

My Six Years with
Gorbachev

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The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania

of the Central Committee.'” Yakovlev got the impression that Gorbachev was going “to have a serious talk” with Chebrikov.

The next day Gorbachev met with thirty writers. He was evidently shocked by the speech of Anatoly Ivanov, a dinosaur and unabashed “Black Hundred” and “back-to-the-soil” type.²⁹ His main idea was the need for a resolution like the one in 1948 concerning the journals *Zvezda* and *Lenin-grad*.³⁰ Then order would be established. I saw Gorbachev’s jaw drop. But he reacted very cautiously and indirectly. Shatrov argued with Ivanov, and Gorbachev supported Shatrov.³¹

For my part, I did the following. About ten days before that, the writer Boris Mozhaev came to see me. He entertained me with stories about the goings-on in literary circles. He was hilariously funny: venomous, sarcastic, and a great impressionist. He imitated Markov, Karpov, and Alekseyev and other authors of novels in the “Party Secretary” genre. He gave me the foreword to his book *Muzhiki i Baby*, a review of it by Academician Tikhonov of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences, and also a hundred-page article of his own blasting the “literary generals” and the overall line of Karpov and Company.³² He wanted me to show it all to Gorbachev. I didn’t do so right away; it didn’t seem appropriate, since this wasn’t my area of expertise. But later, after reading Chebrikov’s memo and talking to Yakovlev, I just couldn’t help myself and wrote the following to Gorbachev:

Mikhail Sergeyeovich!

When I read V. M. Chebrikov’s report on Soviet literature I remembered that some time ago Boris Mozhaev—who was named in that report as a suspected (if not openly) anti-Soviet figure—had given me two volumes of his writings autographed to you.

Maybe you know him as flippant, sometimes careless, as many talented Russian people are. But he has never licked anyone’s boots, never asked “the bosses” for favors, he is a mortal enemy of servility and double-dealing. But nevertheless he “worships” you (his own words).

He told me about his conflict with Karpov (editor of *Novy Mir*) over his novel *Muzhiki i Baby*. He left me the foreword to his novel and also a review of it by academician Tikhonov. In light of Chebrikov’s report, I

29. That is, a conservative, anti-Semitic Russian nationalist who romanticized traditional village life. The “Black Hundreds” were mobs who incited pogroms against Jews in the early twentieth century. *Ed. note.*

30. This was a reference to the particularly harsh anti-foreign, anti-Semitic cultural line of the early Cold War years. *Ed. note.*

31. Mikhail Shatrov, a popular pro-perestroika playwright. *Ed. note.*

32. Vladimir Tikhonov, an agricultural economist and harsh critic of the Stalinist collective farm system. Mozhaev’s novel was a harsh portrayal of rural life under that system. *Ed. note.*

considered it my duty to tell you this, especially now that the Writers’ Congress is coming up. If what Mozhaev has now written is “opponentist” and “revisionist,” then many other things won’t make sense.

When I gave the materials to Gorbachev, I saw that he was still thinking about Ivanov. He said: “Where do such people come from? He’s a real louse.” He was clearly worried that such a person could be so confident that his views would find favor with the general secretary.³³

Now about Gorbachev’s views on foreign policy during the summer of 1986, that is, not long before the emergence of the “Reykjavik idea.” A major event was François Mitterand’s visit to Moscow. The two leaders held strikingly similar views of world developments, at least on a “theoretical” level, and they were also in agreement on a number of practical arms control issues. Mitterand, who had just returned from the United States, said: “In my talks with the Americans, I bluntly asked them what it is they really want. Do they see it as in their interest for the Soviet Union to be able to spend more on

