

Part I

Moving Out of Bipolarity

Chapter 1

U.S. Soviet Policy in the Cold War's Last Years

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One of the questions that continues to hang over the Cold War battlefield thirty years after the smoke lifted is why the United States did not do more to “help Gorbachev” in those last years, when he was so obviously ushering in amazing changes for the better in Soviet policies, in U.S.-Soviet relations, and in international relations generally.

A large part of the answer is that the question simply did not arise for most U.S. policymakers. The reason had to do with a U.S. policy approach to the Soviet Union that had been put in place through years of arduous internal struggle within the U.S. Government. It was a struggle that dated back to the beginning of the Reagan administration in 1981, long before Gorbachev came to office in March 1985. It was made more acute by the President's distaste for struggle itself and disinclination to arbitrate disputes, but the issues were serious enough to start with. During the Cold War U.S. internal infighting about policy toward the Soviet Union usually had less to do with the Soviet Union itself than with the United States, with whether we had the strength and virtue to stand up to the Soviet threat, and then, after détente and Watergate and Vietnam, the question loomed larger than ever.

The stakes could seem very high: to many participants, they were engaged in a struggle for the American soul. The weapons used could be correspondingly low: cunning abounded, and exile sometimes resulted. But the policy approach fashioned in painful battle by the time Gorbachev came to office had something in it for all major American stakeholders and had achieved something like consensus support in government, including the President, and in political and public opinion. Its integrity seemed more important than any single policy goal. And it also precluded steps designed to influence Soviet domestic politics one way or another, i.e. like steps to “help Gorbachev.”

I was probably the U.S. official involved the longest in Soviet policy during this period: from 1981 to 1985 as Director of the Office of

Soviet Union Affairs (SOV) in the State Department's European and Canadian Affairs Bureau, under Assistant Secretaries Lawrence S. Eagleburger, who had brought me there, and Richard Burt, and under Secretaries Alexander Haig and George P. Shultz. I then served from 1986 to 1989 as the Bureau's Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for relations with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Yugoslavia, still under Shultz and then under Assistant Secretary Rozanne L. Ridgway.

As a mid-level official, I was not privy to a lot of high-level policy-making, but that also protected me from some of the viciousness (although I still remember an incoming Reagan administration appointee's comment on one of our drafts: "Well, well, well, this could have been written in Moscow"). Or I might have learned about a decision at one remove, and only after the body-slamming on the floors above ceased for the night. But I assumed, it turned out correctly, that I was the most senior official dealing with Soviet affairs who could meet with anyone, right or left, without being penalized: hence I could brief ex-Governor Jerry Brown before a trip to Moscow to polish his presidential credentials, or travel to Princeton at George Kennan's invitation to check out a speech he intended to make to the Committee for East-West Accord criticizing the administration. (At the Committee's head table, Kennan's former Moscow boss Averell Harriman, whom I also knew, sat down beside me and whispered hoarsely, "Who the hell are these people?" I explained that they were honest folk opposed to current policy.)

The Reagan administration was also the first in years to have no competing Soviet expert at the Secretary's ear, like Helmut Sonnenfeldt under Kissinger or Marshall Shulman under Cyrus Vance. I was so centrally located in the policy apparatus that even if I was not engaged in every gearbox, my view of what was going on (once I learned the main points) was uniquely comprehensive, and it elevated as the years passed. I was the U.S. notetaker at the last Reagan-Gorbachev session at Reykjavik, which broke up without result. During the 1988 Moscow Summit, I was with Reagan beside the Tsar Cannon in the Kremlin when he was asked about "the Evil Empire," as he had labeled the Soviet Union in 1983. He replied "that was another time, another era;" the hair stood up on the back of my head.

In this essay I would like to describe the emergence of the U.S. policy approach that explains why for most U.S. policymakers the question of “helping Gorbachev” never even came up.

Milestones Along the Way

Probably the clearest way to follow the process it is to point to the milestones along the way.

During Alexander Haig’s eighteen months as Secretary of State the Reagan administration’s priorities were economic recovery (via tax cuts) and rearmament; in foreign affairs it wished to reestablish U.S. world leadership. To do so it needed to follow through on the earlier 1978 NATO dual-track decision responding to Soviet deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) against our European allies: if negotiations on INF with the Soviets were unsuccessful by the end of 1983, we would deploy our own. Both European and American opinion also required continued negotiations with the Soviets on strategic nuclear weapons.

