

In Memoriam – The Former President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev



Photo Credit: Dana Gluckstein, MPTV Images

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev passed away in Moscow on August 30, 2022. Mr. Gorbachev was a man of incredible vision and dedication to his country, his people, and his family. His statesmanship, tact, and insight guided him as he helped shepherd the Cold War to a peaceful and orderly conclusion. A reformer and believer in the Soviet system, he was unwaveringly devoted to the country he loved. The world owes him a debt of gratitude for his work to reduce the threat of nuclear conflict and lower the passions of the Cold War. In honor of Mikhail Gorbachev's legacy, we would like to highlight some of the many accomplishments of his storied and momentous life. More recently, through his Gorbachev Foundation, he

released a brief statement against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, stating that issues should be resolved through diplomacy and not war. He called for an end to the hostilities, saying that “there is nothing more precious in the world than human lives.”

Born in Privolnoye, Russia on March 2, 1931, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev lived a humble early life in Josef Stalin’s Soviet Union as a harvester on a collective farm.¹ After college and the death of Josef Stalin, he became an avid promoter of de-Stalinization, rising through the ranks of the complicated Communist Party apparatus to become leader of the Soviet Union in 1985.

Taking office in the aftermath of the stagnant Brezhnev years and the brief and demoralizing tenures of Konstantin Chernenko and Yuri Andropov, the 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev had his work cut out for him. The simple observation that the Soviet Union was in dire need of significant reforms was in itself a courageous recognition. Ever the perceptive statesman, Mr. Gorbachev knew two key changes needed to be made. The first required a halt to the expensive and rapidly expanding arms race with the United States. The second was more challenging: Mr. Gorbachev had to find a way to revitalize the oppressive and stagnant Soviet system.

Ever the hard worker, Mr. Gorbachev was remarkably successful in achieving his first goal of nuclear force reduction. Having established a close working relationship with American President Ronald Reagan (who saw similar utility in reducing both countries’ nuclear arsenal), Mr. Gorbachev secured the ratification of several historic nuclear arms reduction treaties. His tireless efforts in this arena resulted in the elimination of over 80% of the world’s strategic nuclear weapons.² Thanks to Mr. Gorbachev, the world took several tremendous steps back from the brink of possible nuclear war.

In addition to his historic nonproliferation achievements, Mr. Gorbachev took on an even greater challenge. He correctly and boldly recognized that the Soviet system to which he had dedicated his life was in need of dire reform. He set out to open the Soviet Union up to the world and allow its people to taste the beginnings of true freedom. His genuine belief in *glasnost* and *perestroika* - opening and restructuring - gave hope to millions of Soviet citizens who yearned for freedom after decades of isolation and stagnation.

¹ <https://rfkhumanrights.org/mikhail-gorbachev>

² <https://www.nps.gov/articles/start-treaty-1991.htm>

His actions as General Secretary were those of a truly great leader. A man with the foresight and determination to make the difficult choices necessary for the advancement of his people, even if such advancement came at great personal cost. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, Mikhail Gorbachev maintained his steadfast commitment to the causes he championed as General Secretary. An outspoken proponent of nonproliferation, he continued his advocacy and worked to ensure future generations never have to endure the threat of nuclear destruction. He also was an advocate of helping the world's environment through Green Cross.

Our hearts and condolences go out to his family and friends, as well as to the millions of people around the world who benefited from his unwavering belief in the possibility of a better tomorrow.

