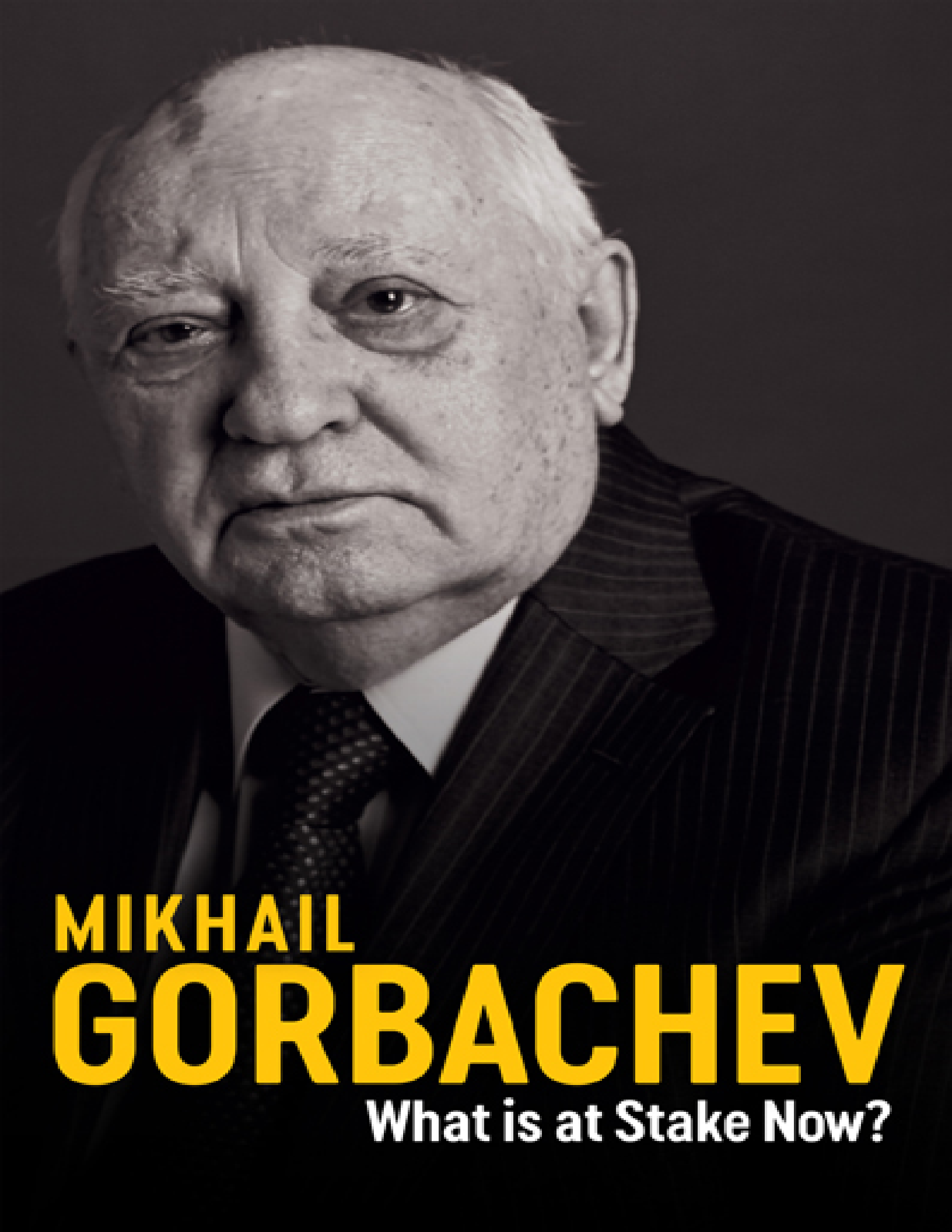
MIKHAIL
GORBACHEV
What is at Stake Now?

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Mikhail Gorbachev

What Is at Stake Now
My Appeal for Peace and Freedom

Translated by Jessica Spengler

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Copyright page

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Preface

This book is called *What Is at Stake Now* and it deals with nothing less than the future of the global world. Is that not presumptuous? After all, who can say where humanity is heading?

The predictions made one hundred or even just twenty years ago may elicit nothing but smiles of bewilderment today. But I do not want to make any predictions in this book. Instead, I want to reflect on how we are behaving today, what we are striving for and what we should avoid if we hope to preserve our world for future generations.

I am very concerned by the current events, developments and plans of which I have recently become aware.

In January 2020, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* which is published in Chicago and has gauged the danger of nuclear war since 1945, moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock ahead by nearly half a minute. Symbolically speaking, it is now 100 seconds to midnight – we are 100 seconds away from war. The situation has not been this dire since 1953.

We live in a globalized world, but we have not yet understood it or learned how to get along together in it. This realization has occupied me for a long time. We often do not notice the dangers lying in wait for us until it is too late. And when we do finally recognize them, we do not dare to act. We have not learned the art of partnership and cooperation, and politics often lags behind the rapid changes in the world.