33. Concerning the problem of “Gorbachev and the intelligentsia”—which turned out to be critical for perestroika—the story of his relations with Yuri Afanasyev is noteworthy. I drew Gorbachev’s attention to this man (then, in 1986, he was an editorial board member at *Kommunist*) in connection with his writings in that journal about the situation in historical science. They exemplified what we called “creative Marxism,” an attempt to break out of official dogmas. But even that caused displeasure in leading ideological circles. Relations deteriorated between Afanasyev and *Kommunist*’s editor-in-chief [Richard] Kosolapov—a person of some talent but pretentiously, pompously orthodox in both theory and practice. Gorbachev took a keen interest in Afanasyev. But that didn’t stop Kosolapov from firing him, after which Gorbachev helped me in securing for Afanasyev the post of director of the Historical Archives Institute. And Gorbachev continued to follow his publications. He thought highly of the book *Inogo ne Dano* [*There Is No Other Way*, a collection of articles by the boldest pro-reform intellectuals that garnered much attention when it appeared in 1988], published at Afanasyev’s initiative, and he frequently “restrained” those of his colleagues who wanted to “smash” Afanasyev.

Afanasyev often visited me and, naturally, wasn’t shy about Gorbachev’s high opinion of him. But when Afanasyev’s articles and speeches became critical and even rude toward Gorbachev—later even demanding his resignation—it had a very negative impact on Gorbachev’s attitude to the intelligentsia, especially because Afanasyev was not the only one. And this came, unfortunately, at a moment when they particularly needed each other. Gorbachev’s complaint was not that they disagreed with him—his tolerance for different opinions and desire to compromise are known. Rather it was that, from an ethical point of view, such “turns” and defections” seemed dishonest and offensive to him, especially when they came from those whom he’d helped bring to prominence.

Unfortunately, something similar happened with many whom Gorbachev had trusted. And so he “generalized” about the intelligentsia: they didn’t want to understand him, they were suspicious of him, they cared more about showing off their independence and boldness (when it had become completely safe . . . thanks to Gorbachev’s efforts!) than about their common interests. A “destructive” complex toward power of any kind is native to Russian intellectuals. It had often interfered with our country’s progress in the past and was manifested here again. And that had dramatic consequences for the unity of the democratic camp and for the entire reform process.

economic development by making cuts in their military budget? Or, on the contrary, does the United States want to exhaust the Soviet Union via the arms race, make it turn away from its history, force the Soviet leadership to spend more and more on nonproductive purposes, on the military? I told Reagan . . . that the first choice means peace, and the second—war.”

Of course Gorbachev agreed fully with this—but what came next was rather more difficult to digest. Mitterand tactfully but firmly argued that it would be a mistake to equate the goals of the U.S. military-industrial complex with the policies of the administration and the intentions of Reagan. “It seems to me,” Mitterand remarked, “that notwithstanding his political past, Reagan is one of those statesmen who is intuitively striving to find a way out of this dilemma. You may find this judgment contradictory, but it is really true. Unlike many other American politicians, Reagan is not an automaton. He is a human being.” “This is extremely important,” Gorbachev replied, “and I’m taking special note of it.” In this way the French president played a major role in eroding the remaining stereotypes in Gorbachev’s “new thinking.”³⁴

Gorbachev’s meeting with ex-president Richard Nixon on July 18, 1986, also helped encourage him toward progress in relations with the United States. Gorbachev argued:

Most dangerous is the existence of our enormous nuclear arsenals. If we build our policies toward each other and the rest of the world on false premises, we may heighten confrontation with the most tragic consequences for all. I would like to emphasize that Soviet society, and not only its leadership, is determined to find ways to normalize our relations and expand our areas of common interest in order to finally forge a friendship. Maybe such a goal seems too lofty just now, but we are convinced that this

34. Some “class stereotypes” were particularly tenacious. Here is one of them. In the spring of 1986, Gorbachev was concerned about the problem of Third World debt. He demanded reports and calculations from specialists and got angry when, each time, they concluded that it was a complex problem of international economics that could not be simply chalked up to imperialist greed and exploitation.

