
FOREWORD BY MELVIN A. GOODMAN

History, including the history of international relations, inexorably moves forward, and students of history must have autobiographies and memoirs that look back in order to understand the past and anticipate the future. Over the past ten years, we have learned a great deal about the rise and fall of the Soviet Union from the memoirs of President Mikhail Gorbachev, Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, and Politburo member Yegor Ligachev, the second most powerful Communist leader during the dramatic changes of the Gorbachev era and one of the last substantial true believers in communism. Such memoirs shed a great deal of light on Soviet policymaking during the Cold War, but they are also selective and self-serving on key issues and do not convey the challenges and frustrations of everyday life in the Soviet system from the bureaucratic trenches. With Ambassador Victor Israelyan's memoir, *On the Battlefields of the Cold War*, we have not only a memoir that provides an inside look at the Soviet foreign ministry but also a searing and probing examination of how the Kremlin conducted its foreign policy and how it treated its own diplomats and policy players.

Ambassador Israelyan's rich and distinguished career as a physician, diplomat, scholar, and professor spanned more than five decades until Foreign Minister Shevardnadze forced his retirement with a series of trumped-up charges. During the 1970s and 1980s, Israelyan was one of the Soviet Union's leading diplomatic specialists in arms control and disarmament. In 1973, as a member of Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's staff, he served on a small task force that attended Politburo meetings during the October War between Israel and the nations of Egypt and Syria. His account of the war, published in 1995, was the first Soviet record of crisis management inside the Kremlin. *Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War* remains the best documentary evidence available to scholars and students of what happened inside the Politburo during times of crisis; it recorded Soviet assessments of United States policy that were free of dogma and Politburo exchanges on international security that were devoid of Marxist-Leninist

ideology. We learned a great deal about Soviet foreign policymaking from this book.

Ambassador Israelyan was unlike his foreign ministry colleagues in many ways. He was not Russian but Armenian; he lacked the typical distrust of the West and was more open to the international community. He was a diplomat and a scholar immersed in the complexities of international discourse and partial to the use of diplomacy to solve international problems. He was critical of the confrontational style of the Soviet foreign ministers of the Stalin and Khrushchev eras and he was pragmatic in his own approach to problem solving. Israelyan believed in arms control and encouraged Soviet acceptance of confidence-building measures and verification to achieve breakthroughs in disarmament. He was part of a small community of arms control specialists in the foreign ministry who were largely unknown to anyone in the United States, except the arms control community in Washington.

In this fascinating memoir of his career, we learn about the trials and tribulations of a high-level Soviet bureaucrat who has his own views on foreign policy and who was present during the worst days of the Cold War and the beginning of the transition that led to a series of arms control agreements and the loosening of Soviet control over Eastern Europe. Israelyan occasionally tried to offer his own views on important foreign policy matters, but his foreign counterparts warned him that they wanted the official Soviet position, not the unconventional views of an enlightened Soviet official. And not being wise to the world of espionage and clandestine collection of information, he was surprised to be upbraided by his Soviet masters who had learned that he had been candidly critical of Soviet actions in some of his remarks to foreign dignitaries.

At his best, Ambassador Israelyan provides authoritative views of the major turning points in Soviet foreign policy. He describes the key events that led to the increased diplomatic isolation of the Soviet Union, the decline in the credibility of the Soviet leadership, and the worsening of Soviet-American relations. He recalls his surprise in learning from future Soviet party boss and then Soviet ambassador to Hungary Yuri Andropov that the uprising in Budapest had not been organized and orchestrated by the Western powers. In tracing the Soviet invasions of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979, Israelyan refers to Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan as major turning points that created significant cynicism within the Soviet apparatus itself, with key bureaucratic players never understanding the need for the use of military force near Soviet borders.

If his doubts about Hungary were latent in 1956, he became more vocal in 1968. In a particularly revealing chapter, Ambassador Israelyan describes the invasion of Afghanistan as the event that both marked the “doom of our Soviet socialist system” because of its misguided “urge to impose on other peoples an alien and unacceptable political regime” and proved to be a watershed in Soviet-American relations, sharply dividing the previous decade of détente from the ensuing years of containment and confrontation.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that Israelyan was surprised by the key events in Afghanistan, not attaching any importance to the coup in Kabul in 1978 and even challenging his diplomatic colleagues who argued that “there was great trouble in store” for Moscow in Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the following year was a greater surprise to Israelyan, but other high-ranking Soviet officials were also out of the decision-making loop. Serendipitously, the ambassador was hospitalized in December 1979, when the Soviet invasion took place, and the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, was in a neighboring ward. The news of the invasion shocked both of these senior diplomats, which meant that the Kremlin had not even bothered to consult its ambassador in Washington for his view of the invasion’s impact on the Carter administration and Soviet-American relations. Both men were alarmed by this fateful decision, not knowing that the Politburo had made a complete strategic reappraisal in the fall of 1979 and that a rump group of Politburo members then decided in November on invasion before year’s end.

