

INTRODUCTION

Two Minutes to Midnight

“If you have anything left on your bucket list, do it now, because the world is close to annihilation.” That was the conclusion of news coverage of the 2019 Doomsday Clock released by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. This group of scientists and scholars, including 15 Nobel laureates, set the clock at 11:58 p.m. — two minutes before the symbolic apocalyptic midnight, the closest the clock has ever been to predicting humanity’s self-destruction. The reason? Nuclear weapons and climate change, the experts say.

In 1984, at the height of the Cold War, the Doomsday Clock was set at 11:57 p.m., in a world situation as threatening as today.

In 1983, US President Ronald Reagan declared the Soviet Union an ‘Evil Empire’ and further escalated the Cold War. Both sides had thousands of nuclear warheads directed at each other. The risk of an all-out nuclear war was very real. Nuclear nightmares and feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and anger plagued people the world over.

Fast forward: only four years later, in 1987, President Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev signed the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty) treaty, eliminating all short and intermediate range nuclear and conventional missiles.

And only two years after that, in 1989, Ronald and Nancy Reagan paid an official visit to Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev in Moscow. Asked whether he still regarded the Soviet Union as an Evil Empire, Reagan said, “No, this was from another era, another time.” In the same year the world witnessed the tears of joy as East and West Germans celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall.

All these positive events set the Doomsday Clock back a full 17 minutes before midnight, the furthest ever since its inception in 1947.

It was Mikhail Gorbachev who held the lion's share of responsibility for this unprecedented shift in world politics. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990 and became one of the most popular and admired citizens of the world.

This book reveals, in a concise form, the ideas and ideals that made such a great change possible — the spirit and vision that guided Mikhail Gorbachev. It also offers Gorbachev's insights into how each of us can help turn the Doomsday Clock back again, by restoring morality and personal responsibility as the foundations of global politics. Such insights are sorely needed in these rudderless times when humanity seems to be sailing across rough seas.

Dozens of books have been written about Mikhail Gorbachev, including by the Soviet leader himself — most of them either biographical or focused on certain political, economical or social aspects during the time of Perestroika. Amid these detailed accounts and analyses, Gorbachev's essential vision and guiding ideals are hidden like precious gems. Having studied the subject for over two decades, I felt there was a huge treasure of wisdom, knowledge and practical know-how waiting to be discovered by a wider audience. Therefore I have attempted to gather these gems and present them in a concise and easily accessible format.

This wealth of wisdom is an invaluable resource for overcoming the huge challenges that humanity faces. And it gives profound insights into this colossal world figure and his message for today. There are several features of his personality and life that stand out:

- *While much has been said in the last century about the paradigm shift from a culture of force to a culture of peace, trust, solidarity and cooperation in international affairs, I believe no other leader in history has put all his political will power into making this a tangible reality. His achievements speak for themselves.*
- *No other leader has put all his moral conviction and lifelong determination behind the complete elimination of nuclear weapons — a goal Gorbachev called “humanity's maturity test”.*

- *While the Soviet Empire under Gorbachev “lost” some countries by letting them become independent, he gained immensely in stature as a statesman because he did what was right from a universal moral and ethical standpoint. World opinion recognizes this. That is why he is still immensely popular and revered among countless people, even 27 years after he stepped down voluntarily as Soviet President.*
- *Mikhail Gorbachev’s dream is that every aware citizen “becomes a president of the earth” and takes personal responsibility for the well-being of this planet. His vision and governing ideas can infuse us with the needed optimism, confidence and ideals to play our role in the current turbulent world situation.*

The majority of texts in this book, shown in black, are selected from Mikhail Gorbachev’s books, speeches, letters and interviews, some never before available in English.

Commentaries from contemporaries and historians related to Gorbachev and his work, shown in blue throughout, give added historical context and understanding of the Soviet leader’s impact.

Also included are a selection of poems and literary texts by Russian writers and philosophers, as these had a deep influence on Gorbachev’s thinking over the span of his entire life, and also help us to understand and identify with the Russian heart and soul. These texts are also shown in blue.

The book is richly illustrated with historic photographs that offer further glimpses into the personality of this fascinating world figure.



Mikhail Gorbachev’s life, spirit and vision are an endless fountain of knowledge, optimism and confidence. May this inspiration better enable each of us to play our role, large or small, in helping to create a sustainable future for our planet Earth, where individual and collective progress and happiness become a shared reality.

—Michael S. Karlen