



Opening Remarks at the Office of the Historian's Conference on U.S.-Soviet Relations in the Era of Détente, 1969-1976

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much, Marc. Thank you for that wonderful introduction. And thank you also for your leadership and hard work over these years.

And good morning, and welcome, everyone, to the Department of State.

What brings us together today is a truly remarkable achievement, both in the history of diplomacy and the diplomacy of history. Only two decades ago, the United States and the Soviet Union stood as enemies, separated by mystery and misunderstanding and prepared for war. Today, Americans and Russians are opening our archives, sharing old secrets, and trying to build newfound trust. I want to commend Marc and all the dedicated men and women of our Historian's office, as well as their Russian colleagues, for this significant contribution to human knowledge and to U.S.-Russian relations.



I'd especially like to welcome Jim Schlesinger – who has distinguished himself over many decades in the service to our country. Thank you so much. He's been our Director of Central Intelligence, our Secretary of Defense, and our first ever Secretary of Energy. So he's had a few jobs. Thank you very much, Jim.

We are also honored, obviously, today by the presence of the man who is the subject of so much of this history: Henry Kissinger. For academics like me, and for many of you I imagine, Henry Kissinger has always been an inspiration – a living reminder that scholars not only write history; they can make it. And Henry, it has been a pleasure for me to get know you over these years and I benefit from your wisdom, I am honored to call you my friend. Welcome back to the Department of State.

The bureaucracy really misses you, Henry. They told me so. (Laughter.)

I am also very pleased to see Ambassador Yuriy Ushakov, who is in the audience tonight -- this afternoon. Thank you very much.

Distinguished gentlemen and ladies, guests: For all of us old enough to recall, and that would include me, the passing of time has not eroded our memory of the daunting challenges that America faced when President Richard Nixon took office. Our nation was in the midst of social upheaval. A contentious war that was sapping our blood and our treasure and turning our country's focus inward. And he inherited a relationship with the Soviet Union in which mistrust was deepening, in which tension was growing, and in which the fear of open conflict was real.

President Nixon and Henry Kissinger rose to those challenges with new ideas and with creative diplomacy. They launched, what President Nixon called, an "era of negotiations" – most directly through what was known as "the Channel" between Henry Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin. This dialogue was continued by our people who increasingly met on sports fields and over chessboards, in classrooms and through our joint exploration of the heavens. And as a result, two states with opposing ideologies and many conflicting interests began easing their suspicions and cooperating in areas of mutual concern like reducing nuclear arms and preventing nuclear war.

But perhaps the most lasting achievement of that time was in many ways the least expected. Because in that period and beyond, the demand for freedom and human rights that began growing among the Russian people became evident. In the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, begun on Dr. Kissinger's watch, some saw the recognition of a divided Europe. What we now know is that the Helsinki Accords laid a foundation of moral principle favorable to our values. It encouraged and empowered Russian patriots to demand their liberties and their rights. And in their aspirations we saw the beginning of the end of the "the long twilight struggle."

These remarkable events are chapters of world history that I have studied in great detail and in which I had the good fortune to participate. I got to be the White House Soviet specialist at the end of the Cold War. And I'll just tell you, it doesn't get much better than that. I got to participate in what I had thought would be unimaginable events: The unification of Germany, the liberation of Eastern Europe, and the peaceful eclipse of the Soviet Union.

But when you look back on those unbelievable days, you have to think that the role that my colleagues and I played in 1989 and 1990 and 1991 was just really harvesting good decisions that had been taken long before; in 1947, in 1948 and 1949, by people like Truman, and Acheson, and Vandenberg; in 1969, in 1970, 1971, by Nixon, and Kissinger; and in 1981 until 1989 by Ronald Reagan.

The end of the Cold War created a new opportunity for comity between America and Russia. Today, there is, to be fair, still a certain distance between us, and I have long thought that that reason for this difference is rooted in history itself; in different ways that our two nations continue to tell the story of the last decade.

For us, and for many in Russia too, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a triumph – ushering in a new promise of international security and stability; a new hope of a Europe whole, free, and at peace; and a new era of liberty, and opportunity, and justice for all Russians. But we need to realize, too, that for many ordinary Russians, who saw the end of the Cold War differently, it was remembered as a decade of great uncertainty, and lawlessness, and weakness, and perhaps even humiliation; a revolution in its truest meaning, when the only social order that most ever knew overturned with devastating abruptness, when the state collapsed and the public wealth of an unsuspecting nation was pocketed by too few.

