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CAN THEY DANCE TOGETHER?"

Speech delivered to the Committee for National
Security, Washington, D.C. May 2, 1989
by Suzanne Massie

Thank you Mr. Warnke, thank you Wren. I thank the
Committee for National Security for according me this award
and great honor which touches me very much.

I deeply love my own country and people -- and it has
happened that I have come to know and love another country and
people whom we regarded as enemy. I began my work twenty
three years ago. Since then I have come to know hundreds of
Russians from every walk of life. The Russian people and
culture have enriched my life and have now become as familiar
to me as my own. When I began it was not easy and sometimes
even dangerous for us to be friends. It was definitely not a
time of glasnost. Shadowy men who frowned on such contacts
skulked in corners. We were often harassed and frightened,
and passed through some very dark days. Yet somehow we
managed to reach out, to trust each other and to maintain
friendships -- friendships made all the more precious because
they were forced to survive barriers, long separations,
enforced silence and distance. Many years have now gone by.
Some of those whom I first met when they were babies are now
married and having children of their own. I am proud to have
a godchild in the Soviet Union born on Christmas day two and a
half years ago and six other children who call me aunt -- one,
who calls me "Aunt America," a name that particularly delights

me.

Through these years I understood how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to go through the dark looking glass that separated our nations and I always hoped that our two peoples would one day have a chance to know each other as I had. I tried to make this happen in my own way by speaking out against what I thought was wrong and writing about what I found beautiful -- and there was much of both. My efforts were not always regarded benignly by either side. The bureaucracy of both countries has at times regarded me as dangerous, curious and a little mad.

Perhaps this is understandable for as I am a writer and a historian I have a little different perspective -- a worm's eye view if you like. I am interested first and foremost in people -- their dreams, sorrows, aspirations, their past. My father was a very independent Swiss and from my earliest childhood I was taught to believe in the power of the individual. He instilled in me the belief that each of us can affect the world we live in for good or evil. For me, history is made by people, not by impersonal economic and political forces beyond our efforts to control and we can all change and affect it.

Certainly one thing that one observes as a historian is that history has a funny way of doing flip flops: today's guerilla fighter is tomorrow's patriot; yesterday's wartime enemies, today's treasured allies, and vice versa. Even national symbols are not sacrosanct. Teddy Roosevelt once proposed that the United States change its national symbol to

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the Grizzly Bear -- a brave, independent animal said he, much better than that "dandified vulture" we had adopted. In those days, Russia's symbol was the Eagle: a double-headed one, that faced both East and West, a symbol still useful to remember today.

Since during the past fifty years -- with the exception of a brief flirtation during World War II -- the Eagle and the Bear have been glowering and rattling swords at each other it has been difficult for we Americans, who have very short memories, to recall that throughout our history, with the exception of recent times, Russia and the United States enjoyed the most amicable relations. In the era of Imperial Russia, gestures between the land of the tsars and our young republic abounded and the United States considered Russia to be one of its firmest supporters in the international community. These friendly relations reached a peak in the 1860's and 70's during the reign of the Tsar Liberator Alexander II. This Emperor who instituted many social, economic and political reforms, in addition to his crowning achievement -- the liberation of the serfs in 1861, two years before Lincoln freed the slaves in the United States -- was an object of respect and even veneration in the United States.

During those decades, Russian interest in the United States also increased greatly. Russians eagerly read the works of Edgar Allan Poe and James Fenimore Cooper, as well as those of Washington Irving, Hawthorne, Emerson, Longfellow, Whitman, Lowell, Holmes and Bret Harte. Russians soaked up American adventure novels, and learned the names of our

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states, cities and rivers. Young Russians dreamed of America as the land of excitement and romance. The great novelist Ivan Turgenev hailed Americans, as "the greatest poets of our time -- not the poetry of words -- but of action."

In 1860, Alexander II wrote admiringly of the United States as "presenting a spectacle of prosperity without example in the annals of history" and the Tsar and his ministers were firm in the belief that the Union must be preserved. When the French urged the British and the Russians to join them in full recognition of the Confederacy, the Imperial Government refused. And when, in 1863 at a critical moment in the Civil War a Russian frigate and two Russian corvettes steamed into New York Harbor, the event caused as much joy in the United States as it did surprise and consternation in France and England. Mrs. Lincoln paid a visit to the frigate *Oslabyia*, the first time a First Lady had set foot on a foreign warship. Toasts were drunk to Tsar and President. In New York, the Russians were greeted by cheering crowds and ecstatic newspaper headlines which proclaimed "New Alliance Cemented." At an elegant ball given at the Academy of Music, tables were decorated with huge figures of Peter the Great, Washington, Lincoln and Alexander in sugar and cake. Russian officers, among them young Rimsky-Korsakov, then eighteen years old and a naval cadet, whirled hoopskirted New York ladies who wore on their bodices buttons from the coats of Russian officers.