This meant the Reagan administration was stuck with an arms control agenda not of its making; otherwise it had very little incentive for active engagement with the Soviet Union. Some preferred and others (like me) understood the preference for waiting until economic recovery and rearmament were well underway before seriously returning to the table.

In the meantime, public and allied pressure for arms control produced two startling U.S. negotiating proposals from President Reagan: in November 1981, to eliminate INF entirely (“the zero option”); and in March 1982, to reduce strategic ballistic missiles by 50% (requiring disproportionate Soviet cuts because they had more of them). These proposals appealed to Reagan’s instinct for boldness, and they appealed both to those who suspected (or hoped) the Soviets would never accept them and those (like me) who welcomed the structure they helped give the superpower relationship. But it was also an article of faith that we had to get away from the “arms control-centered agenda” favored under Carter (and Nixon and Kissinger before him), and since we were stuck with some arms control anyway, Haig himself preferred to give priority on the agenda to so-called “regional” issues, hotspots like Afghanistan

and Southern Africa and especially Central America, where the Soviets were expanding their influence and threatening U.S. interests.

I was devoted to Al Haig. He had very good policy instincts, and as a former NATO Supreme Commander he totally understood that America's position in the world depended heavily on its alliance relationships. This set him apart from players who were very impatient with Europe and whose unilateralist inclinations were restrained only by the need to be different from President Jimmy Carter, who had left U.S.-European relations under some pretty dark clouds.

I also admired Haig for (figuratively) throwing his body in front of tanks to keep sound policy practice alive during that first heady year of the Reagan administration. We in SOV supported him in that as he prepared for the traditional meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko during the UN General Assembly session: I remember going out on the street to get nuts because the UN Mission that lent us one of its many ambassadors' offices was ill-equipped to supply them. I was with him the next June in New York for another Gromyko meeting, when he abruptly announced his resignation. His special assistant Woody Goldberg told me afterward that Haig had been in high office so long he did not know how to make a telephone call himself. Ever after, in his retirement working for United Technologies, he would greet me at parties with an affectionate "you old scoundrel."

But Haig was also very Kissingerian, and this was not an asset when dealing with the Soviets under Reagan. It may have helped keep him robust in fighting those who wanted to replace diplomacy with ideology, but it hurt when he tried to explain things in Kissingerian terms that did not come naturally to him—he was at his most pungent and accurate when he sounded like he was in a golf club locker room—and I think it may also help explain why he was so hesitant about talking to the Soviets about human rights.¹

One of the issues that had brought Kissinger low was his insistence that human rights were subordinate to issues of war and peace—"human rights too," as he grumbled—and Haig really had trouble talking about them with Gromyko or handing over the lists of divided families or Jewish refuseniks that we put into his briefing books. He would have someone else do it, usually our newly-arrived Moscow Ambassador Arthur Hartman, who came home for the meeting, and since the Soviet

position was still that these were internal Soviet affairs, it could not have helped Hartman's running-in as ambassador. When Haig summed up his last Gromyko meeting for the President, he defined "our full agenda" as "regional security, military security, human rights and other bilateral issues."² Human rights, in other words, were still (just) a bilateral issue.

The first milestones were thus the work of George Shultz. During the first year after he replaced Haig as Secretary in June 1982, his main preoccupations were the Middle East and fashioning a resolution of the imbroglio over the Soviet gas pipeline to Western Europe that had helped eject Haig: it involved intricate negotiations both internally and with our European allies, and it ended only at the Williamsburg Summit in May 1983. (For the rest of his tenure Shultz kept the Williamsburg table, built with the imbedded names of the world leaders in attendance, in his private conference room on the 7th Floor.) As he learned and scouted the policy landscape, Shultz was very careful in approaching the arms control and Soviet Union minefields. But one of his early acts was to redefine our agenda for Soviet relations: in preparing for his first meeting with Gromyko at the UN that September, he separated human rights from bilateral issues and put it at the head of his presentation.

