

Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is the culmination of an ambitious 15-year project to open up the previously secret Cold War files of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as those of the United States and its allies, and to use those primary sources to produce a new multi-lingual, multi-archival, multi-national history covering the most important flashpoints in the Soviet bloc and the ultimate, remarkable end of the Cold War.

We chose for the title of this book a revealing quotation from the Canadian scholar Jacques Levesque, who so presciently—well before many crucial primary sources were available—defined the key historical and analytical questions about the denouement of the Cold War in his book, *The Enigma of 1989* (University of California Press, 1997). As Professor Levesque wrote on the second page:

Very little in the Soviet legacy is remembered, in the current context, as having been positive. With some irony, the way the USSR separated itself from its empire and its own peaceful end may seem to be its most beneficial contributions to history. These episodes are, in any case, masterpieces of history.

By using this wonderful phrase as our title, we certainly do not claim that our own work belongs on the masterpiece spectrum, but rather that the documents, dialogue, and analysis presented in this book do answer some of the most important questions that Professor Levesque posed and that we used to frame our own research agenda. That agenda grew from our close collaboration with many partners who were already prying loose the historical record throughout Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the former Soviet Union. Our partners sought with us to understand the crises of communism—primarily during the years 1953, 1956, 1968, 1980–1981—that culminated in the miraculous year of 1989. And yet it was exactly the repressive experience of those earlier flashpoints that made the peaceful conclusion of the Cold War seem so unlikely and—when it happened—such a masterpiece.

The books that precede this one in the series of National Security Archive Cold War Readers¹ through CEU Press tell the stories of those earlier crises in documents, and provide indispensable contextual history for the phenomenon

¹ Ostermann, *Uprising in East Germany*; Békés, Byrne and Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*; Navrátil et al., *The Prague Spring 1968*; Paczkowski and Byrne, *From Solidarity to Martial Law*; Mastny and Byrne, *A Cardboard Castle*?

of 1989. In the introductions and acknowledgments of those books, the careful reader will find the names of those on whose shoulders we stood—scholars, researchers, archivists, translators, former dissidents, former officials—all of whom helped in some way to open the secret files, bear witness to the events, provide explanations, atmosphere and analysis for the primary sources, and produce extraordinary cross-fertilized collections as well as “supernova” conferences that made headlines around the world. These books and the research projects they grew from led us to the present volume. Our partners in each of those adventures in scholarly spelunking urged us to take on the 1989 revolutions, which resulted in our organizing, co-sponsoring or participating in international conferences in venues from Potsdam to Timisoara, and from Providence, Rhode Island, to Saratov, Russia. We owe our thanks to the visionary philanthropists who underwrote these conferences and our work over these many years, especially the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the Central European University, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and the Ford Foundation.

The scholarly meeting that is at the center of this book was both the chronological mid-point and truly a programmatic high point for the overall project. It followed our joint efforts to dramatically expand the historical record on each of the crises of what our Polish colleagues call “The System”—meaning the Stalinist regime imposed on Eastern Europe. Our partners from the region in particular were most curious about what exactly the superpowers had been up to in 1989, when Poland held free elections, Hungary opened its borders, the Berlin Wall fell, and the Czechoslovaks sent a political prisoner to the presidency. Why did the Soviet Union not intervene with force to stop the revolutions of 1989? When exactly did the Soviet Union decide—and did it do so explicitly—to renounce the Brezhnev Doctrine of intervention in Eastern Europe? How could a system founded on repression give up its empire largely without violence? What was the Gorbachev strategy towards the socialist camp, and how did it change over time? What happened to the U.S. policy of differentiation, which made Stalinist Romania into America’s closest friend in the region? What was the role of the United States in Moscow’s decisions, and in the multitude of interactions with East Europeans, both dissidents and officials, in the late 1980s? Was the possibility of a superpower condominium ever considered, as in the Yalta discussions at the end of World War II?

To address these questions, we gathered together a handful of the most well-informed eyewitnesses to the superpowers’ roles in the events of 1989—top Soviet officials Anatoly Chernyaev, Georgy Shakhnazarov, and Sergei Tarasenko, and senior U.S. officials Jack Matlock and Douglas MacEachin (their biographies are given in the “Main Actors” section of this book). We surrounded them with inquisitive scholars from Central and Eastern Europe, the former USSR, the United States and Canada, and a thick briefing book of the best documents available at the time from all sides, and engaged them in a mutual interrogation. The site of the encounter was the Musgrove conference center on St. Simons Island, Georgia.

