

Preface and Acknowledgments

This book is the culmination of 20 years of research that started in the early 1990s when the Gorbachev Foundation published the Russian-language transcripts of the Reykjavik and Malta summits with Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, respectively. It took years (in the case of Reagan) and decades (in the case of Bush) to get the American transcripts declassified, but along the way, the authors gathered thousands and thousands of pages of the preparatory talks on both sides, the internal policy debates, the recommendations to their bosses by key players ranging from the CIA to the Soviet military-industrial commission, the mid-stream all-nighters by subordinates during the summits, the after-action reports both official and unofficial (as in diaries), and the makings of a truly interactive documentary history of these extraordinary conversations that ended the Cold War.

We call this book “the last superpower summits” not only because there is only one superpower today, but also because it seems to us that the high level and scope of the dialogue between these world leaders was unprecedented and appears to be largely missing in today’s world. Reading the transcripts, the memcons, the telcons, the letters, one almost gets nostalgic for the quality of the conversation, which briefly reached the level of global partnership on settling regional issues, and reflected a remarkable degree of understanding of mutual interests. There were certainly elements of manipulation, going both ways, especially around the unification of Germany in NATO and the first Gulf War, that left resentments which plague international relations even today. But the meeting of the minds fairly leaps from the pages of these extraordinary documents, which more than most, “speak for themselves,” for they are mostly the spoken word.

This book is the story of an extended conversation made possible by the change of leadership on the Soviet side in 1985, and the eagerness on both sides to engage (and be seen to engage!). The documents show significant differences between the two American administrations in their connections with Gorbachev, and much more continuity on the Soviet side.

We conclude in this book that the summit conversations drove a process of learning on both sides. Early on, Geneva 1985 and Reykjavik 1986 reduced Moscow’s sense of threat and unleashed Reagan’s inner abolitionist. Later on, Malta 1989 and Washington 1990 helped dampen any superpower sparks that might have flown in a time of revolutionary change in Europe, set off by Gorbachev and by Eastern Europeans (Solidarity, dissidents, reform Communists, and emigrants, in pretty much that order). And at the very end (almost too late) the summits and their “arms race in reverse” actually dramatically reduced the nuclear

threat with the Bush administration's September 1991 unilateral tactical nuclear withdrawals that were rapidly matched by Gorbachev—and thank goodness. (This underappreciated success story will be the center of our next book—on the Nunn-Lugar program that helped denuclearize the former Soviet Union in the 1990s.)

The summit talks between Gorbachev and Reagan, and later with Bush, covered the world in a way that is impossible to imagine today, certainly not between the United States and Russia, and not even with the NATO allies or others who are nowhere close to equals. Here in the last superpower summits the caliber of conversation is striking, even if one superpower was a declining equal. The documents feature no small irony in that the core Bush administration advisers in 1989 such as Brent Scowcroft and Robert Gates did not actually think the Soviet Union was declining, and at least at first saw Gorbachev as simply the new Brezhnev, just better at PR.

We documented that Bush attitude, the resulting Gorbachev frustration, and the revolutionary events of 1989 in our previous book, *“Masterpieces of History”: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989*. There we also published for the first time in English the Soviet transcripts of the Malta summit; so here, we use the American memoranda of conversation instead (they are almost completely congruent, and the few differences we highlight in our headnotes). The serious researcher will read the two books together, because we did not repeat those documents here, even when they were most profoundly on point. Similarly, a serious reader will consult the National Security Archive's online series of annual postings, translated by Anna Melyakova and edited by Svetlana Savranskaya, of the invaluable diary of Anatoly Chernyaev—so often an eyewitness to these summits.

Both *Summits* and *Masterpieces* are tips of the iceberg when it comes to the primary sources that the Archive has obtained on the end of the Cold War. The authors have published since 2005 (the 20th anniversary of the Geneva summit) a series of online briefing books documenting each of the summits, and our hundreds of Freedom of Information Act requests and Mandatory Declassification Review requests over these years have pried loose from government vaults dozens of linear feet of related primary materials.

The real problem of this book is the embarrassment of riches. We built this manuscript over five years to a size that far exceeded the reality check that constrained our publishers. At one point, our manuscript pages mounted over the 3,000 mark, and the last few months before sending the manuscript off have been death by a thousand cuts. We groaned every time we eliminated yet another favorite document, so we owe the reader an explanation of what we cut and what we kept, and why.

Mainly, we privileged the actual words that Gorbachev, Reagan and Bush said to each other. This volume contains the American or the Russian version of almost every word they said at the summits, at least as far as the interpreters and the note takers managed to capture them. Going through these conversations

makes the reader a fly on the wall, listening in at lakeside Geneva, or beside the bay in Reykjavik, or on the cruise ship at Malta, inside Top Secret discussions whose transcripts resided in locked safes until the Freedom of Information Act (on the American side) and the Gorbachev Foundation (on the Russian side) released them from bondage.