That came as no real surprise: at Westminster that June Reagan had delivered one of his most powerful speeches, mainly on democracy and freedom, but including human rights, and in discussing Soviet affairs with Haig and Shultz he repeatedly returned to cases like the Jewish refusenik Anatoly Shcharansky and the Siberian Pentecostalist families holed up in our Moscow Embassy since 1978. It was only later, when Reagan's diary was published, that we learned that before that first meeting with Gromyko, Reagan had told Shultz it was okay to talk about a summit, but we would need action first on items like permitting Jews to emigrate and letting the Pentecostals go.³

At the time, though, Shultz had simply reordered his talking points: speaking explicitly on behalf of the President, he put human rights first. And when Gromyko grouched that surely these were tenth-priority issues compared to the arms race and reducing arms, Shultz replied that he was disappointed, for "the U.S. view of the world depends on how people are treated."⁴ The exchange marked the emergence in practice of what became the U.S. "four-part agenda" for U.S.-Soviet relations:

human rights, arms control, regional matters, and bilateral issues. And that was the first milestone.

As we prepared Shultz for this initial encounter with a senior Soviet in that summer of 1982, the policy machinery was also engaged in two other exercises that bore on the emerging shape of the U.S. approach. One was contingency planning for our response to Brezhnev's approaching demise. In our discussions there was rapid agreement that we knew too little about the inner workings of Soviet leadership politics to try to play favorites or tailor what we did to unknowable prospects. The second exercise was development of an overall Soviet policy document, to be enshrined in a National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) signed by the President. The President's Soviet affairs advisor, Harvard Professor Richard Pipes, was determined that, in addition to our traditional goals of containing Soviet expansionism and negotiating agreements that were in our interest, the document include language about encouraging Soviet domestic change. Most of the tension in the exercise was over how strong that language should be. In the end it was quite mild—"to promote, within the narrow limits available to us, the process of change." When the document emerged as NSDD 75 the next January, however, just as Pipes returned to Harvard, it explained the point Shultz had made to Gromyko as a national policy judgment: "The U.S. recognizes that Soviet aggressiveness has deep roots in the internal system."⁵

Shultz attended Brezhnev's funeral in November 1982 with Vice President Bush (and me, among a plane full of others), and in the aftermath the Soviets moved quickly to propose renewal of dialogue. Shultz in turn proposed a review of all our agreements still in force with their Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin (which I prepared with his senior aides) and scheduled it for February 15, 1983.

Washington was awash in studies of how to deal with the Soviets under Brezhnev's successor, former KGB chief Yuri Andropov. At one point, on January 13, after sitting through another meeting, Reagan confided to his diary that he "Found I was wishing I could do the negotiating with the Soviets—they cant (sic) be any tougher than (Paramount Studios head) Y. Frank Freeman & (Columbia Pictures head) Harry Cohen" (with whom he had negotiated on behalf of the Screen Actors Guild; "Cohen's" name was actually Harry Cohn).⁶

Shultz cannot have known of Reagan's wish, but he was a close student of Reagan—his prospects as Secretary of State depended on having the confidence of one of our most mysterious Presidents—but he probably suspected. For he then took advantage of a chance White House dinner *à quatre*, with just the two couples present, to suggest bringing Dobrynin over to see Reagan. Reagan accepted and held to it despite internal White House opposition. There, in his first meeting ever with a senior Soviet, even before turning to overall relations and arms control, Reagan started with the Pentecostals in our Moscow Embassy, urging permission for them to go abroad and promising not to crow if they did.⁷ A bit mystified and a bit suspicious, the Soviets decided on a response which we took to be positive, and there followed five months of intricate back and forth (in which I was heavily involved) until, in July, the last family member left the USSR. Reagan did not crow. As Shultz pointed out in his memoir, Reagan's first successful negotiation with the Soviet Union was over a human rights issue.⁸ That was the second milestone.

