

when we understood that a 10 percent cut in the defense spending would solve the problem of the consumer market, we did not do it. Right now the military budget in Russia is one-tenth of what it was in the Soviet Union. At that time, cutting perhaps fifteen billion rubles from the military budget could have been done, but unfortunately we did not take that step. Nevertheless, the country was moving forward, and it moved to the point from which there could be no return to the past.

When I am asked whether perestroika won or lost, I say that perestroika won, because it brought the country and the processes of political return, to the point of no return. In the future we will probably see some reversals, and maybe some authoritarian steps will be taken. It is very difficult for Russia to continue to move toward a democratic society with a well-established democracy and socially oriented market economics. Nevertheless, there is no return to the past. There is no turning back the clock. I would like to emphasize this, because people ask, what is happening in Russia? It is a very well-educated country with tremendous resources, but why is it not moving faster? This is a question that President Bush put to me. He said to me, you have wonderful engineers. You have very good workers. You have well-educated people who are very well-disciplined and know how to work. You have the resources, perhaps more resources than the rest of the world. So why aren't you moving faster? I told President Bush the reason is that we still have to create a system built on the principles of freedom, democracy and a socially oriented market economy, where people can show initiative and succeed by doing so.

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Today we can say that perestroika gave freedom to our people and hence, political and economic pluralism, glasnost, cultural and ideological pluralism, freedom of the media, and freedom of religion. The first free elections in the 1,000 year history of our country were held in 1989. It is a fact, I recall, that the first time I invited all the leaders of our various faiths to the Kremlin, I had them sit down at the table of the Politburo. I said to them, many people have sat at this table, but let us now sit at this table and together draft a law on freedom of conscience. Today, this is the most democratic law on the freedom of conscience, probably in the world.

So I could continue listing the successes of perestroika, but that would take me too far from my subject. Even though perestroika was later interrupted by its opponents, and also by reckless radicals, the achievements of perestroika were not negated. Although Yeltsin emphasized shock therapy, and aggressive methods for addressing problems, because he wanted to solve every problem in three or four years, and because he promised that the country would be among the four or five leading nations of the world in three or four years, he could not negate the achievements of perestroika.

A fully fledged democracy was accepted by the people, and they responded by starting to actively participate in all democratic processes. Then a different group of people came to power, and they had a different approach, which I believe was reckless. This democracy became a mechanism for ways and actions that were ultimately harmful to the people. President Putin inherited a situation of chaos in our state, our army, our society, and in the economy. President Putin used his first term to stabilize the situation, and this is a historic achievement. He stabilized the situation and prevented the disintegration of the Russian Federation. We also saw economic growth, and we saw that people's income grew. But now he's facing a new choice, which I will later describe and discuss.

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Despite the complexities of the recent history in which I participated and was a player, I am convinced that the choice of democracy and freedom was the right choice. What is more, it was the only right choice. Today therefore, I defend the principles and the values of democracy. Any attempt to replace those values with other values will not work. Perestroika also had an impact on the democratic process that started in the final quarter of the twentieth century in other countries. As a result, we saw the bloodless, velvet revolutions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The process of democracy continues there, and as a result, those nations have moved further along in the democratic change in their countries. We have seen the impact of perestroika on other countries as well.

I recall the words of the former president of South Africa, Nobel Peace Laureate, Frederick de Klerk, whom I know rather well, since we sometimes speak to similar audiences. In one of our conversations, he said that without the Soviet perestroika we wouldn't have been able to start the changes in South Africa that eliminated apartheid. Soviet perestroika also stimulated the democratic process in Latin America, and of course it made a great contribution to ending the Cold War.

At that time, we saw the hopes that were shared by people in all countries. Perestroika was a step toward a new world order that would be based on democratic principles. We were hoping that the resources that were released as a result of ending the arms race would be used for good purposes such as addressing mankind's global problems, dealing with the environmental crisis, and helping third-world countries in countering the problems of backwardness and poverty. We were hoping that this would create a better atmosphere to strengthen and further develop the democratic process throughout the world.

However, the opportunities that we had were not fully utilized. Why did that happen? After all, we believed in a better world order, and we were trying to do something in order to give an impetus to that world order, specifically in Europe. We met in Europe in November of 1990 and adopted a document called the Charter

for a New Europe. We hoped that that charter would be a document for building a new united democratic Europe that would be friendly to both the Soviet Union and to the United States of America.

