

Gorbachev Warns of Growing Danger

A group of Americans visiting Russia heard dire warnings from ex-Soviet President Gorbachev that the tensions between the U.S. and Russia are creating a dangerous situation for the world, reports Rick Sterling, who is on the trip.

By Rick Sterling

The former President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, is 87 years old but still sharp. He told a delegation of 30 Americans in a two-week visit to Russia organized by the Center for Citizen Initiatives, "This is a time to be concerned. We should worry about relations between our two countries. ... Things cannot continue as they are."

President Gorbachev recalled his initial meetings with President Reagan, which came after six years of poor relations and hostility. In the first summit meeting, Reagan issued a long list of accusations against the Soviet Union; Gorbachev responded with his own accusations against the U.S. After that meeting Gorbachev said "He's not a hawk; he's a dinosaur" while Reagan said about Gorbachev "He's a die-hard communist."

At the next summit meeting, Reagan continued lecturing Gorbachev. After listening for 15 minutes. Gorbachev stopped Reagan saying, "That's enough. If you want to talk as equals we can go very far. Differences can be bridged. Problems can be resolved. But as equals."

Reagan asked how the Soviet Union would respond if the United States was at risk because of some kind of natural calamity. When Gorbachev said his people would want to help, not take advantage, the mood changed.

Gorbachev recalled his own friendly experience talking with average Americans. He suggested that perhaps the U.S. needs its own perestroika. He reminded us that it was President John F Kennedy who said "We need peace but not a Pax Americana not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women."

Gorbachev continued saying, "The current situation is not right. We need to change that. Let us stop provoking each other. Let us stop trying to tear up other countries. Our two countries are still central to world peace. We need peace in order to resolve other world problems. One percent of the world controls 90 percent of the wealth. The ruling class is happy with this but things cannot continue as they are. ... Budgets smell of gunpowder. ... Fear is being cultivated. This is resulting in a new arms race."

Gorbachev asked, "Does the USA want Russia to just submit?" Referring to

Russia's history with invasions by France in the early 1800s and Germany in the 1940s, he explained "This is a country that can never submit... There will be no winners in a nuclear war."

The Ukraine Crisis

The 30-member delegation has been having informative meetings with numerous people to gain a better understanding of modern Russia and its relations with the United States and the world. Another especially interesting meeting was held with Vladimir Kozin, member of the Russian Academy of Military Science.

Vladimir Kozin is an arms control specialist and member of the Russian Academy of Military Science who has worked on arms control issues since the 1970s. Kozin says that Russians see themselves being encircled by NATO. Of the 16 countries bordering Russia, eight have anti-Russia sentiments. He notes that the U.S. military budget is 12 times greater than that of Russia and increasing.

Kozin said it is a "fairy tale" that Russia interfered in the U.S. election. What is NOT a fairy tale, he said, is that the U.S. has spent a huge amount of money to influence Russian elections in the past and funded 400 Non-Governmental Organizations (or NGOs), which were part of the destabilization campaign in Ukraine leading to the 2014 coup.

Regarding key conflict points emerging from the Ukraine crisis, Kozin noted that Crimea was part of Russia since 1783. He added that despite the presence of 16,000 Russian troops (who were in Crimea as part of the Sevastopol naval base agreement) and 18,000 Ukrainian troops, the Crimea plebiscite to re-unify with Russia was handled without violence, with huge turnout and overwhelming vote in favor.

As for hostilities in eastern Ukraine, Kozin asked why this fighting has happened just because the largely ethnic Russian population resisted the overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich and demanded some form of autonomy from Kiev.

If Scotland can consider secession from the United Kingdom and Catalonia from Spain, he argued, what's wrong with Donbass (eastern Ukraine) wanting more autonomy within Ukraine? Why has Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko turned to military conflict instead of negotiating with the dissidents in eastern Ukraine?

Kozin believes it is vital to have an arms control summit meeting between Presidents Trump and Putin. He thinks we should work toward the complete elimination of nuclear weapons by 2045. In the meantime, the easiest way to reduce tension and the risk of war would be an agreement on "No First Use of Nuclear Weapons," he said.

In a sober assessment of Trump's first 100 days as President, Kozin concluded, "Aggravating these facts of life is the deep degree of mistrust between Washington and Moscow, which the Americans spawned and have continued to nurse. A vicious circle has emerged in the interrelationship between weapons and trust ... Clearly such an irrational phenomenon cannot go on indefinitely."

From both Kozin and Gorbachev the message was clear: We need to do something to restore discussion and stop the slide toward ever greater tension and danger.

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