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Gorbachev and the Failure of American Foreign Policy



Dave Valdez/White House photo

The death of Michel Gorbachev in 2022 reminds me of the failure of American foreign policy to seize the opportunity to make the world a safer place for democracy and all living things. The period in which he led the Soviet Union was an unprecedented and historic chance for the United States to lead rather than compel others. The choices made by the Reagan and Bush administrations lifted the veil of pretense and exposed the truth that this country's decisions to allocate resources and to develop policy is ruled by the military-industrial complex.

Why is the foreign policy of the US been designed to destabilize first, the Soviet Union, and then Russia? Instead of supporting Gorbachev, the US government decided i to take

advantage of his proposals while clandestinely planning to abrogate the agreements made. The team of Scowcroft and Gates created a wall of deception and pushed the world closer to catastrophe by refusing to agree to Gorbachev's proposal for further dismantling of nuclear stockpiles. The imperialistic mindsets of Scowcroft and Gates were prepared to use subterfuge, trickery and blatant lies to advance the interests of the military. The truth is that the behavior of US foreign policy and the choice to spend more on the military than the rest of the world combined has overshadowed any talk that we live in a



The Destiny of Civilization

Finance Capitalism,
Industrial Capitalism
or Socialism

Michael Hudson



democracy.

What price salvation? We should not confuse the interests of the military-industrial complex with the interests of the American people. If democracy and freedom touted by the so-called “patriotic” were in fact a powerful force, why would we need such a sizable allocation to the military. Imagine in the backdrop of the current debate over our democracy, the United States spent an estimated \$10-\$20 trillion dollars on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. What was the return on this expenditure? If these dollars were instead invested in the American people, it would be sufficient to cover the need for infrastructure investment, education and student loans. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) report in its recent Report Card (published every four years), estimate that the US will need to invest upwards of \$4.59 trillion by 2025 to improve the nation's infrastructure. In another expanding debt sector, student loans are now approaching \$2 trillion. A different foreign policy: one of diplomacy and conciliation, could have allowed for the redistribution of resources to make investments in this country.

Michael Hudson, in his book: *The Destiny of Civilization: Finance Capitalism, Industrial Capitalism or Socialism*, reports that in China, unlike the United States, the government creates the credit with the explicit intent of creating money and credit to invest in the real economy; building high-speed trains, to build housing, invest in education. In other words, China's banks do not make profits for corporate takeovers or for speculative purposes but for investment in the real economy. Neoliberalism, as practiced by the United States, has created an expanded role for the financial sector pushing an agenda that is designed to prevent any government entity from controlling the supply of credit. Neoliberalism attempts to make money financially which is the quickest way to make money. Neoliberals focus on creating credit not to invest in the real economy, thereby expanding the means of production, but to buy and sell the existing means of production.

What is the connection between foreign policy and the economy? In the words of Lyndon Johnson, we can have "butter and guns." The United States has chosen guns. However, in a finite world, our resources can only go so far. The least efficient means of expenditures is to spend money on guns to support the military-industrial complex, or for local taxpayers to subsidize sports stadiums. We find these scattered all across America. We need instead to invest in infrastructure, education and people not WMD and we need to avoid the misadventures created by the necessity for war and weapons. Consequent to these considerations, it is not, according to our commitment to the military-industrial complex, in our best interest to seek a peaceful resolution to conflict. Thus, it is not surprising that Reagan and Bush quietly turned down Gorbachev's gesture to dismantle our respective nuclear stockpiles. Bill Clinton, who many regard as the second Reagan administration except he supported a woman's right to reproductive freedom, defied agreements made with Gorbachev that would prevent further expansion of NATO. Furthermore, Clinton assured Yeltsin in 1994 that any expansion of NATO would be slow with no surprises and would be done in partnership with Russia. He told Yeltsin that he would like Russia and the United States to focus on the *Partnership for Peace* program not NATO. Meanwhile, back in Washington, foreign policy "entrepreneurs" were making plans for the immediate enlargement of NATO beyond what could reasonably be expected.

The United States had a choice to make, not unlike the choices at the end of WWII. The US decided on the *Marshall Plan* to rebuild our former enemies by supporting the allies within those nations, both in Germany and Japan. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US had a similar choice to provide support and assistance for Russia in

building a democracy and modernizing the Russian economy. Instead, we chose to betray original agreements with Gorbachev. In fact, one could argue that the winding road to the war in the Ukraine began in 1991.

If you want to declare yourself the bastion of freedom and democracy and of American exceptionalism, it is absolutely critical to provide leadership for others rather than compel them with the threat of war; financial or otherwise. The idea that the American way of life is derived from the soul of our nation, from our fundamental beliefs that “all men are created equal,” one person, one vote must necessarily manifest in our foreign policy. Foreign policy cannot be divorced from these fundamental beliefs. The world would have been better off if the United States had honored its word with Gorbachev.

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