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It is my conviction that the fact that this did not happen, and our plans turned out to be a kind of illusion, is due, above all, to the fact that world politics lags behind the events. We have entered upon a global era, but we often live by old methods and old habits. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, we have become a lot slower in the process of moving toward the new world order. As a result of this, we see that processes are developing in a dangerous and uncontrolled way. The wave of hope that spread throughout the world after the end of the Cold War has been replaced by disappointment. Wherever I go I hear questions, because people are concerned and alarmed. They are asking what's going to happen? Why is it that so many hopes have been broken?

Politicians reacted incorrectly at the end of the Cold War. Instead of creating some kind of world government, a new architecture of international security was built. Instead of switching resources from military purposes to the purposes of development in the West, the West indulged in a euphoria called the West's victory in the Cold War. It cultivated the victory complex and the primacy of force in international affairs.

When we were ending the Cold War, it was understood by people in the West that change was necessary in the West as well. Perestroika was necessary in every country because we were moving from a long confrontation that lasted for decades and affected every country. Every country needed renewal. When the Soviet Union disappeared, it was seen by all as the funeral of communism. I said then, and I will say again, the ideas of Jesus Christ, which are basically socialistic ideas, were buried many times, but those burials never succeeded.

The true idea of socialism is the idea of justice and fairness. This is something that every country needs to use in some way. A country cannot succeed when people are not respected, when their rights are not respected, and when there is no social justice. There will be crisis again and again. It will just continue if justice is rejected.

There is also a defeat complex, and that's a very severe disease that is very difficult to combat. The victory complex is also a disease, and I think that the West is only now beginning to understand this. All of us lost the Cold War, particularly our two countries because the Soviet Union and the United States spent \$10 trillion each for the arms race. It is a kind of financial universe that could be used for better purposes.

Recently at a conference in Cancun, it was said that \$10 billion more would be used for international aid, but the Cancun conference did not open up the Western

markets to developing countries. Former vice chancellor Genscher of Germany said that this was a shameful decision. How can we hope to combat backwardness and poverty in the third world if Western markets are not open to the products from the developing countries? At the same time, of course, the West is the master of the markets in the developing countries themselves.

So again, this is the victory complex that I believe is actually quite damaging, and that is why some people are saying that the victorious West does not need the United Nations. They say that what is necessary are decisive military actions, and that democratic regimes and democratic models can be imposed by means of preventive strikes, etc. I believe that all those views are erroneous, and I believe that we are beginning to understand that.

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We see in Iraq a problem that I saw after the military victory. A military victory which was, of course, inevitable because it would have been odd if 75 percent of the military might of NATO could not cope with Iraq—that would have been a scandal. The military victory was certain. The problem in Iraq is that we have Islamic people versus a coalition of mostly Christian nations.

At that time, I wrote a letter to both John Paul II and to George Bush, the president of the United States, warning that this could result in a religious conflict and religious strife. I believe that we should end military actions. I believe that occupation should be ended as soon as possible.

Of course, you can say that the war is over, but if there is still occupation, people will react. If there is occupation, people will react to it as occupation. I heard that when your president met with the pope, the pope said, “George, this is a problem that should be addressed.”

So, I would like to recommend that this process, which is difficult for both America and us, move forward. No one wants America to be defeated in Iraq because that would be a defeat for all of us, but let us take this process forward as soon as possible, and let us hope that it will finally culminate in positive results.

I would also like to say that we were not able to take positive advantage of globalization because globalization was an uncontrolled process. This again is an issue of democracy. Globalization was a spontaneous process, and as a result of this we saw that developed countries had a tremendous advantage from the start. After the end of the Cold War, they were able to benefit tremendously from globalization. But those countries that are poorer did not benefit from globalization, despite the various declarations and commitments of the international community.

The gap between the rich countries and the poor countries has grown as a result of the ten years of globalization. This happens when there is no real democracy, and when there is chaos in the world. Of course, some people can benefit from the chaos by managing chaos for their selfish interests.

Therefore, what we need is democratic principles that take into account the interests of different countries. We need at least a minimal degree of governance. I'm not referring to a world government. It would be an illusion to hope for that, but we need to adapt the existing system at the national level, at the regional level, at the level of international organizations, and at the UN level in order to adapt all of those mechanisms to the challenges of our time.