The reader will also find here copious excerpts from the transcripts of the foreign ministers—George Shultz, Eduard Shevardnadze, James Baker, and Alexander Bessmertnykh—especially when they go face to face with the president or the general secretary. These talks often reached levels of candor that even the summits would envy, and certainly shaped every summit. Also here are extracts from the contemporaneous records written by close observers of the summits, especially Gorbachev's foreign policy adviser Anatoly Chernyaev, but also from President Reagan's and from President Bush's diaries, which we quote frequently in the essays that introduce each summit.

What is missing here for the most part are the intelligence briefings and the policy documents that the two governments generated around the summits, and that so informed both leaders. On the U.S. side, for example, the national security decision directives that relate to the summits are widely available, including in the Digital National Security Archive published by ProQuest, so even though President Reagan (for one) occasionally read them out loud at a summit, this volume leaves them out except in his words. Similarly, the formal Politburo protocols are also useful, but their language is far more stilted than Gorbachev's conversation ever was, so we have favored the latter. Likewise, even though we obtained hundreds of pages of talking points and speech drafts on both sides, we cut them in favor of the actual words spoken.

In our headnotes and particularly the essays introducing each of the summits, we have made our biases and our analyses plain. We also give the reader the documents on which we are basing those conclusions. Judge for yourself. We come away from the documents with strong feelings about missed opportunities, about blindness on both sides, about the ways the world would be a safer place today had the summits included more empathy. Yet we also marvel at the ways the summits actually talked the Cold War to an end.

We owe extraordinary debts to so many others for the making of this book. First of all, we thank Anatoly Chernyaev and the Gorbachev Foundation, whose early publication of summits transcripts dating back to 1993 has set a standard for foreign policy openness that all governments should emulate. Anatoly Sergeyevich subsequently played a key role in the systematic publication of the Foundation's records, not only memcons but Politburo protocols and Central Committee memoranda, and other invaluable materials. Not least, Anatoly Sergeyevich donated his personal diary to the National Security Archive to serve as a permanent eyewitness record of these years at the end of the Cold War, and we have counted on him for his perceptive analysis and generous descriptions of atmosphere and context. At the Gorbachev Foundation, our special thanks go to Vladlen Loginov, the unsung hero of the documentary record, who edits

the grand and meticulously compiled *Sobranie sochinenii*, which constitutes the most complete published record of the Gorbachev era. Another Gorbachev adviser, Andrei Grachev, was always helpful with his knowledge, his insights, and his books and personal archive.

We also owe an intellectual debt to Jack Matlock, eyewitness, key player, and acute analyst, whose files at the Reagan Library hold a treasure trove of primary sources, and whose books provide essential context and analysis on both the American and Soviet sides of the summits. Rodric Braithwaite, the British ambassador to the Soviet Union, always gave us support and insightful advice, along with access to his diaries and cables. We also thank David Hoffman, whose book *The Dead Hand* and thoughtful comments and advice provided a source of inspiration, in addition to his donation of documents, Mel Leffler for his always stimulating questions and ideas, Mary Sarotte for many in-depth conversations about German unification, and William Taubman, whose forthcoming biography of Gorbachev will become the standard in the field. Among the academics whose books were invaluable to us and which we consulted repeatedly are Archie Brown, Robert English, Ray Garthoff and Frances FitzGerald. We benefitted from so much research by those who looked at the subject of the end of the Cold War before us that it is impossible to name them all, but this book could not have materialized without them.

We appreciate all the archival help we received at the Reagan and Bush libraries, especially from Robert Holzweiss at Bush and his superlative records manager, Zachary Roberts. At the Reagan Library, Shelley Williams was always helpful and welcoming, as were the many archivists and FOIA officers who worked on our endless requests. At both institutions, we are indebted to the prolific FOIA and MDR filers like Keren Yarhi-Milo, Jason Saltoun-Ebin, and the team of graduate students who worked with Jeffrey Engel (then at Texas A&M)—these researchers performed a great service not just to us, but to the public, because anybody's request that opens a file benefits all future researchers. Professor Engel and his team not only helped open but also then digitized key files including the Bush memcons and telcons to the benefit of all researchers. We are also grateful to the wonderful staff of the Hoover Institution Library, where we consulted the Katayev collection and the diaries of Stepanov-Mamaladze.

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of breakthrough documentary volumes, and editor Linda Kunos has always improved them. Longtime CEU Rector John Shattuck, the original chair of the Archive's board of directors, made the partnership especially robust, together with István Rév, the head of the Open Society Archives.

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These last superpower summits, the conversations that ended the Cold War, are now finally on the record, from both sides, just in time to mark the 25 years that have passed since the Soviet Union went out of existence in December 1991. This book should remind us about contingency, about choice, about accident and coincidence, about the way the Cold War ended long before the Soviet Union did, and about the ways American policy tried to keep the Soviet Union together (contrary to current myths). This book has lessons to teach us about dialogue, about empathy, about mutual security. Most importantly, these historic actors (one was a professional, as well) come alive in their own words, and take us back to that time when human civilization hovered on an existential brink. These three men, Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush, walked us back from that nuclear brink, and this is their story, as they said it at the time, in their secret conversations, to each other. Just listen.

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