I was politically active at a time when my country and the whole world were ripe for colossal changes. We took on the challenges. We made mistakes and misjudged some things.

Yet we initiated changes of historic dimensions, and they were peaceful. I think this gives me the right to reflect on the future, too, and to share my thoughts with you, dear readers.

I hope this book inspires you to think and act yourselves – because, ultimately, all of us together are responsible for the future of the global world.

Part I
Our Shared Security

The Militarization of World Politics

World politics is moving in an extremely dangerous direction. Militaristic and destructive tendencies are on the rise. The system for nuclear arms limitation is being dismantled. The decision of the United States to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty on the elimination of intermediate- and shorter-range missiles was a major blow to the world's security.

The INF Treaty, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) for reducing strategic nuclear weapons and the initiatives of the presidents of the USSR and the USA for eliminating tactical nuclear weapons made it possible to rid the world of thousands of nuclear weapons that had been amassed during the Cold War.

At our first meeting in Geneva in 1985, Ronald Reagan and I articulated the idea that would later lead to the INF Treaty: 'A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.' At the same time, our two states were revising their military doctrines in order to reduce dependency on nuclear weapons.

Compared with the peak of the Cold War, the number of nuclear weapons in Russia and the USA has shrunk by more than 80 per cent today – a historic achievement.

This process did not apply only to nuclear weapons, however. There was also a convention for the elimination of chemical weapons, and the countries of Eastern and Western Europe agreed to radically reduce their armed forces and military spending. This was the 'peace dividend' reaped above all by Europeans after the end of the Cold War.

Since the mid-1990s, however, a countertendency has emerged: the gradual remilitarization of thought and action, a continual increase in military spending and the dismantling of the arms control system.

Of the three main pillars of global strategic stability – the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the INF Treaty and START I – only the latter remains. But the future of the New START Treaty, signed by Presidents Medvedev and Obama in 2010, is now also being questioned. Judging by statements from representatives of the American administration, it too could soon be history.

Today’s military activities have come to resemble preparations for an actual war. Documents published by the Trump administration show that US foreign policy is increasingly being geared towards political, economic and military rivalry all over the world. The goal is to develop new, more flexible nuclear weapons, which simply means continually lowering the threshold for the use of such weapons.

In light of this, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced to the Federal Assembly that Russia is developing a number of new weapons systems. He explained at the same time that Russia was not looking for a new arms race, an attitude that undoubtedly reflects that of the population. In the past, our country never initiated a competition in building up arms. Instead, it was forced to play catch-up, responding to the challenge from the other side. Today, not only Russia but the entire world is facing a new politico-military challenge.

The USA wants to dominate world politics by relying on military superiority. At least, this is the impression one gets from recent events.

In the process, the USA wants to marginalize the United Nations and the Security Council and, in effect, replace them with NATO – a military alliance that is not only enlarging its own territory but that also aims to expand its 'sphere of responsibility' all over the world.

I have never made any secret of my opinion that the decision to expand NATO was a major strategic blunder on the part of the West and a move that tended to destabilize the political and military situation in Europe and beyond its borders. In connection with this, I would like to explain once again how this issue was discussed as the Cold War was coming to an end and what conclusions are to be drawn from that today.

In the years when I was the leader of our country, the issue of NATO was being addressed within the context of German reunification. The prospect of a unified German state joining NATO – an organization born during the Cold War – was viewed with serious misgivings by many in our country. We talked frankly about this with our negotiating partners and proposed possible solutions. After long and hard discussions, we agreed that, as a sovereign state, a unified Germany should decide for itself which organizations and alliances to join. But there was more to our agreements than that.

In the early 1990s, we agreed that the territory of the former German Democratic Republic should be given a special politico-military status. Germany pledged not to station any additional military infrastructure, foreign troops or weapons of mass destruction there. The Germans also pledged to reduce their armed forces by nearly half. Germany has upheld these and other stipulations to this day.

At the same time, the military doctrines of NATO and the Warsaw Pact (which still existed then) were being revised.

The plan was to strengthen their political components at the expense of military ones. The member states of NATO and the Warsaw Pact signed an agreement to cut their troop numbers.

Some of my critics reproach me to this day for not having insisted on a legally binding stipulation that would have prevented NATO from expanding into Eastern Europe in the future. But such a demand would have been absurd, even preposterous, because the Warsaw Pact still existed at the time. We would have been accused of destroying it with our own hands.

We achieved all that we could under the circumstances at the time. Russia was fully entitled to demand that the other side act in accordance not just with the letter, but also the spirit of these agreements and obligations. But the mutual trust that emerged with the end of the Cold War was severely shaken a few years later by NATO's decision to expand to the east. Russia had no option but to draw its own conclusions from that.

What Is at Stake

The INF Treaty, which was of historic importance to world peace, is itself now history – and its demise is the fault of the USA. The same is true of the refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the withdrawal from the ABM Treaty for the limitation of missile defence systems.

If the INF Treaty is terminated by either of its two parties, the country in question must provide a notification stating the 'extraordinary events the notifying Party regards as having jeopardized its supreme interests'. The country that takes such a serious step must explain to the world