I would like to say that what we are dealing with is a situation where very often the opinions of the people are being rejected and not respected. We see that whole nations are being humiliated. Why be surprised at all kinds of resistance and even terrorism? If 2.8 million people in the world live on one or two dollars a day, if children do not go to school, if children die because of hunger, bad water and lack of medicine, then we have the soil from which terrorism and extremism can grow. Religious and political fundamentalism is the breeding ground from which extremists recruit their followers. This is because of the situation in which a large part of the world lives. We should address this.

We've also seen that the democratic wave of the past that initially resulted in ending authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in many nations, is being rolled back. According to UN experts, we originally saw an advance of democracy in dozens of countries, but now we see a roll back of democracy. Why is that?

Political scientists at the Congress in Quebec discussed this problem, and then another similar congress was held in South Africa in 2003. They concluded that many people are unhappy with democratic government. They are disappointed with democratic government because democratic government has often failed and disappointed them. These people are ready to support a different kind of authoritarian leader who promises solutions to their vital problems.

The vital needs of the people have to be addressed, because if they are not addressed, then democracy is in jeopardy. Again, this is not something that can be decided by some crusade to impose democracy. We need above all to help to address the problems of security, poverty and backwardness, and the problems of the environment. These are the three challenges of democracy today.

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I think that to conclude as the political scientists did in Quebec when they said that this could result in the twenty-first century becoming a century of authoritarianism, would be a very hasty conclusion. People continue to appreciate and value democracy. They appreciate opportunity in business and in politics. They want democracy.

For example, the president of Kyrgyzstan who became a president in my time in the Soviet Union was an academic, a physicist, and a very cultivated person, who appeared to have everything needed to create the conditions for democracy in that country. However, he probably stayed fifteen years longer than he should have, and people saw that clans were moving into positions of power and appropriating property. They saw that the parliament that was elected in the recent election included more than a dozen members of the family of that president. At the same time, people were living in dire poverty. When people saw that the president, in whom they had placed so many hopes showed little concern for their vital needs they marched on the capital Bishkek. They ousted the president, and he had to flee to Russia. That revolution took just two days.

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If democracy really works, and if it really defends the people and the interests of the majority of the people, then democracy allows people to solve their problems. If people see that this is not happening, then people march on their capitals.

I think that it is still good that the impetus of perestroika, which was supported in the world, is still there. It is still playing a positive role. Last fall, I visited Latin America, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Mexico. Now, let me tell you, I had the impression that I was walking on burning soil.

There is no work there. The percentage of unemployed is up to 30 to 35 percent of the population. Eighty percent of the people are poor. That is why in Uruguay we see turmoil even though the country is potentially wealthy. A colonel was elected president, and when the right wing forces who were unhappy with what this very radical president was doing ousted him from the presidential palace, the people returned him to power.

Today, they continue to support him. Chavez has their support because he wants to solve people's problems and address people's vital needs. Look at the situation in Argentina, in Uruguay, in Brazil. In all of those countries, radical leaders have been elected democratically because people want them to address the vital problems.

Let us not be disappointed with democracy. Churchill was right when he said, democracy, of course, is a bad system, but all the others are a lot worse. Indeed, there are many weaknesses in the current state of democracy, even in the developed countries. The problem is how to have participation, democratic participation.

Very often people ignore the democratic process and do not even bother to vote. They see that democracy is flawed. I think today the real problem that is pivotal to democracy, even in advanced countries, is decentralization. Today,

administrative reforms are underway in practically all Western countries with advanced democracy. Delegation of authority, of financial authority, to the level of self government by the people, enables problems to be solved better. So, there is a need for a very serious discussion of how democracy should function.

To conclude, I would like to add to my remarks a special additional chapter about relations between our two nations, Russia and the United States of America. I believe that right now the situation between our two nations enables us to draw some conclusions.

The first conclusion is that we have relegated confrontation to the past. We will never have this kind of confrontation, and this is a great achievement. Among the important steps taken by we Soviet reformers during perestroika was to normalize relations with the United States of America. A similar wish to have a better relationship with us was present among the US leaders.

I will not talk a lot about why this had not happened before. So far as we are concerned, we took practical steps to improve our relations, and I must say President Reagan responded. He was the partner who transcended his previous statements, and he met us half way. He was ready to cooperate. He was a great president, and we pay tribute to him for what happened at the end of the last century when we ended the Cold War and developed a normal relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union.