In light of subsequent events—including the fact that before Gorbachev left office, he signed a protocol about the USSR joining the IMF—one comment he made in his conversation with Mitterand is of historic interest. “Very recently, about two months ago, a Soviet economist received a letter from the IMF. I saw it myself, this letter was three or four pages of requirements they set for the Soviet Union: raise the prices of certain goods, close certain enterprises, etc. How can they treat an independent state like this, especially one such as the Soviet Union, which has never been bankrupt? The Soviet Union can always stand up for itself. But what about economically weaker countries? This violates their sovereignty, their independence. If such conditions are imposed on them, they’ll end up poorer than before they turned to this organization.”

is the right choice because it is impossible to imagine the consequences of any other. . . .

We believe that we must not be passive. I’ve heard it said that Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership are so disappointed with the present U.S. president that, while not yet breaking off contact, they are looking beyond him and expecting more from his successors. I must say, and I would like you to tell President Reagan, that this is not so. It can’t be true if only because we are aware of the authority of the president in the United States. And if we thought that our talks were better postponed until after the election, it would mean that we were ready to wait another three or four years. But during this time much could change . . . in today’s tense atmosphere, we simply cannot afford to wait.

Nixon’s reply was very important to Gorbachev: “You, Mr. General Secretary, have correctly taken note of the popularity of President Reagan among the American people. I am happy to hear you think it better to come to an agreement with President Reagan now than to wait for his successors. . . . I have known President Reagan for a long time, over thirty years. And I have the strong impression that he views the American-Soviet relationship as his personal responsibility. . . . He has been very impressed by your conversations as well as your personal commitment to the cause of peace between our countries. He also thinks that he made a certain personal connection with you and, based on that, he believes that an agreement is possible if you work together.” Gorbachev replied:

You can be assured that Gorbachev does not have any evil designs, that he is not trying to win a diplomatic game. Such an approach would be pointless. . . . We want to find a path to friendship between our countries. Right now the situation is paradoxical. If one country keeps building weapons while the other one doesn’t do a thing, the one that arms will not gain anything from it. The weaker party could just explode its nuclear stockpile, even on its own territory, which would mean suicide for it and a slow death for the opponent. Therefore you are absolutely right in that military superiority is a myth. . . . And even if the American leadership loses interest in solving these problems, we will not let it go.

And now on the origins of the Reykjavik summit. In late August of 1986, Gorbachev went on vacation to the Crimea (although not to the dacha that became famous after the 1991 putsch). He took me with him for the first time. I practically substituted for his whole secretarial staff, as well as for his

aides in every policy area. I would join him, just before lunch, on the verandah or in his office. We would look through the mail and coded messages from abroad. He spoke on the phone with Moscow (and other places), made decisions, assigned tasks, etc.

One of these—early in his vacation—was to instruct the Foreign Ministry to develop an outline for his next meeting with Reagan. Shevardnadze was also on vacation at the moment. His first deputy, Anatoly Kovalev, was left in charge.³⁵ Some time later we received the “paper,” as we usually called it, and I took it to Mikhail Sergeyeich. He took it and read attentively. Then he tossed it on the table, looked at me, and asked: “What do you say?” I replied: “It’s no good, Mikhail Sergeyeich!” He said: “Simply crap!” He started thinking aloud, and then said: “Write this down. Urgently prepare a draft of my letter to the president of the United States of America with a suggestion to meet in late September or early October either in London or,” he paused for a moment, “in Reykjavik.” I stared at him in surprise. “Why Reykjavik?” He said, “It’s a good idea. Halfway between us and them, and none of the big powers will be offended!”

He grumbled that despite the good long talk he’d had with Foreign Ministry personnel in May—when they spoke openly and showed their professionalism and commitment—they still had not learned to think big. They got caught in details, were afraid of being accused of softness, of losing face. They weren’t prepared to take big steps.

I called Kovalev the same day and gave him Gorbachev’s message and instructions for the Foreign Ministry to start developing the specifics for talks with Reagan on all issues, primarily disarmament. A while later we received their draft. Our response was in my letter to Kovalev, which I quote in full:

I was present at the inception of the Reykjavik idea. I was the first to hear Gorbachev formulate his plan for this summit. (By the way, by mistake some ideas intended for Reykjavik almost showed up in the letter which Comrade Shevardnadze was supposed to deliver to Reagan. But Mikhail Sergeyeich caught it in time. I mention this only because it shows that the people who are preparing materials for Reykjavik already have Gorbachev’s ideas on paper.) And in the light of these ideas, here is my opinion about what you came up with.