When the overland telegraph brought the additional good news that another Russian fleet that arrived in San Francisco,

jubilant reigned all over America. Years later one gentleman recalled that his mother had clasped him to her bosom exclaiming, "We're saved! The Russians have come!" Lincoln referred to the Russian visits in his Thanksgiving Proclamation as one of "God's bounties of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate the heart."

The timely appearance of the Russian fleet caused the French and English to hesitate in giving support to the Confederacy. And, after the war, a grateful America did not forget. In 1866 after an assassination attempt on the life of Alexander II, President Andrew Johnson sent a formal message to the Emperor and the House and Senate passed a joint resolution congratulating the Russian people on his escape. This was a unique event in American history; never before had a message been sent to a foreign nation expressing personal feeling for its sovereign.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox personally delivered the message, crossing the Atlantic in a new Monitor class ship which anchored in St. Petersburg. He was nearly overwhelmed by the spontaneous outpouring of enthusiasm by the Russian people. The flag of the United States flew everywhere, people sang American songs and in the city of Kostroma, people threw their coats on the road for the American visitors to walk on. Fox was made an honorary citizen of several Russian cities.

Alexander's letter to President Johnson thanking him for the resolution of Congress was suffused with warmth and I think bears repeating today:

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"The two people find in their past no recollections of old grievances, but on the contrary, memorials only of amicable treatment... These cordial relations which are as advantageous to their reciprocal interests as to those of civilization and humanity conform to the views of Divine Providence, whose final purpose is peace and concord among all nations.

It is with a lively satisfaction that I see these bonds continually strengthening... I pray you to express them to Congress and to the American people, of which that body is the organ. Tell them how much I -- and with me all Russia -- appreciate the testimonials of friendship which they have given me and how heartily I shall congratulate myself on seeing the American nation growing in power and prosperity by the union and continued practice of the civic virtues which distinguish it.

Your good friend,

Alexander"

It was in the glow of these good feelings that Russian-American negotiations for the sale of Alaska were completed in 1867. And because of that purchase we are today still only three miles distant from each other.

Today after many years of confrontation in the twentieth century it is perhaps time to consider the question: Could the Eagle and the Bear dance together again? Today we see a new liberalizing Russian leader who is extending many invitations.

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Over the past four years he has with quite astonishing speed moderated Soviet foreign policy, promoted economic reforms, courageously increased openness and self-criticism, allowed greater autonomy for the national republics within the Soviet Union, introduced a measure of democracy and made significant moves in human rights and increasing religious freedom. But where is our Abe?

Over the past twenty five years I have observed a curious phenomenon in American policy. Somehow we always seem to be one leader behind: We treated Khrushchev as if he were Stalin, Brezhnev as if he were Khrushchev and now -- Gorbachev as if he were Brezhnev. Because of this unfortunate predilection we have often missed opportunities in the past. I believe that this is the greatest opportunity we have had to try to forge a new relationship with the Soviet Union and it would be tragic if we were to muff this one now. We moan a lot about Gorbachev's successful "peace" offensives. What are we suggesting that is better? We have clung to our model of a Soviet foreign policy so entrenched that it could never evolve, while at the same time remaining convinced that we, because of our more flexible and responsive system have a greater ability for change. Yet now, it is our leaders who seem curiously paralyzed. Perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness) may be on the front pages of our newspapers and passed into our language, but not into our policy or our actions. Instead, we have responded with a bureaucratic sounding phrase "status quo plus" which sounds suspiciously like an American translation of "Brezhnevian

unknown, but I think we should no longer be talking so much about "intentions" but rather more realistically about the "possibilities" of the Soviet Union.

Now as they struggle to resolve their problems what should we do? Gloat? Bash them? Or reach out a hand? Many of Gorbachev's invitations to the dance have been rebuffed. A good example is Afganistan, which the Soviet Union regarded as a turning point in its relations with the new administration.