This book centers around the three days of dialogue that took place at Musgrove in May 1998. At its heart is a slightly edited version of the transcript of the discussions. By “edited” we mean primarily that we have reduced the input of the scholars. Because these sessions have remarkable historical value as oral history, especially since one of the leading participants, Georgy Shakhnazarov, has since passed on, our bias was naturally to keep the words of the veterans intact. We also cut discussions that took us too far beyond 1989—for instance, to 1991 and the fracturing of the Soviet Union—or that inconclusively debated issues like the Politburo’s foreknowledge of the April 1989 Tbilisi violence, which the primary sources have now put to rest.

Since the Musgrove meeting, we have acquired thousands of pages of additional primary sources that answer many of the questions posed in the dialogue, and flesh out dramatically the accounts given by the veterans. The very best of that documentation is published here, most of it for the first time in English, and much of it for the first time in any language. Simultaneously with this publication, we are launching a Web companion site at www.nsarchive.org, which includes a more substantial piece of the historical record.

We consider the documents published in this volume to be the “greatest hits” of the much larger universe of sources that help us understand the end of the Cold War. Scholars have already pointed out the irony that “historians now have available, at least on the Soviet side, more primary sources on the end than on the beginning or the middle of the Cold War.”² Our selection for this book emphasizes Soviet documents from the highest levels, both because of their relative rarity and because of the unique role Mikhail Gorbachev played as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in a highly centralized system. We sought to include the interactive documents—the notes of Politburo meetings and diplomatic sessions, the memoranda of conversations, the advisory opinions—which argue for particular positions or roads not taken, rather than the one-dimensional formal protocols or decision directives which are usually short on substance and long on bureaucratic jargon. We also looked for evidence of what these leaders said to each other in private talks or closed-door sessions. And we focused on documents that were illustrative of issues that came up over and over, and therefore were representative of the larger body of available documents too lengthy to include here.

We selected these materials from the National Security Archive’s collection of tens of thousands of pages of sources on the end of the Cold War, which in turn were amassed from archives all over Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as from U.S. government and Western European sources. Appended to each document in the book is a specific source citation, but here we want to provide some context for those citations, and give credit where it is due.

² Painter, “The End of the Cold War,” 491.

Probably the most important single source for this volume has been the Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow, which began publishing its primary materials as early as 1993, including transcripts of summit meetings such as Malta and Reykjavik. During the 1990s, the Gorbachev Foundation was a haven for scholars, providing unique access to documents as well as to eyewitnesses, many of whom were writing their own memoirs and commentaries on the Gorbachev period. In 2006, the Foundation published an extremely useful edited volume of transcripts from the Politburo meetings of the Gorbachev era.³ Although current political and archival conditions in the Russian Federation have severely limited access to this kind of material, the Foundation deserves our thanks for making possible so much of the new scholarship on the end of the Cold War.

We also relied on the extraordinary generosity and intellectual openness of Anatoly Chernyaev, who donated to the National Security Archive his historic diary of his years in the Central Committee, including six years at Gorbachev's side. Anatoly Sergeyevich's notes of Politburo discussions, of brainstorming sessions with Gorbachev and his advisers, and of the general secretary's meetings with foreign leaders—on file at the Gorbachev Foundation—have proven invaluable for our efforts to document, analyze and understand the dramatic events of the late 1980s.

Georgy Khosroyevich Shakhnazarov not only contributed his insights to the Musgrove dialogue, but shared with us key memos he had written to Gorbachev. We also found highly relevant documentation in the collection amassed by the historian and former general, Dmitry Volkogonov, which his family donated to the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., and in the "Fond 89" collection (based originally on the records of the trial of the Soviet Communist Party in the early 1990s), which was published through the collaboration of the Hoover Institution (Stanford University) with the publishing firm Chadwyck-Healey and the Russian Archival Service (*Rosarkhiv*). Professor Jacques Levesque donated from his personal collection the planning memos produced in early 1989 by the Central Committee's International Department and by the Foreign Ministry.