The October War of 1973 was another turning point of sorts in Soviet-American relations because the unexpected U.S. declaration of a nuclear alert near war’s end dealt a major blow to Soviet-American relations and introduced the nuclear card for the first time since the Cuban missile crisis. Ambassador Israelyan has written about the war elsewhere (*Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War*, 1995), but here he adds important details to his earlier work. He provides a candid assessment of the Politburo’s criticism of the Arab decision to go to war and its shock at the decision of the United States to issue a nuclear alert (Defense Condition III). Egypt and Syria had clearly defied the Kremlin in resorting to war, and the paramount consideration for the Politburo was to ensure that the war did not damage Soviet-American relations. (Washington, for that matter, was unhappy with the start of the war because it began in the midst of the Watergate crisis for the Nixon administration.)

Some Soviet officials actually wanted to match the U.S. alert status, par-

ticularly KGB chief Andropov and Defense Minister Andrei Grechko, but Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev and Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin prevailed and simply failed to respond to the U.S. nuclear alert, which had been the responsibility of national security adviser Henry Kissinger and not President Richard Nixon. Israelyan's memoir provides an arresting commentary on the limits and constraints on Soviet policy in the Middle East during a major crisis. His analysis is a useful antidote to those Americans who exaggerated the ability of the Soviet Union to project power in the Third World during the Cold War.

At a celebration commemorating the October Revolution, which happened to coincide with the end of the October War, Ambassador Israelyan noticed that the only Soviet official who did not join the circle offering congratulations to the leadership for the solution to the crisis was Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, who clearly believed that the United States had intimidated Moscow, resorting to the threat of force—even nuclear force—to win a major diplomatic triumph. Thus, the ambassador had identified a future opponent of the reforms of the Gorbachev era, since it was Akhromeyev who opposed many of the arms control agreements of the 1980s and the unilateral Soviet troop withdrawal from Central Europe in 1989. In the wake of the abortive coup against President Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991, Marshal Akhromeyev, who was a fan of James Fenimore Cooper and referred to himself as the “last of the Mohicans,” committed suicide when it was certain that the coup would fail.

There is a wonderful humanity to Victor Israelyan's work. He goes behind the major decision-makers in the Kremlin and offers perceptive biographic and demographic profiles of the men (there were no women) in the foreign ministry and the policy apparatus. In addition to impressionistic portraits of such key figures as foreign ministers Aleksandr Shepilov, Gromyko, Shevardnadze, and Andrei Kozyrev, there are descriptions of the bureaucratic landscape, including a new generation of foreign ministry officials who were brought in following the death of Josef Stalin and those who were introduced with the surprising arrival of Shevardnadze in 1985. Ambassador Israelyan provides a candid description of the foreign ministry's unhappy reaction to the Shevardnadze appointment, believing that a rank amateur from the Caucasus would not be able to keep Soviet diplomacy on the tracks. His opposition to the Shevardnadze appointment may have played some role in the way Shevardnadze forced the resignation of his fellow country-

man from Tbilisi, Georgia, although the ouster was far more ugly and tawdry than circumstances required.

For the first time, we begin to see the complex demographics within the foreign ministry during the Cold War, which included a liberal and pro-Western community that supported arms control negotiations with the United States in the 1970s and 1980s and the Prague Spring reform movement in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. Israelyan introduces us to such “Americanists” as Dobrynin, Roland Timerbayev, Oleg Grinevsky, Yuly Vorontsov, and Alexander Bessmertnykh, who at one time or another held important positions in the Soviet embassy in Washington or with the Soviet delegation at the United Nations and opposed such Soviet decisions as the deployment of SS-20 missiles and the invasion of Afghanistan. All of them were communists but also pragmatists, who wanted to remove ideology from decision-making in Soviet national security policy.

Finally, Victor Israelyan’s *On the Battlefields of the Cold War* is a work of great courage and honesty in a field that is often dominated by self-aggrandizing and self-serving accounts of international security. The ambassador is willing to acknowledge policy blunders in the Soviet system and personal faults in his own conduct; he is an excellent student of diplomatic history and also records American errors in judgment along the way. With a non-traditional background in medicine, perhaps it is no surprise that the ambassador is sensitive to the need for greater international stability and security for all nations. As an author of a dozen books in Russian and English on diplomacy and international relations, Israelyan has a sense of balance and fairness that is the hallmark of a professional historian. Finally, with great clarity and eloquence, he has provided a memoir that opens the door to nearly fifty years of diplomacy between the two superpowers that dominated the period of the Cold War. He describes himself as an “ordinary civil servant who labored in the trenches in the middle tier of the Soviet apparatus,” but his memoir is the rewarding work of an extraordinary and humane man who helps us to understand some of the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the international instability that followed in its wake.

