

Toward Global Cooperation Between The Soviet Union and the United States

By His Excellency Aleksandr Bessmertnykh

Dr. Feulner: Good afternoon. I am Ed Feulner, President of The Heritage Foundation. I am honored to welcome the Ambassador of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United States, His Excellency Aleksandr Bessmertnykh.

Today's lunch is one in a series of steps The Heritage Foundation has taken over the past year to understand the complex changes taking place in the Soviet Union and to be a part of the effort to bring democracy and free market principles to that country. Last December, for example, a delegation of Heritage experts and outside economists was invited to advise the government of Estonia on privatization and establishing independent economic links to the West. Earlier this fall, I joined members of The Heritage Foundation Board of Trustees on a week-and-a-half fact-finding mission in the Soviet Union. As a result, we plan to send teams of experts to conduct seminars for economic and political reform leaders in the various Soviet republics.

Ambassador Bessmertnykh's visit to The Heritage Foundation takes place against the backdrop of what may be the most fateful months in the history of his country since 1917.

Ambassador Bessmertnykh is an expert on the United States. He was appointed ambassador last May, a few days before the Bush-Gorbachev summit, after serving in Moscow as First Deputy Foreign Minister. He is no stranger to Washington, having spent thirteen years here, from 1970 to 1983, as First Secretary and Counselor and Minister-Counselor of the Soviet Embassy. Ambassador Bessmertnykh also served in the United Nations Secretariat from 1960 to 1966. He holds a Doctor of Laws degree from the Moscow Institute of International Relations.

Mr. Ambassador, again, welcome to The Heritage Foundation. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on the dramatic events of the last few months and your forecasts for the future.

Ambassador Bessmertnykh: Thank you very much, Dr. Feulner, and I very much appreciate to be here with you today for two reasons. First, I've got a good chance to see some good old friends of mine, some old acquaintances from previous administrations. And the second reason is that I have met some new people at this meeting and I hope to enjoy our friendship after this meeting.

I was thinking that it is going to be an easy task, but Dr. Feulner just told me that my predecessor was in here once and he participated in this kind of luncheon and made a

Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, at the time of this lecture, was the Soviet Union's Ambassador to the United States. He currently is the Soviet Foreign Minister.

He spoke at The Heritage Foundation on November 21, 1990.

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speech, and in two days he was recalled. I express hope that there was no connection between the two events. The only way to be on the safe side may be to make a very long speech. I will probably be testing some of your patience and tolerance with my remarks on the subject which I chose, and that is the Soviet-U.S. relations at the dawn of the post-confrontation era.

I will not be very harmonious in putting the whole picture together. I will probably emphasize some of the things which I believe are of more importance to the present day situation. Maybe we can deal with other matters at the next meeting. So please be patient. I'm not going to be too long with my remarks.

So we are now going through a very important stage of changes. And the emerging rapprochement between the two countries is occurring, however, against the backdrop of the deepening crisis of state and society in the U.S.S.R. And the paradox of today's situation is in the fact that *perestroika*, which made this unprecedented U.S.-Soviet accomplishment possible, may now confront the United States with a new choice born out of mounting difficulties in the U.S.S.R. We are entering the dawn of the post-confrontational era burdened by the long experience of global confrontation, distrust, negative emotions, and the Cold War stereotypes.

The past period in the Soviet-American relations has definitely had certain elements of intellectual comfort because analysis was very simple. Hostility itself was a source of intellectual assumptions, for what was bad for the U.S.S.R. was good automatically for the United States, and vice versa.

Characteristic Scenarios. New sources for conceptual ideas seem, however, uncertain as yet, and fluid now. So one can foresee a spectrum of possibilities for carrying out U.S. policies in these changed conditions. The two most characteristic scenarios, as I can see them, are the following: 1) to weaken and to pin down the U.S.S.R., as a former potential adversary, after its eventual complete disintegration; 2) to strengthen cooperation on the basis of the already achieved rapprochement — to achieve partnership relations as the basis for creating a new world order in the post-confrontational Europe.

