
PREFACE

As God would have it, I lived in a country that was in the midst of a tragic social-economic experiment. The goal was to build a new society, a society with neither poor nor rich, oppressed nor oppressors, where justice prevailed over inequality. The country that declared such noble goals achieved great accomplishments. By putting the lives of 27 million of its sons and daughters on the altar of victory, it helped to rid the world of the menace of fascism. It was the first country to successfully explore space. So powerful did this country become that by the latter half of the twentieth century it was recognized as one of only two superpowers determining the face of the modern world. At the same time, monstrous crimes were committed in this very same country; monstrous crimes against its own citizens, including mass murders and terrible infringements of human rights and freedoms. This is what gave rise to the label “evil empire”—a label that reverberated with shame throughout my country. I personally felt this shame, knowing that I shared the responsibility for the crimes and violations.

Nonetheless, I was a believer in the experiment, and to the best of my ability I served the system that had been created to support that experiment. Over the course of my forty years of service in the Foreign Ministry I gained a reputation among my colleagues and partners in negotiations as a knowledgeable diplomat. My service was appreciated highly; I was awarded nearly twenty governmental orders and medals, a state prize, ranks, and other decorations. Hundreds of times I sat in conference halls, negotiating at tables beneath a plaque bearing the name of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and I always felt proud and honored to be representing the interests of such a great country. In the end, however, the Soviet experiment collapsed under the weight of its contradictions. And the irony for me was that I was a casualty of these contradictions, forced to resign in shame after having always tried to fulfill my duties.

I resolutely oppose those of my countrymen, including my fellow diplomats, who shift responsibility for the Soviet evil exclusively to the leaders. No doubt the leaders must bear a lion’s share of the responsibility, since

they were, so to speak, directing the show, but the others—party functionaries, bureaucrats, diplomats, military officers, scientists, artists, and more—participated in this show. Surely some played greater roles than others, and many did so out of fear, but it is important that each Soviet citizen realize and admit his or her share of the responsibility.

Memoirs are worthless if their authors attempt to present themselves as angels. I hope, therefore, that I do not belong to the unfortunately large group of former Soviet functionaries (party and governmental “apparatchiks,” bureaucrats, diplomats, and others), who have written memoirs in which they try to convince their readers that during their sometimes stellar careers they always saw the errors and blunders of the Soviet leadership. Some of them belonged to the very leadership they now criticize, and yet we are supposed to believe that they apparently stood firm against these errors, but alas in vain. This seeming opposition did not prevent these men from climbing the ladder of service, for some were elected as delegates to the Supreme Soviet, some became members of the Party’s Central Committee, and some even became CPSU secretaries, being assigned to prestigious and important posts all along the way. In actuality, any noticeable opposition would not have been tolerated and would have resulted in strict punishment in the totalitarian Soviet state. Some authors, for example, former CPSU functionaries, claim to have sympathized with the “Prague Spring” and yet they advanced in the apparatus precisely because they had participated in its suppression. After the disintegration of the USSR, Politburo members who once headed the KGB in Soviet republics claimed to be champions of human rights and fighters for democratic freedoms. We shall leave it on their conscience.

It is important that we have firsthand accounts from those who held the highest leadership positions in the Soviet Union. Less recognized, but equally interesting and important, are the ordinary civil servants who labored in the trenches—the middle tier of the Soviet State apparatus. I myself belonged to this tier; and therefore, it is what I have concentrated on in writing my memoirs.

In the summer of 1991 I was invited by the Fulbright Foundation to teach a course on Soviet foreign policy at Pennsylvania State University. I accepted this invitation with pleasure; but when I left Moscow for the United States in the days of the August 1991 coup, I could not imagine that I was leaving a country that soon would cease to exist. So sudden was the Soviet collapse that I had to alter the course I was teaching at the time. Continuing to hold

forth on the foreign policy of a nonexistent state somehow seemed inappropriate. In the years that followed I was invited many times to lecture and to participate in conferences. Invariably, the one subject I was always asked to speak about was the Soviet collapse. Why had it happened? Even today I find it impossible to fully explain the fall of the Soviet state. I do not even attempt such an explanation here. Rather my aspiration is to bring to life, as best I can, one part of the Soviet experience to which I devoted all my life. I cannot claim to be objective but I have tried to be as evenhanded as possible in the hope that future observers will have one more piece of the puzzle as they seek to understand the tragedy that was the Soviet experiment.

On the pages of this book, I mention many names—friends and colleagues, diplomats of the former Soviet Union and other countries. I am grateful for their cooperation and even confrontation during the Cold War years. Writing this book, I enjoyed the essential help and friendship of a young American, Peter Potter, my editor at Penn State Press. Peter and my son Karen made possible the publication of this book.