The third milestone also had its serendipitous side. We now had the makings of an agenda for dealing with the Soviets, but no overarching rationale of the kind required to maintain public and political support for any major policy approach. Meanwhile, Shultz' Mideast preoccupations had obliged him to postpone previously scheduled testimony on U.S.-Soviet relations before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and it was now rescheduled for June 15, 1983. He paid careful attention to this testimony, and as part of his preparations, the previous month he had "reviewed for the president where we stood on each of the items in our four-part agenda."⁹ But the intention was to inform and lay out the makings of a strategy, rather than break new ground. Given this opening to ambiguity, the next day the Soviet beat reporters for the two newspapers mostly read in Washington, Don Oberdorfer of *The Washington Post* and Phil Taubman of *The New York Times*, wrote diametrically opposed interpretations of what Shultz had meant to convey: Oberdorfer heard a "new hard-line note," Taubman a "conciliatory tone."¹⁰

Les Gelb, Taubman's boss at *The New York Times*, called me to ask sardonically what my boss had actually said; so, in putting together the press guidance with Shultz, we had to decide. And what we decided was that after two-plus years in office, our new "realism" and recovered

“strength” vis-à-vis the Soviets had proceeded to the point where it was time for “dialogue.” And that was a third milestone.

That summer of 1983 then saw a mini-thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations, as both sides loosened up and took small steps, inside and outside the ongoing arms control negotiations, to move things forward. As an example on our side, Shultz went to the President directly for a decision—blocked for months by guerrilla warfare from the White House staff—to propose negotiations on our bilateral cultural agreement and opening new consulates in Kiev and New York. He got it: Ronald Reagan was ready to negotiate with the Soviet Union in 1983; he was not waiting for a more amenable Soviet leadership to emerge.

This mini-thaw came to an abrupt end, for a while, at the turn of August and September, when the Soviets shot down Korean Airlines flight 007, with 269 people aboard. But even as we led world outrage at the slaughter of innocent civilian air travelers, Reagan sent our strategic arms negotiators back to Geneva, against the advice of conservatives, including Defense Secretary Weinberger, who were recommending everything from expelling Aeroflot (which we did) to seizing all Soviet assets. And he did so even before returning to Washington from a California vacation. The message was that arms control negotiations were in the U.S. national interest, and should be pursued short of truly catastrophic reasons to abort.

The rest of that “hot autumn” was devoted to the struggle over deploying U.S. INF in Europe; absent a negotiated solution, we deployed; and it was the Soviets who walked out of all arms control negotiations. The effect was to put us into the 1984 U.S. election year. Presidential election years are times for stocktaking rather than bold new policies. But the message had been given, and that was the fourth milestone.

At the end of the summer Pipes was finally replaced as Reagan’s Soviet affairs advisor by the dean of Foreign Service Soviet experts, Jack F. Matlock, Jr. (who went on to finish his career as U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, his fourth assignment there, in the USSR’s very last years). He had been named earlier, but was limited to intermittent spells at the White House until he could leave his post as U.S. Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, which helped account for the rambunctiousness of

his NSC staff subordinates while he was away. Matlock restored some order to the NSC approach and some harmony to the U.S. Government approach, and he instituted what amounted to little seminars for Reagan on Russian culture and history, with scholars like Suzanne Massie and Professor Nina Tumarkin of Wellesley. Reagan was a man who thought symbolically and expressed himself most easily in parables, and these sessions made Russia and Russians real for him, probably for the first time in his life. In our presidential system that made a difference to policy. I was told that new National Security Advisor Robert (Bud) McFarlane had asked his Northern Virginia church congregation to pray for Massie on one of her Moscow trips.

On the policy side, election year 1984 opened with a January 17 speech by the President on U.S.-Soviet relations, inspired and (probably) mainly drafted by Matlock. The three great goals of 1981 had been reached, Reagan announced: “we halted America’s decline. Our economy is now in the midst of the best recovery since the 60’s. Our defenses are being rebuilt, our alliances are solid and our commitment to defend our values has never been more clear.” So, he continued, it was time for dialogue: “We must and will engage the Soviets in a dialogue that will serve to promote peace in the troubled regions of the world, reduce the level of arms and build a constructive working relationship.”¹¹