The arguments for and against the first approach are basically well known. Setting them up, one can see the demand for war here in the fact that its realization substantially broadens this fear of uncertainty in the world because nobody can see now what it would mean if such a major state as the Soviet Union were to disappear from the political map of the world. It is clear enough that in the event of the Soviet Union's disintegration, the existing balance would break down, and the whole world situation would go through a tremendous change.

The entity which is known today as the Soviet Union was formed over the span of not 75 years, as many people believe, but within its main borders about 1,000 years, all this time playing a major role in the world's history. If the Soviet Union falls apart, this region will no doubt become the main source of world instability and conflicts, an area of bitter confrontation of nations, most of them of the Third World category, but equipped with nuclear weapons and nuclear reactors.

As to the second approach, strengthening the cooperation, we are only beginning to understand its potentials and limitations. It is clear to us that the new guarantees in the post-

confrontational era can only be based on the replacement of confrontation with cooperation. But if the period of confrontation was born out of the existing conflict of interests between the great powers with ensuing deterrence, the linkage of interests of the new era of cooperation is only a necessity born out of the disappearance of the elements deterring conflicting sides in various regions. The Persian Gulf crisis has simply demonstrated to us the absence of those deterring elements.

Experience teaches us that we cannot divide the world into permanent friends or adversaries. The former may fail you, while the latter can show great potential for compromise. What are the prospects for cooperation between our two countries in a world where the balance of forces rests on the bipolar pattern that has been slowly drifting in the direction of a multipolar structure?

Summing Up Experience. Let us attempt to consider several major problems in our agenda in order to sum up the experience we have gained in the recent years of cooperative relationship. I would like here to make some remarks on the *perestroika* and the internal situation in the U.S.S.R. within the framework of our relationship.

At present, our country is going through a difficult period in its history. In our view *perestroika* was brought to life in our country primarily by internal causes involving the inefficiency of the administrative economy that prevailed for decades. The colossal squandering of resources because of the inefficiency of economic management and the absence of a market has resulted in a situation where one of the resource-richest countries in the world now has a shortage of almost everything.

This paradoxical situation is obtaining at a time when the real wealth in our country is still quite significant. We have 2.1 hectares of arable lands per capita – and of course, a hectare is 2.5 acres – which is quite enough to provide the country with agricultural products.

The forest reserves are enormous – 814.3 million hectares, of which 326 million hectares are exploitable. The Soviet Union leads the world in known reserves of gold, natural gas, iron and manganese ore, copper, nickel, zinc, tungsten, potassium salts, asbestos, and a number of other minerals.

The intellectual potential of the country is also impressive. There are more than 30 million people in the U.S.S.R. with higher and secondary education, including 1.8 million scientists and scholars.

On the other hand, manual labor in industry, construction, agriculture, and transportation accounts for 60 to 70 percent of all activity. More people wash dishes now than are employed in transportation. Twenty-seven percent of all the trucks in the country do not get on the road. Those that get on the road on the average stay idle for three hours a day. Forty percent of the trucks and other vehicles ride empty while the others are loaded to no more than 70 percent. Fifteen percent of those that are on the road carry the wrong stock to the wrong place.

Or take the use of machinery. Seventeen percent of all machines are idle during the first shift in plants and factories. Seventy percent of them do not work during the second shift. Twenty million tons of metal are lost annually of which eight million tons are wasted as shavings. One-third of glass plants and one-fourth of brick factories produce breakage.

I am citing all these figures in order to illustrate how the existing cost-ineffective, wasteful economy in our country is, in fact, working for itself, leaving very little for human consumption.

Difficult Reforms. I wish to stress the conclusion which is self-evident: an effective use of existing resources in our country in conditions of a contemporary market economy would guarantee prosperity and high living standards. This is the background of the developments which are presently underway in our country.