It is clear that we made an incorrect assessment that the Communist regime would collapse as soon as the Soviet armies pulled out. It is now evident that we were mistaken. We could have concluded that we had not made a correct assessment and responded to Soviet initiatives. Two months ago, the Soviet Union was proposing a solution which looked very much like the status quo before the invasion -- a coalition of all parties including the former King with strong United Nations participation. Instead, it was our reaction to push harder, thus escalating the conflict again. Because of our negative response, the Soviet Union has perhaps had to reassess their policy and we may not be able to get what we could have only a short time ago. Our mutual goal after all, should be to see an end to a bloody conflict in which the principal victims are innocent civilians -- not a continuation of a war through proxies.

Considering our actions it has seemed to me a little ironic that we have been asking the Soviet Union as a test of its good intentions to help out in Central America. What are we doing to help them out in an area which is of vital concern

stagnation."

Certainly there are many who have a large investment in old policies. Careerists are reluctant to link themselves to any Soviet leader by making definite pronouncements. After all, who knows what might happen between now and a future confirmation hearing? Careers in Washington are made by stressing one's "hawkishness," "vigilance," "prudence" -- not by going out on a limb and expressing the need for new approaches toward policies, some of which are now almost fifty years old.

By arguing that "we can't do much" or "America should act only in American interests" the establishment seems to be treating the whole issue as a spectator sport in which it need not play a role. There is an astonishing lack of creativity, initiative and vision on our part. Bureaucratic equivocation seems to be our only answer to ferment and action on the part of the USSR. I was personally astonished to read a few weeks ago that after three months of the combined work of the NSC, the State Department, the CIA and the Pentagon pronounced, and I quote, that "the hardest task is to probe Russian intentions and tactics"! The elephant seems to have labored only to bring forth a mouse. It is not such a mystery and there is no need to examine the entrails of a rooster to divine the facts. The picture is clear and spread out for all to see and read on the pages of Soviet newspapers. The Soviet Union is in the process of wrenching change -- coping with deep and perilous troubles -- physically, psychologically, ecologically and economically. The outcome of all this ferment is as yet

to them?

Another kind of missed opportunity occurred recently. A week ago the New York Times reported that the Soviet Union, dipping into an emergency fund of foreign currency had begun a major push to buy Western consumer goods -- razor blades to soap powders, shoes and pantyhose. These would have a retail value of 5 billion rubles, perhaps equivalent to 1 billion dollars. Most of these contracts, now already concluded, were signed with Japanese and European companies -- not with the United States. This is perhaps not so much because of MFN but because of the generally negative political climate. In both of these very different cases, we missed the lead.

We all know that in order to dance one needs to hear the same tune and learn complimentary steps. As citizens, we should all think about what these steps might look like; but, while we are retooling and studying our broad policy there are some mutually beneficial tangible moves that we might consider that come to my mind:

1. We should I believe, energetically propose a generous and comprehensive plan to join forces with the Soviet Union to combat the problems of environmental degradation which threaten our common planet. We are being told today by environmental experts that we have ten years to turn the situation around. In the Soviet Union the situation may be even worse; their experts are saying that for them it is now and perhaps even yesterday. In the course of a conversation I had last June with a high-ranking Soviet official he

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remembered that President Reagan once said that if our planet were to be suddenly threatened with danger by aliens from outer space, we would quickly join together to fight the common enemy. "I believe," said this Soviet official, "that the enemy is here -- and it is the destruction of the environment."

2. We should more vigorously explore the possibility of joining forces to combat terrorism as was proposed recently at an international police conference.

3. We could perhaps be a little more sensitive to certain pressing regional concerns of the Soviet Union. As one speaker at a recent conference I attended asked, "How would you like to have Iran on your border?" The Soviet Union is the fourth largest Muslim country in the world and, along with the United States and Brazil, one of the three largest Christian countries. The Double-headed Eagle looking both toward East and West symbolized this concern.

4. The Soviet Union has enormous problems of health. According to Soviet statistics 38% of Soviet children do not receive DPT shots. The Soviet Union has 140,000 cases of tuberculosis in children vs. our forty. The Soviet Union is fiftieth in infant mortality. There is no point in dwelling on the reasons for this -- more importantly, I believe it is an area where we could perhaps reach out the hand of cooperation without the slightest fear of jeopardizing our

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national security. I myself am hoping to study the problems of handicapped children in the Soviet Union.