35. A long-time diplomat who, until perestroika, was perhaps best known for his support of the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This included his successful efforts to persuade the Brezhnev leadership to accept the CSCE’s “Third Basket” of human-rights provisions. *Ed. note.*

It seems to me that what is being prepared is not what the general secretary had in mind for the summit. You are working instead on what will follow the summit. In fact, you are devising a new set of instructions for Comrade Karpov rather than a broad political platform for the general secretary.³⁶ We are putting the cart before the horse again. It might be argued that before we harness the horse, we should load the cart with profitable goods. But Comrade Akhromeyev has more than enough of those goods and he can load them any time, even if you wake him up in the middle of the night. But he will probably first ask, “Which way are we going, and how far?” But that is exactly what no one yet knows.

There are no signs of new thinking, of approaching the problem of war and peace in the spirit of the Congress. I believe the underlying assumption itself is wrong. In his answer to *Rude Pravo* Mikhail Sergeyeich posed the question:³⁷ “What can we conclude from the Americans’ behavior? That they are preparing for war?” It seems that the same question can be asked of the authors of this project. Are we going to fight a war?

Of course the military has its own logic, its interests mean that it’s always trying to restrain the politicians. But this doesn’t mean that the military should define our general policies. The conclusion of the Congress was that given the right policies—foreign, domestic, economic, in short, policies following the new guidelines—*there will be no war*. This is what our military expectations should be based upon, as well as our military expenditures (although this is a different question).

What can be concluded from this document? The January 15 program has been completely forgotten, together with its statement about a nuclear-free world by the end of the century. And so the issue of strategic arms limitation has been pushed into the background although it is the primary danger to humanity, as Gorbachev has openly said on many occasions.

And what are the document’s tactics? They are also far removed from the philosophy of the Congress. Employing all kinds of interim variants, we are trying to get Reagan to make concessions. But nothing will come of it. He will only change his stance if we get Western Europe on our side and are really able to turn public opinion against him. But by keeping our SS-20s in Europe, we’ll certainly never get the West Europeans on our side. Besides, do you seriously believe that Thatcher, Mitterand, or whoever follows them into office, could, in any imaginable situation, press the button to launch their missiles against us? Can this really be what underlies our European strategy?

36. Viktor Karpov, the leading Soviet arms negotiator in Geneva. *Ed. note.*

37. In early September, Gorbachev was interviewed by the Czechoslovak Party daily *Rude Pravo*.

Going to Reykjavik with little progress beyond that reached over the past year's negotiations in Geneva would condemn this summit to failure and provoke universal disappointment. The summit in Reykjavik is not aimed at experts who know all the fine points of modern weapons, but at nations and states, the world community. Therefore, big politics should be in its forefront, not negotiating minutiae. The world must hear major, sweeping proposals from Reykjavik, in the spirit of the January 15 program.

At a September 22 Politburo meeting, following Shevardnadze's announcement of Reagan's agreement to a summit in Reykjavik, a discussion ensued that now makes an odd impression for its incongruity between the goal (to find a means of saving mankind) and the pettiness of the "difficulties" that stood in the way. The Americans' agreement to meet carried one condition: we had to allow twenty-five individuals (including Sakharov and Orlov) to leave the country, along with ending the notorious "Daniloff affair."³⁸ Gorbachev considered it necessary to "respond" to the list, but not in full and not all at once, rather in increments; Orlov, for example, was released a month later. At the same time, we would announce that we were halting grain purchases to let Reagan know that we too had leverage. We would "launch some propaganda" about the 150 bugs found in the walls of our new embassy under construction in Washington.