You know that the economic reform in the U.S.S.R. is proceeding with difficulty, and that economic and political debate in our country has reached its peak. The compromise reform plan presented by Gorbachev and adopted by the national parliament has involved considerable criticism inside the country, primarily on the part of the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin. The deteriorating economic situation has prompted an increasing number of cities, republics, and regions to adopt isolationist measures, including attempts to create their own separate monetary systems, like the introduction of special coupons in Ukraine.

The adoption by the national and republican parliaments of conflicting legislation has brought into dramatic focus the issue of republic sovereignty. *Perestroika* has entered the stage which is sometimes referred to as the war of the laws, or the constitutional crisis. This has brought about as the most pressing issue the problem of split in the top echelons of power in the U.S.S.R. between President Gorbachev and President Yeltsin.

Coexistence Among Nations. It appears that one of the most important issues can be that of assessing the limits of republican sovereignty from the standpoint of creating a stable and safe world. At present, we see that the head-on rush to sovereignty produces conflicts which isolate or escalate into armed clashes. In fact, almost everywhere the radical forms of introduction of sovereignty have provoked counterreaction in constituent republics. You know what happened in Moldavia. The Georgian independence is strongly opposed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are the parts of Georgia which have already seen armed clashes. The question of Karabakh sovereignty has in fact grown into an intermittent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Very many people in the Soviet Union are now beginning to understand that the problem of republic sovereignty is not the issue of U.S.S.R. decolonization or liberation from communism and so forth, but that of finding some civilized form of coexistence among nations. One should not forget that nations in the Soviet Union are very much dispersed. On the other hand, the iron heel of totalitarianism has greatly distorted and sometimes even disfigured the conditions of nations' existence in our country. Thus, the dominant nation in a republic often ignores the interest of ethnic minorities. This feature of a totalitarian state, the imposition of centrally adopted decisions by force, cannot disappear overnight. Democratization sometimes produces a kind of totalitarianism of the majority, which is very dangerous in terms of its potential for fueling inter-ethnic contradictions.

Peoples in the U.S.S.R. are in fact in the very beginning of the process of mutual adjustment of sovereignties, which Europe completed at the time when its national states were established. Unfortunately, this experience is not cost free, for the inter-ethnic peace and the present-day borders in Europe are the fruits of centuries of bloody wars, including two world wars.

So, I would think that the beginning of the process of establishing completely sovereign nations within the U.S.S.R. on the European pattern would result in destabilization of not only the situation in our country but in the adjacent regions. The Soviet Union, just like the United States, has got to find the answers to very difficult issues of survival of the international community. But there are no ready answers to the questions that arise. If one is to proceed on the basis of the situation as it now exists, there are grounds for believing that there is no way the great powers can be relieved of their burden of responsibility, and simply retire.

As a matter of fact, Soviet-U.S. cooperation over the post-war years has shown that only their joint position can lead to a relaxation of world tensions, and to localize and, in the future, remove the hotbeds of the existing conflicts. This is the first point.

The second point is that only through global cooperation between our countries can the groundwork be laid for shaping the world community as an effective force capable of stopping aggression, legitimizing the use of harsh measures and even military force in response to the threat to peace. I would like to stress that no state – however powerful – can alone lend legitimacy to the use of its forces even for the noblest objectives.

Watershed in Relations. I think we have a chance which should not be lost. Global cooperation between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. may at least give mankind what in the past was thought to be impossible, that is, a synthesis of the moral force of world public opinion, which is the ultimate source of any right, with the strength of individual states. We believe that only the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. can be the guarantors of this process, as well as the resulting system of world stability in the framework of the United Nations structures which would thus gain new and vital substance.

This is not to say that Soviet-U.S. interaction is equal to domination of the two powers. Cooperation between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. is first of all a guarantee of the effectiveness of the international community which has moved from confrontation to the real work for the benefit of a world in which each has the right to vote. So, it is our view that Soviet-U.S. relations are now passing a certain watershed. We must assess our relations without a tinge of false sentimentality, but with the understanding of the new challenges, new responsibilities, and nascent common interests.