I believe that perhaps things could have been quite different if it had been a different president. When we first met on the very first day of our summit in Geneva in the fall of 1985, we actually called each other names. I said to my colleagues that Reagan was a real dinosaur. President Reagan called me a diehard Bolshevik. Nevertheless, two days later we signed a document that contained some very important ideas. The most important statement in that document was that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

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Once you agree on that, you need to change policies and have a different doctrine. The process we started that ended the Cold War and included eliminating several classes of nuclear weapons, reducing strategic weapons, and reducing the threat of nuclear war, was a full-fledged policy. Unfortunately, now it is not a straight line but rather a dotted line, and the new doctrine in the United States of America and in Russia contains the idea of the possible use of nuclear weapons. Preemptive strikes are also being considered.

If there are such provisions in the military doctrines, is it something more than just rhetoric or just words? Does it mean that we are returning to the past? I think it would be a mistake to do so. Preemptive strikes or super armament cannot solve

those problems that require political solutions. Again, security, poverty, and the environment are the challenges.

Now is the moment when all countries, and that also includes the United States and Russia, will be making an important choice. I think this is a moment that is as important as that in the mid-1980s. The United States of America must choose a model of leadership for itself.

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The United States has tremendous economic, political and military power as well as cultural influence. It has a wealth of democratic traditions, and that places the United States in a special position of responsibility and a special role. The special role and special responsibility are two sides of the same coin. A country with a special role should always act responsibly. I believe the United States can lay claim to international leadership, but the question is, will it be a leadership by domination? Will it be the leadership of imposing one nation's will, militarily, on other nations, or will it be a leadership through partnership?

I visit America two or three times a year and have visited probably more states than many of your presidents. My experience and my talks with political leaders and with ordinary people in various countries, including here in America have persuaded me that the first scenario of leadership by domination is being rejected now and will be rejected in the future. That is of course if US policymakers choose this scenario of leadership by domination.

The second scenario, leadership by partnership is something that the people will accept and will support. Is it so hard for Americans not to be an enforcer or not to be a global policeman? Is this the way to realize the democratic function of American society by having democracy within the country and being a policeman internationally? Wherever I go, people have agreed that they don't want America to be a policeman. They want a stable, well protected and free world where everyone feels good.

Russia could become a key partner with America not only in fighting terrorism but also in addressing other important challenges. The future of relations between our two countries is a fair and equitable operation in building a new democratic world order. By the way, Pope John Paul II was asked if he thought a new world order was necessary, and he said yes. We must create a new world order instead of the old bipolar order. Pope John Paul II formulated very tersely and succinctly what kind of world order this should be. He said a new world order is necessary, and that it should be more stable, more just, and more humane. That is the best way of putting it, and today, as we recall those great words, we pay tribute to the pope who did so much for the world.

In today's world, where we see the emergence of new power centers, the emergence of new dangers and where we see the unpredictable new non-state players,

America and Russia should walk together. This is my conviction. Both in the United States of America and in Russia, there are people who think very differently. They are suggesting some very different ideas, and they would like to sow doubts among Russians and Americans about the future of our relations. I think that we paid a heavy price to end confrontation and start cooperation when solving international problems, and we should continue this cooperation.

Finally, I think that the first thing that we need to do is to get rid of fears about each other. Action by Russia in the former Soviet Union is necessary because we used to be one country, and it remains in many ways an interlinked economy. Cooperation there is necessary. But whenever Russia is active, there is fear in many parts of America and among American policymakers that Russia is trying to recreate an empire.

At the same time, when the United States is taking some steps with former Soviet republics, people in Russia begin to think that America is encircling Russia. Very often those people on both sides are exacerbating those fears, and that makes it more difficult for our two nations to take advantage of the great opportunities that we have as a result of ending the Cold War. The real picture in Russia is that Russia doesn't have to fear anyone. Russia is currently addressing its problems. Two-thirds of the Russian population still lives in poverty.

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Since the stabilization that we achieved during President Putin's first term, we need to move further. We need to implement a technological modernization that will improve our economy, education, science, small and medium size business, and people's income and will create a market. I will not discuss this in detail, but these are the pressing tasks. We had problems in the beginning of this year, and mistakes were made by the government for which extraordinary steps had to be taken to put the developments back on track. However, I believe that it's very important to preserve the trust between our nations that we built during perestroika. This is tremendous capital, and this capital has to be increased rather than frittered away because cooperation is difficult to establish and should be preserved.

I would like to conclude my remarks by saying that I continue to be an optimist. I believe, and I am hopeful that concerning the relations between our two nations, the United States and Russia, the best is not in the past but is yet to come.