This was not quite the four-part agenda (for Matlock too had spent part of his coming of age under Kissinger). Human rights were in the speech, as “Another major problem in our relationship.” But the speech’s agenda had only three parts, and in laying out the elements of the third, the “constructive working relationship,” human rights reverted to a bilateral issue: “Respecting the rights of individual citizens bolsters the relationship; denying those rights harms it. Expanding contacts across borders and permitting a free exchange of information and ideas increase confidence...Peaceful trade helps...” But, as the Washington saying goes, it was good enough for government work. And the whole was to go forward under the familiar (Shultzian) three principles of “realism, strength, and dialogue,” and it was capped by the kind of musing on the hopes of ordinary American and Soviet people—Ivan and Anya and Jim and Sally—that Reagan had reached for (without the names) in his first handwritten message to Brezhnev from the hospital after he was shot in March 1981.¹²

The speech summed up and registered the results of three years of uphill struggle to arrive at a sensible, sustainable U.S. policy toward the other superpower, this time as policy enunciated by President Reagan himself. Shultz was known to complain that Washington was not one damned thing after another but the same damned thing over and over again, but unruly as we are, when the President announces policy at this level the battlers down below tend to fall in line. And that was the fifth milestone.

General Secretary Andropov died the next month, on February 9, and for the rest of 1984 until our election, the Soviets licked their wounds and struggled with their succession, for the Brezhnev crony who followed Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, was also old. Watching Andropov's funeral from our Spaso House residence in Moscow while Bush, Shultz, and Ambassador Hartman waited in Red Square, I commented to CIA analyst Bob Blackwell that the four top men on Lenin's mausoleum were probably 300 years old, and calculating mentally, he confirmed that they were exactly that, for an average age of 75. Born in 1938, I no longer consider that so old, but then it was, and for Soviets too. With arms control negotiations in abeyance, we used that election year to pile the U.S.-Soviet table with proposals for new or renewed or renegotiated agreements in the other three parts of the four-part agenda; they would be there if and when the icepack broke. And I made sure the four-part agenda itself became a staple of our public affairs material on U.S.-Soviet relations.

As the election approached, Shultz accepted an invitation to speak at the opening of a new RAND/UCLA Soviet studies center in California, and he used the speech to provide the ideological capstone to the first term's Soviet affairs policy achievement. It was not easy going: as we and others in the Department picked at draft after draft, he finally stopped sending drafts for comment and wrote the finished speech himself, because there was something specific he wanted to say and do. He wished to put to rest the notion of linkage that Nixon and Kissinger had made the centerpiece of our Cold War diplomacy, the idea that issues should be mixed together and played off against each other. "If applied rigidly," Shultz said gently, "it could yield the initiative to the Soviets, letting them set the pace and the character of the relationship."¹³ It had lingered among practitioners ever since, and Shultz wished to replace it with something less vulnerable and more sustainable, within

the framework of “realism, strength, and dialogue” which the President had reaffirmed that January.

“We do not seek negotiations for their own sake,” Shultz told his listeners:

We negotiate when it is in our interest to do so. Therefore, when the Soviet Union acts in a way we find objectionable, it may not always make sense for us to break off negotiations or suspend agreements. If those negotiations or agreements were undertaken with a realistic view of their benefits for us, then they should be worth maintaining under all but exceptional circumstances. We should not sacrifice long-term interests in order to express immediate outrage ... Over the longer term, we must structure the bargaining environment to our advantage by modernizing our defenses, assisting our friends, and showing we are willing to defend our interests. In this way we give the Soviets more of a stake, in their own interest, in better relations with us across the board ... A sustainable strategy must include all the elements essential to a more advantageous U.S.-Soviet relationship. We need to be strong, we must be ready to confront Soviet challenges, and we should negotiate when there are realistic prospects for success.

Shultz’s RAND/UCLA speech was our sixth milestone.

After Reagan’s landslide reelection November 6, it took the Soviets eleven days to propose “new negotiations with the objective of reaching mutually acceptable agreements on the whole range of questions concerning nuclear and space weapons,” and a January meeting between Gromyko and Shultz to kick them off.¹⁴ On Thanksgiving Day, November 22, I came into the office with John Tefft (who would go on to retire as Ambassador to Moscow in 2017) to finish off the joint statement announcing that the meeting would take place in Geneva January 7 and 8, 1985. I noted with pleasure that in explaining it to the press Bud McFarlane introduced the four-part agenda on his own, without talking points from us: it had become an integral, almost unconscious part of American policy. A new era had begun.