Gorbachev thought it useful to organize some press "leaks"—that we suggested an important meeting, while they responded with cheap gestures. He also suggested giving our political commentators the green light for personal attacks on the U.S. administration, to express "their own opinion" of the Americans as saboteurs of peace-making efforts. And not to stop there, but also to criticize America on the usual grounds: the homeless, crime on the streets, unemployment, racism, violating human rights in the Third World, etc. Another proposal was to permit some reputable observers onto Soviet testing ranges so they could declare—"without giving away state secrets"—that Americans "had more of everything" and that they were telling lies about us.

The purpose of all this posturing, whose pretext was that "our people won't understand or approve of concessions" otherwise, was really quite "Gorbachevian." It was *to force Reagan to agree to the summit* that was necessary for one vital goal of perestroika—the easing of the military burden. Still, the methods were those of the past, as was the belief that the United States wanted to wear us out economically via an arms race and so prevent our

38. Nicholas Daniloff, an American journalist, was being held on trumped-up espionage charges; Yuri Orlov, like Sakharov, was a physicist and human-rights campaigner. *Ed. note.*

reforms from strengthening our position as a great socialist state. Here is my record of Gorbachev's words at that Politburo meeting on September 22:

No one is going to help us carry out our policies. And therefore we need, on the one hand, to be realistic about the Americans' actions toward us, but on the other hand to maintain a reasonable and consistent political line. Our effort to get Reagan to agree to a summit serves the same purpose. This is why I rejected the draft letter to Reagan prepared by the Foreign Ministry. The authors of that document—some of them are here now (a hint at Kovalev)—based it on the premise that there is nothing worth discussing in the president's proposals. That was all nonsense, I could not go along with it. I consciously dramatized the situation and named specific issues. We have to assume that it is possible to achieve positive results. The developments in America itself will help, together with the pressure we'll continue to apply and the positive impact of our policies. Let's not try to guess whether Reagan will agree to a summit. But we certainly cannot prepare something that is sure to provoke a refusal. That's not politics. Certainly, the American administration should have a vested interest in the summit we proposed, be it election-related or something else. We have to understand that, in advancing our proposals, we also have to take their interests into account and not expect to get 100 percent of what we want.

A few days before the departure for Reykjavik there was a discussion between the Politburo and the appropriate agencies about directives for the talks with Reagan. A draft had been prepared by Akhromeyev, Vorontsov, and Kornienko and presented to the Politburo by Dobrynin, who was the new International Department chief.³⁹ The day before the above-mentioned session I gave Gorbachev my opinion on this draft. Here are the main points in what I wrote:

The main goal of Reykjavik, if I understood you correctly in the South, is to sweep Reagan off his feet by our bold, even "risky" approach to the central problem of world politics. To get all we can out of an international situation currently favorable to us for a major step toward disarmament.

This draft does not satisfy your plan either in form or content. It builds on the old principle: "If there is a war, both sides should have equal means"

39. Following the Twenty-seventh Party Congress, Dobrynin was recalled from his position as ambassador in Washington to replace Ponomarev—Chernyav's long-time boss—as head of the Central Committee's International Department. Kornienko left the Foreign Ministry at the same time to serve as Dobrynin's deputy in the new post. *Ed. note.*

(to destroy each other and everyone else!). But the philosophy of the Congress calls for a completely different approach: "War is madness, therefore it should not and will not happen."

In form, this draft would be more appropriate for Comrade Karpov than for such a summit. It employs the arithmetic, not the algebra, of contemporary world politics. *In content*, it seems to me, it does not reflect the intentions you formulated in the Crimea during the summer.

1. We should make strategic weapons, not nuclear tests and space, our first priority. It is the most understandable and worrisome problem for the world community, and a bold suggestion here would make a most powerful impression.

We should start with the thesis about the necessity of liquidating nuclear weapons, which has been repeatedly stressed by the U.S. president as well. This goal should define our intentions to reduce and liquidate strategic arms. Therefore, we should emphasize our idea of a 50 percent reduction in the very first stage of talks.