In a pioneering example of highest-level openness, former West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl took the initiative in 1998 to publish a large volume of German documentation of his conversations with other leaders about the end of the Cold War and German unification.⁴ Instead of the usual 30- or 40-year rules for release of documents, this 10-year standard would revolutionize the use of primary sources for contemporary history, not to mention accountability for leaders. Fortunately, in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe, such openness is now the rule for records of that era, and our partners at the Institute for Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences; the Cold War Research Group and the 1956 Institute in Hungary; and the Czechoslovak Documentation

³ Chernyaev, *V Politburo TsK KPSS*.

⁴ Küsters, *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*.

Centre and Institute for Contemporary History in Prague all provided us with remarkable primary sources from those countries' Politburo and Central Committee records, opposition movements, and secret police files, a selection of which are included in this book and all of which informed our research.

As always, we warmly acknowledge our partnership in exploring documentation from "the other side" of the Cold War with Christian Ostermann and the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC.

The National Security Archive's trademark approach to American documentation focuses on the U.S. Freedom of Information Act, and during the course of this investigation we filed hundreds if not thousands of FOIA and declassification requests with agencies of the U.S. government as well as the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (Simi Valley, California) and the George Bush Presidential Library (College Station, Texas). Many of those requests are still pending today, but the ones already processed have produced such useful materials as the U.S. transcripts of Reagan–Gorbachev summits and a wide range of CIA intelligence analyses of the Soviet Union. We are particularly indebted to the archivists of the presidential libraries for making these documents available to us, and to Catherine Nielsen, formerly of the National Security Archive, who handled the organization's numerous related FOIA requests.

Special thanks to Lisa Thompson for preparing the index.

The essays that precede the Musgrove dialogue and the documents in this volume seek to answer as explicitly as we can the questions that we and our partners posed at the beginning of this project. How did the Cold War end so peacefully? What were the roles of the superpowers? Since this book does not attempt to document the actual course of the revolutions of 1989, but rather to explain the behavior of the superpowers, the two essays take their frames from Moscow and Washington, respectively.

For Moscow, this collection presents the most conclusive evidence to date that the Soviet leadership made the critical choices about Eastern Europe much earlier than historians previously understood, that Gorbachev's vision for Europe—"the common European home"—drove his decisions and tactics for Eastern Europe, and that the use of force to preserve the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe was never an option for Soviet reformers. Among other major findings, this volume shows how economic factors such as the falling price of oil influenced the Kremlin's reassessment of the strategic value of Eastern Europe, as Moscow came to see the "fraternal allies" more and more as burdens rather than assets. The evidence here reinforces arguments that the power of ideas was more important in guiding the Kremlin's new thinking than concerns over the balance of power or the realist conception of national interests.

For Washington, this book argues that U.S. engagement with its traditional Soviet adversary—especially that of President Reagan with Gorbachev in their discussions of nuclear weapons—was more significant than U.S. pressure (defense buildups, proxy wars, or anti-communist rhetoric) in contributing to the

major changes in Kremlin policies in the late 1980s. By relieving the Soviet sense of threat, the Reagan–Gorbachev discourse on arms reductions and the abolition of nuclear weapons reinforced Gorbachev’s “new thinking” mindset and enabled faster progress on reform both domestically and in foreign policy. In contrast to the interactivity between Washington and Moscow during the Reagan years, the transition to the George H.W. Bush administration was in fact the second coming of the “hawks,” clustered around a cautious president, and the resulting “pause” in U.S.–Soviet relations during 1989 left a vacuum in Eastern Europe into which the dissidents and the reform communists rushed. In making possible that outcome, the pause—more a consequence of presidential tentativeness than White House grand strategy—helped change the world, and thus was greatly, if unwittingly, beneficial. But it had significant costs as well, weakening Gorbachev’s political standing at home and leading the players to miss opportunities for dramatic arms reductions and the integration of the USSR (and later Russia) into Europe.

Our real purpose in preparing this book is to encourage and guide further scholarship on these issues, since we see this collection as a starting point for much more work. For us, the dialogue, the documents and the analyses show what 10 years of research have added to our knowledge—from the point at which the original Musgrove dialogue took place, all the way to 2009, this 20th anniversary of the year of miracles and “masterpieces of history.”

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