Chernenko died in March, so I had a third trip to Moscow with the Vice President and Shultz. The joke was that on the wall of the Andrews Air Force base office responsible for Presidential and other VIP flights, a sheet listed Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko one

after the other, under the notation “You die, we fly,” and with plenty of room below. After meeting with Gorbachev, Bush and Shultz reported to Reagan that we were dealing with a different kind of Soviet leader. And we were ready.

The Gorbachev Years

U.S.-Soviet relations during the Gorbachev years were no picnic. They began in uncertainty, and uncertainty never entirely disappeared. The story of the 1980s in East-West relations was not one of steady progress, but of lurching from the worst of times, which included something like a close call in the 1983 Able Archer affair, a U.S. exercise the Soviets feared was a prelude to attack, to the best of times with Gorbachev.¹⁵ It was no wonder that gears ground: while successful practice gradually fortified trust and confidence on both sides, the way forward was never smooth.

Starting with traditional secrecy on the Soviet side and traditional skepticism on ours, it took years for us to learn to take Gorbachev at his word. His radical arms control proposals of January 1986, including the proposal to eliminate nuclear weapons that now bulks larger in the historiography because of what transpired at Reykjavik that October, seemed to us at the time to be a rehash or enhancement of Soviet ideas that dated back to the 1950s: a kind of election platform *after* his March 1985 “election,” perhaps, but not the kind of negotiating proposals we had to deal with seriously.

In these Gorbachev years, new Soviet domestic policy concepts followed each other in refreshing but somewhat bewildering succession: “new thinking,” *perestroika*, then *glasnost*. They certainly inflected Soviet negotiating positions, but it was hard to tell how at any given moment. There were times when relations slowed almost to a pre-Gorbachev pace, for instance between Geneva in late 1985 and Reykjavik in October 1986. Later on, I was with Shultz in Moscow in 1987 on the day Foreign Minister Shevardnadze announced that an INF treaty would not be enough to justify a Washington summit (the subtext was that something on strategic defense or SDI would also be required). Shultz was at his impassive best in response, and before long,

an INF-only summit was back on. We found out only later that the hiccup followed a Yeltsin-Ligachev blowup in the Central Committee.¹⁶

It was thus easier, but also seemed more sensible, for us to continue avoiding speculation on Soviet motives and infighting—although there was plenty of it around—and to keep our focus on concrete Soviet negotiating positions. It is true that for most policymakers that meant Soviet positions in arms control. Not only did old habits of thinking die hard, but it was still the fact that there was really only one goal—avoiding nuclear war—that was shared by the elites of two superpowers who competed in every other vital respect.

I was therefore only slightly taken aback when my boss Rick Burt, himself an arms control expert, let drop that he had no memory of Reagan's meeting with Dobrynin in February 1983; it was now two years later, in 1985, before he went off to be Ambassador to Bonn. (He returned in 1989 as President George H.W. Bush's strategic arms negotiator.) But I was convinced that given recent U.S. history and politics, the way *détente* had died, the way Reagan had succeeded Carter, the only path back to arms control was through the more innocent-sounding broad agenda I had helped George Shultz invent. As the gears ground us forward from epoch to epoch, it was the critical lubricant.

Compared to relations in the first Reagan term, of course, the Gorbachev years *were* a picnic—incrementally, the “worst of times” transmuted into a period of substantial accomplishment achieved through negotiation on an expanding agenda at an increasingly steady pace. Both sides could be proud of the seriousness and skill they brought to this joint accomplishment. Together, they brought the Cold War that had absorbed so many of mankind's energies and resources since World War II to a peaceful conclusion.

Yet there were costs. They were mainly costs at home for Gorbachev, and as confusion there proliferated and resources dwindled and opposition mounted, continued progress in U.S.-Soviet relations became ever more important to him. But there were no comparable costs to us: we negotiated intensely and in good faith, but also, as Mark Twain once put it, buoyed by the “calm confidence of a Christian with four aces.” We liked and admired Gorbachev, but we saw no reason to go the extra mile he increasingly felt he needed from us.