I firmly believe that we cannot understand Russia today, and we cannot fully connect with the Russian people, unless we continue working to see our shared history in common terms. This can not, and it will not, lead to apologize for Russian actions that never should have happened. But a deeper understanding between our peoples will help our governments to work with each other, not talk past each other, and to continue to build a better relationship; something that we both want and surely that we both need.

I was just in Moscow with Secretary Gates and I can tell you that the United States and Russia share many common interests and we are cooperating to address a wide range of common challenges: regional and global.

Our two nations are partners in the cause of peace in the Middle East; working together, through the Quartet, to advance the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine,

living side by side in peace and security.

Like us, Russia has been a victim of terrorism, and we are working productively together; sharing intelligence, coordinating law enforcement efforts, and protecting both our peoples from this new global threat. We are doing the same when it comes to stemming the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The United States and Russia are leading the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. And we are working with common purpose in the Six Party Talks to rid the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons and to support a future of peace on the Korean Peninsula.

And in the case of Iran, the United States and Russia may differ from time to time over tactics and the timing of how we address this challenge, but what is most important is that we are united in our common conviction that a nuclear weapon in the hands of the Iranian Government would be disastrous for international peace and security, and we have forged together a common diplomatic strategy, with two paths: one with incentives if Iran chooses cooperation; the other with consequences if Iran continues choose to confront the international community. The United States and Russia have acted together in the UN Security Council to impose two sets of Chapter 7 sanctions on the Iranian Government, and we are now working together to raise costs for Iranian intransigence even further, including finalizing the text of a new resolution.

Now, the fact that Russia and the United States have common interests is not to say that we do not have differences. We do. Yet Russia is not the Soviet Union. Like many of you, I visited the Soviet Union, I studied in the Soviet Union, and I will tell you: Russia today is not the Soviet Union. And the chattering that we hear of a new Cold War obscures and distorts reality. We can all be thankful that the only damage that the Cold War is causing today is a few headaches for historians gathered here.

We must understand the Russians' view of their recent past, but we need not agree with conclusions that some seem to have drawn from that experience. Russia has regained some of its strength and its cohesion. But at times, perhaps reflecting the view of the 1990s, we fear that this is sometimes seen in zero-sum terms of another era. We respect Russia's interests, but no interest is served if Russia uses its great wealth, its oil and gas wealth, as a political weapon, or that if it treats its independent neighbors as part of some old sphere of influence.

Nor do we believe that Europe's unity and liberty since 1991 is unjust. The freedom of people to choose their own governments and the freedom of nations to make their own way is a source of security, not a threat to it. So we hope that Russia will also recognize that we can work together for a Kosovo solution that contributes to peace in Europe.

We recognize that Russians today enjoy greater security and opportunity, and even greater personal freedom than at any point in Soviet or Tsarist history. But this is a standard to which Russians themselves do not wish to be held. They wish to be held to a higher standard. And so we will continue to speak for those principles of liberty, and democracy, and openness that we believe can best ensure the long-term success of the Russian people and contribute to a partnership with us that is rooted not just in shared interests, but in shared ideals.

We want a 21st century partnership with Russia building on our common interests. We want Russia to be strong, strong in 21st century terms – not just with a strong center, but with strong, independent institutions: an independent judiciary and legislature, and an independent civil society, with a free media and a vibrant nongovernmental sector. Democratic institutions and a free society are not a source of weakness; they are a source of strength in a dynamic and modern world.

When we disagree, we will address Russia's views seriously and we will express our own ideas candidly. It was in this spirit that Secretary Gates and I went to Moscow and offered constructive ideas to address Russia's concerns about our missile defense systems. This desire for cooperation also leads us to think that Russia can work with us to fully ratify and implement the Adapted CFE Treaty, rather than to suspend its obligations under the old treaty.

Ladies and gentlemen, it can be easy and perhaps even tempting today for both Americans and Russians to become consumed by our differences and to let those differences define us. That was true during the Cold War, especially before the rise of the era that we study today, détente.

But what history teaches us is that it is possible for the United States and Russia to disagree, even to disagree vehemently, but not to let our differences destroy the positive work that we can, and must, do together.

Our work in the present is being aided immensely by you, our scholars of the past. You are helping Americans and Russians alike to understand our shared experience, both the good and the bad. You are strengthening the friendship between our peoples. And most importantly, you are reminding us that today's headlines are rarely the same as history's judgment.

America's relationship with Russia will remain large and complex: a mix of cooperation and competition, friendship and friction. This has always been the case. But we have achieved great things together before. We are doing so again today. And I am confident that with patience and hard work, dialogue and understanding, our future can be brighter than our past.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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