In contrast to our former positions, we should not make reductions here conditional on a space agreement [i.e., SDI]. Otherwise it will be another dead end. There should be only one directive for participants in strategic arms talks: Balance their different types based on the particulars of the Americans' and our force structures.⁴⁰

2. On medium-range missiles. Here, it seemed to me, nothing new is suggested compared to what Karpov has already said in Geneva. And we should start, I believe, not with an intermediate variant, but the *optimal* one: Liquidate all medium-range missiles in Europe, ignoring the English and French arsenals, and immediately start separate talks on the Asian ones. This should be the general framework for the negotiators. This position is put forth as a second option for the draft, albeit with many qualifications.

The draft refers once again to the danger the French and English arms present to us. But it is completely impossible to imagine the circumstances under which any French or English government, no matter how close their relations with the United States, would press the button to launch a nuclear attack against us. We are simply scaring ourselves here while reinforcing the obstacles that have blocked European disarmament for over ten years.

3. The ABM issue should be combined, I believe, with that of ban-

ning nuclear tests.⁴¹ And the latter should be given first priority. Specifically, we should, as you said in the South, have our negotiators prepare an agreement about a ban on nuclear testing. And we should not insist on their joining our moratorium—whether we resume our own testing or not—until such an agreement is made. The SDI question is thus attached to this problem. If there is no testing, there will be no SDI.⁴² This approach will be acceptable to the world community and to specialists. It is beneficial for both public relations as well as practical purposes. . . .

I was naturally flattered when Gorbachev approved of my analysis and used it for the Politburo discussion. He based his directives on the idea of liquidating nuclear arms by the year 2000, that is, on his Declaration of January 15, 1986. And he rejected any arguments that contradicted this idea, weighing them against a rhetorical but meaningful question: "What are you doing, still preparing to fight a nuclear war? Well I'm not, and this is what determines everything else. If we're still trying to conquer the entire world, then let's discuss how to defeat the Americans in the arms race. But then we can forget all that we've said about our new policies." And he approached the issue of medium-range missiles in Europe from the same standpoint.

But here he also had a specific military-political goal because the danger of a war, especially in connection with medium-range missiles deployed in Europe, seemed very real in 1986. "We want Europe to be completely free of these weapons," Gorbachev said, "because the Pershing-II missiles are like a pistol held to our head." He rejected all the "interim" approaches suggested for virtually every weapons type. "It'll be a long way from Reykjavik to a concrete agreement, so it's no time to get bogged down in arithmetic." He summed up the discussion thus:

We are by no means talking about weakening our security. But at the same time we have to realize that if our proposals imply weakening U.S. security, then there won't be any agreement. Our main goal now is to prevent the

41. Again, the ABM or Anti-Ballistic Missile issue had two major aspects. One was that the ABM Treaty of 1972—which banned large-scale defenses and so preserved each side's ability to retaliate against attack, thus ensuring a kind of stability (or "balance of terror" as it was sometimes described)—appeared under threat from SDI. The other ABM issue involved U.S. charges that it was the USSR that was undermining the treaty by developing components of a ground- (not space-) based anti-missile system. *Ed. note.*

42. Because, at the time, one of SDI's most prominently featured components was the space-based, nuclear bomb-powered "X-ray laser." *Ed. note.*

40. This is a reference to the Soviet primary reliance on land-based missiles in contrast to the Americans' deployment of a more balanced "triad" of land-, sea-, and air-based weapons. *Ed. note.*

arms race from entering a new stage. If we don't do that, the danger to us will increase. If we don't back down on some specific, maybe even important issues, if we won't budge from the positions we've held for a long time, we will lose in the end. We will be drawn into an arms race that we cannot manage. We will lose, because right now we are already at the end of our tether.

Despite all this we were still dominated by an obsession with absolute parity that had squeezed the country dry in the preceding decades. And therefore it hardly occurred to anyone that we could give up the race, even though its senselessness, its conflict with the philosophy of new thinking, were so obvious. That is why at that same Politburo meeting, directions were also issued to focus on the quality of weapons in case we failed to prevent a new phase in the arms race.

