

1989

## Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World.

Carol Ford Benson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Benson, Carol Ford (1989) "Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World.," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 42 : No. 1 , Article 28.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol42/iss1/28>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

Presidency before the bills for supporting the forces were due. Provision of resources by the member nations to support the evolving strategy of NATO has been a problem from then to now.

The high priest of all SACEURs was Lauris Norstad, selected for the post by Ike in 1956 and fired by Kennedy in 1962. Since the SACEUR has always been an American, Washington politics, rather than Council approval, is the key factor in the assignment and departure of Supreme Commanders. The Norstad chapter is ably handled by Jordan and is probably the most interesting in the book. It illustrates the problem of being an American (USCinC Europe) and an Allied official at the same time. Norstad was impaled on the question of nuclear control: Kennedy and McNamara felt his Medium Range Ballistic Missiles initiative involving potential alliance control of nuclear weapons was far too risky. In addition, McNamara could never accept the notion that the Allied commander answered to the North Atlantic Council, not to him.

In the concluding chapter Jordan elaborates issues developed in the study which are faced by each SACEUR, albeit in somewhat differing contexts. In particular, each Supreme Commander must serve as a symbol of allied unity while at the same time providing strategic direction to bridge differing national perceptions of both the threat and the optimum strategy to counter it.

The central strategic problem in NATO has always been one of arriving at the proper mix of conventional forces, which are expensive, and nuclear forces in order to provide a deterrent adequate to meet the agreed-upon threat. There has been a tendency, however unrealistic, on the part of NATO toward overreliance on nuclear weapons, which tends to strain the credibility of the Alliance's deterrent strategy. In recent years this has been complicated by arms control initiatives such as the 1988 INF agreement between the United States and the Soviets.

This book, long overdue, is perceptively written by an able group of scholars as well as two former Supreme Commanders and is highly recommended to those interested in the problems of our most successful alliance and the first ever in peacetime. It should be especially useful to potential and practicing policymakers. Like it or not, multinational alliances, both new and old, are going to be with us for the foreseeable future—inevitably, even with nations who are today considered adversaries.

DOUGLAS KINNARD  
University of Oklahoma

---

Gorbachev, Mikhail. *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987. 254pp. \$19.95

This is, without a doubt, the most significant book in the final period of the 20th century.

Why would a review begin with those words? Because Americans who have become complacent in their belief that they have everything, that they live in the freest society on earth, and that economic prosperity accompanied by the respect of nations is theirs by divine right are about to be shaken badly. George Frost Kennan, writing as "X" in 1947 stated: "The issue of Soviet-American relations is in essence a test of the over-all worth of the United States as a nation among nations. To avoid destruction the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation."

In writing *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, Mikhail Gorbachev has nailed the "95 Theses of Soviet Reformation" to the door; it would be foolhardy to ignore this book. It is a first-person, present-tense account of what the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) thinks and upon which he says he wants the domestic and world audience, to whom he addresses his book, to be able to rely.

Immediately, the reader will see that it is not in the tradition of a cautious politician sending up a trial balloon by an intentional leak. *Perestroika* (restructuring) is a dive from the rail, right into the churning waters. It is performed in full view of all. This demonstrates the princi-

ple of *glasnost* (openness) which is essential to the success of *perestroika*.

General Secretary Gorbachev directly controls one-sixth of the world's landmass and influences every nation on the globe. When he calls his *perestroika* a revolution and says that it is a direct descendant of Lenin's principles, we must take him at his word. He is starkly critical of the ways in which he says the Party and various programs went off the track in the fifties and sixties; he attributes the failures of economic production and social advance during the past three decades to deviation from strict Marxist/Leninist principles. *Perestroika* is the means of self-correcting the system: "A revolution should be constantly developed. There must be no marking time. Our own past illustrates this. We still feel the aftermath of slowing down."

*Perestroika* was introduced at the April 1985 Plenary Meeting of the Communist Party Central Committee as a means to overcome "economic deadlock and stagnation." Gorbachev further contends, "I think we had every reason to declare at the January 1987 Plenary Meeting: in its essence, in its Bolshevik daring and in its humane social thrust the present course is a direct sequel to the great accomplishments started by the Leninist Party in the October days of 1917. And not merely a sequel, but an extension and a development of the main ideas of the Revolution. We must impart a new dynamism to the October Revolution's historical

impulse and further advance all that was commenced by it in our society."

The General Secretary warns that *perestroika* will hit hardest those who have become comfortable with the old ways. He also warns that everyone will have to be prepared to make sacrifices during the advent of *perestroika* because reforms require that some "give up for good the privileges and prerogatives which they do not deserve and which they have acquired illegitimately. . . ." No wonder so many oppose the concept and resist its effects.

Gorbachev begins his open letter to the world (his own term) by saying *perestroika* is not a whim on the part of ambitious individuals or a group of leaders, but an urgent necessity arising from the profound processes of development in socialist society. He distills its effect into one phrase: working an extra bit harder.

*Perestroika* is wide-ranging and fascinating to read. Gorbachev examines every aspect of Soviet life and the relationship between the individual and the Party. He cites Marx and Lenin to demonstrate the purity of his precepts, to ground them solidly in pre-Stalinist thought. This is wise because it avoids arguments with living persons and the philosophical heirs of those not now alive—for whatever reason—who might have disagreed.

He explains the origin of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's angry comment, "We will bury you!" which was taken during the 1958-1964 period as direct evidence of the

U.S.S.R.'s belligerence and willingness to engage in war with the United States. Gorbachev says "We will bury you!" was an expression used in the late 1920s and 1930s in an ongoing argument between farming experts and scientists.

Gorbachev is adamant that "people in the West must stop exploiting those few words by one who is no longer among the living, and must not present them as our position." He says, in what appears to be a candid comment, "Khrushchev was an emotional man, and took it very much to heart that his sincere efforts and specific proposals to improve the international situation came up against a brick wall of incomprehension and resistance."

The optimism and obvious intellectual strength of the Soviet leader are demonstrated on every page. Who else could explain the theory of scientific socialism so amicably? Society passes through certain stages in its development, from primitive to slave-owning states, to feudal systems, to capitalism, and finally, so Gorbachev thinks, to socialism, "blending public ownership and personal interest," which did not evolve until the 20th century. "Let the West think that Capitalism is the highest achievement of civilization. It's their prerogative to think so. We simply do not agree with this. And let history decide who is right."

CAROL FORD BENSON  
San Bruno, California