I was in the UN General Assembly hall in December 1988 when Gorbachev announced a reduction of half a million Soviet troops and equipment cuts in Eastern Europe that made the “Brezhnev doctrine,” the Soviet commitment to keep other Communist regimes in power, unenforceable. I was electrified; it was a fabulous moment. But afterward I was also with Gorbachev, Reagan, and President-elect Bush on Governors Island as Gorbachev tried to get Bush to sign on to everything he and Reagan had accomplished together, and got only a weak last toast to show for it. Nothing came easily. And of course a dust-up with our German allies over short-range missiles, the Communist implosion in Eastern Europe, German reunification, and the Soviet collapse were all still to come.

To be sure, we had grown somewhat complacent: we were so used to nice surprises that seemed to validate our policy of negotiating from strength that if good things kept coming, why change? But it was also because we changed administrations in what turned out to be mid-stream. At the Governors Island meeting, Bush was reluctant to pledge continuity because he was determined to keep his powder dry, to be his own man in Soviet policy. That hesitation carried into his Administration as well. I also chaired the study groups set up in the spring of 1989 on U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-East European relations: they ended with versions of previous policy, but they extended into the summer, and that had the effect of putting U.S.-Soviet relations on hold at a turbulent time in Soviet politics: the Congress of Peoples’ Deputies, issuing from amazing partially contested elections, met that March. By the time we were ready again, East European developments—power-sharing and then a Solidarity-led government in Poland—absorbed most of our energies and resources for months to come; in November the Berlin Wall fell, and German reunification heaved itself onto the agenda. When we reengaged, at Malta in December, the words were fine, but there was very little more than that left over for Gorbachev.

I would argue, however, that the main reason why the question of “helping Gorbachev” went unanswered was because it was never asked, and that it was never asked because there was no room for it in the U.S. policy approach that had achieved a consensus satisfactory to all major Washington stakeholders and to U.S. political opinion, after years of struggle, by the end of Reagan’s first term. It was not controversial during the 1984 election campaign, the acid test in U.S. politics. It

was based on the Shultzian concept that the two superpowers should define their key interests to each other, and continue to confront each other where those interests clashed, but continue to negotiate, based on those interests, when they did not. It kept us at the negotiating table(s) despite setbacks in one or another area. But it gave us no reason to adjust positions depending on the vagaries of a Soviet political system which we would always understand only imperfectly, "as through a glass, darkly." All we needed to know about "where the Soviets were" we would learn at the negotiating table; we were merely curious about the rest. It had taken time for the concept to permeate U.S. policymaking toward the Soviet Union. But by the time Gorbachev was entering his vale of tears in the late 1980s, it had; and none of us involved in the process saw any reason to change in order to reward him for moves he obviously judged to be in the Soviet interest, or he would not have made them. That is the story I have tried to tell.

Notes

1. *Foreign Relations of the United States 1981-1988*. Vol. III *Soviet Union* January 1981-January 1983 (Washington, D.C., United States Government Publishing Office, 2016), No. 209, p. 682. Hereafter FRUS 81-3.
2. FRUS 81-83, No. 188, Tab B, p. 625.
3. Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries Unabridged* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), Vol. I, p. 157, cited in FRUS 81-83, No. 216, p. 715 n2.
4. George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph. My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), pp. 122-23.
5. FRUS 81-83, No. 260, p. 862.
6. Brinkley, op. cit., p. 188, cited in FRUS 81-83, No. 259, p. 861.
7. See Dobrynin's account in Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York Times Books/Random House, 1995), pp. 218-20.
8. Shultz, op. cit., p. 171.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
10. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1983/06/16/issue.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article>; and Shultz, op. cit., p. 277.
11. <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/01/17/world/transcript-of-reagan-s-speech-on-soviet-american-relations.html>.
12. FRUS 81-83, No. 46, pp. 116-8.
13. Shultz, op. cit., pp. 487-90.
14. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 500.
15. See Robert E. Hamilton, "ABLE ARCHER at 35: Lessons of the 1983 War Scare," Foreign Policy Research Institute, December 3, 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/12/able-archer-at-35-lessons-of-the-1983-war-scare/>. Thanks to James Dobbins for highlighting this point at our May 8, 2019 workshop at SAIS.
16. On this episode, see Pavel Palazchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 72-76.