5. Although I am not an expert in the field of arms control, I would hope that we could use the opportunity that is being presented now to pursue and conclude arms agreements. For one reason or another the Soviet Union seems ready to put a great deal on the table. Why linger incessantly to explore and test these overtures?

6. More cultural exchange: there are excellent films being made in the Soviet Union today -- we see very few. The theater is vigorous and provocative yet the Taganka Theater has never been to the United States, nor has Efreimov's Moscow Art Theater. We have no regular exchanges of television programs although there are now many interesting programs being made and shown in the Soviet Union.

7. The Soviet Union is eagerly looking for agricultural technology and knowhow, among other things for cattle feed additives rather than grain purchases. Nothing much has been done by our side. We have demonstrated little flexibility and just don't seem to be listening.

8. It might also be helpful if we stopped talking about how long Gorbachev will "last." He has already lasted four years -- the full term of an American President -- and is now entering his second. Instead of worrying so much about what

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will happen to him and how long and who next (a fruitless exercise since no one can predict this anymore than we can predict with certainty who our next president might be) we might perhaps better deal with what we have now. One has only to think how strange it would be to say that there was no certainty in dealing with President Bush since he might not last longer than four years. The old saying goes: the Past is over; the Future unknown; Today is all we know for certain.

We all know it is hard to adjust to changing human relationships. In our own personal lives we know that when a partner -- or an adversary -- changes it is often easier for us to deny the change than it is to wrestle with the personal growth that a new adaptation demands.

Change in the Soviet Union has come faster than anyone could have possibly predicted a few years ago. Only two years ago I gave a speech on the surprising happenings of that year in the Soviet Union. These ranged from the serious to the frivolous: an Yves St. Laurent show in the Hermitage, Pizza Hut... and could one believe it, even talk of a baseball team in Kiev. Everyone laughed. One man in the audience jovially declared "But we already have the Red Sox!" I ended my talk then by musing, "A baseball team in Kiev. If we are sensitive enough and imaginative enough to recognize change when we see it we may one day be playing a new kind of World Series." Well, the baseball team from Kiev has just played Annapolis. "Peetchers" and "beizball bets" have now entered the Russian vocabulary along with "beezness" and "democratizatsiya." The Russians lost, but cheerfully said, "It's your game and we

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came here to learn." Which of their games are we trying to learn? It seems that we are dropping the ball, and if we are not careful it is we who may end up losing not only the chance to play with a new team, but the whole world series.

It might be useful for us to remember sometimes that we are not always at the center of their radar screen as we rather vainly like to believe -- but sometimes only at the far corner. The Soviet Union is an Empire of one-hundred nations which covers eleven time zones. Russia is only one of fifteen republics. The Empire's frontiers are loosening, and as they do Russia and the Soviet Union are not only faced with extraordinary problems, but will have to consider new relationships and directions.

We have another serious problem to consider. A Soviet diplomat once said to his counterpart at one of the arms talks, "We are about to do a terrible thing to you. We are about to deprive you of an enemy." We need to ask ourselves: Can we live without an enemy? Engagement seems to be easier for us than disengagement.

Now in Abe and Alex's time the United States and Russia got along fine and yet no two systems could have been more different than an ancient autocracy and a young Republican democracy. So the difference in systems is not the problem. The problem has been a militant, expansionist Marxist-Leninist ideology.

In over twenty years even while Soviet newspapers and officials were reviling us almost daily, I have never heard an expression of hostility from any Russian man in the street.

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Curiosity, bewilderment -- apprehension sometimes -- but basically, the Russians really like us. I have been told, "Tell your countrymen we love you more than the Europeans do." The Russian people do admire us -- and for the right reasons. They admire our energy, our spontaneity, our imagination and our knowhow.

Even the Soviet government and Soviet officials often pay us the compliment of trying to behave like us. They dress like our bureaucrats, talk like our bureaucrats, use incomprehensible acronyms just like ours.

The Russians are not our enemies. It has been the Soviet Government that has called us enemy and today, even they are no longer doing so.

Russians today, as they were in Abe Lincoln's day, are still fascinated by America. The United States -- not Europe, not Japan -- remains the standard of all excellence, the standard by which they measure everything. Many Russians still look to us as a model. Gorbachev's new step of creating a Congress of People's Deputies is an attempt to separate the executive from the legislative branch of government. One of the recently elected delegates to this new congress is a man who happened to be here last summer. He watched the Bush-Dukakis debates in Peoria and took home a video tape, and his wife recently reported by phone that he used it to good effect in his successful campaign.

The word "democracy" is now on Russian lips everywhere -- used by officials, printed on posters and in the pages of newspapers. Yet it obviously does not mean the same thing to

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them as it does to us. For however encouraging glasnost may be and the steps away from totalitarianism toward a greater pluralism it certainly is not and will not be our system, and if we are going to be satisfied only with a mirror image, we are bound to be disappointed, for Russia is different, has always been different and her way will not be ours. And what do we expect? Primaries in Minsk? Psychologists say that only narcissists want mirror images. Perhaps we should explore the differences -- we might learn something.

We are a country of impatience, they of patience. We are a country of rationality, they of emotion. They are comfortable with contradiction and mystery, we are not. We may not know it yet, but we need the strength of the Russian people, their profound spirituality, and the wisdom and perspective they have so dearly won through their suffering.

We might be as enriched by this contact in the future as we have been in the past. One has only to think how much Russia has given to our common western cultural heritage; to name but a few of a long, long list: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, the ballet, Diaghilev, Stanislavsky, Tchaikovsky, Gershwin, Stravinsky, Chagall, Balanchine.

It may be time for us to start dancing together again. A Hindu proverb says: "When two bulls fight, the grass gets crushed." We are both exhausted from our fighting and while we have been occupied with this expensive struggle former adversaries are getting stronger at our mutual expense.

We Americans have a short history. It is hard for us to understand a country with a long history. And in Russia

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everything is long -- their roads are long, their queues are long, their names, church services, novels and their history is long. I think we need to take a little longer view. Seventy years is a drop in the historical bucket for a country that is over a thousand years old. Russia has seen many leaders, many have passed into the mist, but Russia is still there.

I believe that today we should be working with a new and changing Soviet Union to develop a mutually beneficial relationship, one which sees the gradual strengthening of forces which are friendly to the United States and the world: the growing freedom of the press, the broader political participation, the strengthening of universal ethical and religious values and the law as the moral base of society.

In order to achieve this, we need patience and a little perestroika and self-criticism of our own. We must rigorously reexamine our old prejudices and stereotypes, and understand the complex forces and problems at work in the USSR. We need to bring a far more nuanced and compassionate approach to Russian national aspirations and concerns and not tar all of these as being extremist and retrograde as we have a tendency to do now. Perhaps most of all we must strive to get over our often provincial ignorance of some of the most basic facts of Russian history and the complexities of Soviet life and society. Only when we do this can we perhaps start looking down the road to a day when we will not be adversaries, but perhaps even partners -- not enemies, but friends -- as in other periods of history when we once were.

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This may still sound Utopian today -- although less than it did four years ago -- yet it is possible, and perhaps looking at the problems which are coming at us from the rest of the world, even necessary for us both.

Before we too quickly dismiss such a possibility let us think for a moment about what has happened already. Who could have predicted, what odds would you have given two years ago that we would be playing baseball and eagerly scanning the front pages of the New York Times for the results of Soviet elections?

President Reagan's favorite Russian proverb was TRUST BUT VERIFY. It is a good principle, but the first word is TRUST. Without that there is nothing to verify.

The bear has gotten up on its hind legs and has started to move quite friskily, ever more insistently tapping out a rhythm that says in the words of Lewis Carroll "Will you, won't you, will you won't you, will you join the dance?" It is time I think, for the Eagle to stop sitting it out, to get up and lift its wings. The movements might look a bit awkward at first, but with the time and practice the result might just be a creditable waltz.

In Russia, this week following Orthodox Easter which fell this past Sunday, is known as "Bright Week" to symbolize the joy of hope returned after a dark season. We should rejoice that today the Russian and other peoples of the Soviet Union are seeking a new relationship between themselves, their government and the rest of the world. In this Easter season of spring, which brings with it the promise of rebirth in both

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nature and man, it is possible to hope, and I do.

As for the future, I would like to leave you with a thought expressed to me by a Russian poet:

"Perhaps we are all witnesses in a gigantic trial whose outcome is determined and yet still hidden from us, but whose outline we can sometimes glimpse as we can sometimes, behind a driving rain, glimpse the silhouettes of angels."

- END -

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