The Reykjavik summit was held on October 10–12, 1986. A large team of journalists, scientists, and Central Committee apparat officials was sent there well ahead of time. Their function was to interact around the clock with the Americans and other foreigners who had flocked there in great numbers from all over the world, to explain the policies of new thinking, and to help create a new image of the Soviet Union. Such broad contacts had first occurred during Gorbachev's first big foreign trip, to Geneva in November of 1985. They had proved effective. A perestroika-inspired relaxation, a liberation from ideological shackles, allowed our representatives to be themselves. Well-educated, for the most part intelligent, they could carry on a normal dialogue in normal human language instead of firing off prepared accusations and "fighting back" on every issue, thereby puzzling even those who supported us and wanted to understand us.

Our team consisted of Velikhov, Bessmertnykh, Vlasov, Arbatov, Bovin, Primakov, Gerasimov, Shishlin, Grachev, Falin, Karpov, Zhurkin, Zivs, Palazchenko, Borovik, Zorin, Kalyagin, Kolesnichenko, Burlatsky, Pumpyan-sky, Maslennikov, and others.⁴³ Also accompanying us were Akhromeyev and Kruchina.⁴⁴ The core delegation was made up of Shevardnadze, Dobrynin,

43. Among those listed, particularly notable for their later contributions to the "new thinking," were the nuclear physicist and unofficial arms control adviser Yevgeny Velikhov; the diplomat and future foreign minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh; the foreign-policy specialists Georgy Arbatov, Yevgeny Primakov, and Vitaly Zhurkin; Central Committee analysts Nikolai Shishlin and Andrei Grachev; and the journalist-foreign-affairs analysts Aleksandr Bovin, Gennady Gerasimov, and Fedor Burlatsky. *Ed. note.*

44. Here Chernyaev singles out Chief of the General Staff Sergei Akhromeyev and Central Committee official Oleg Kruchina, two who would later take their own lives in the aftermath of the failed August 1991 putsch. *Ed. note.*

Yakovlev, and myself. Most of this big group was housed on the ship *Georg Otz*, which had arrived in Reykjavik a while before. It was our hotel. There, on the main deck, Gorbachev daily gathered about twenty people to discuss progress in the talks with Reagan and Shultz. He spoke sincerely, and with no restraint, seeking advice on how to proceed further, what other concessions he could make, what not to back down on, and what further tactical steps would yield at least the minimum of Gorbachev's expectations of Reykjavik. . . .

The reader probably remembers the simple, bold formula that he proposed—cut strategic arms in half across the board. And then let the experts, the military, work out the details of these cuts based on differences in each side's triad of strategic offensive weapons.

That was a grand and unprecedented move. It summed up the political and ideological evolution of Gorbachev over his year and a half at the helm of a nuclear superpower. This formula contained everything essential for a radical change in world politics: a realization of the necessity of preventing nuclear confrontation, a revision of Soviet foreign policy's decades-old logic based on international class struggle, rejection of the "enemy image" and fears of the "imperialist threat," replaced by the search for new approaches to ensuring security.

Few then appreciated the magnitude of that simple, seemingly purely military, formula. But apparently Reagan intuitively felt something naturally human in this initiative, so unexpected from a Soviet leader. His "hasty" agreement confirms it. But he was immediately halted by his entourage. Later he had to pay for this "mistake," which was put down to incompetence. But in fact it showed a lot of simple wisdom long missing in world politics. Gorbachev saw it and repeatedly returned to this incident in Reykjavik.

I believe it was then, at that very moment, that he became convinced that it would "work out" between him and Reagan. That the U.S. president, not much interested in the minutiae of the arms talks, had intuitively felt "the challenge of the times." A spark of understanding was born between them, as if they had winked to each other about the future. And Gorbachev retained a certain sense of trust in this person. After Reykjavik, he never again spoke about Reagan in his inner circle as he had before. Now there could be nothing like the incident prior to his trip to Ireland when, in response to the comment of a prominent Western politician that Reagan was a fool and a clown, Gorbachev said that it was too bad such a person was at the head of a superpower. Never again did I hear statements such as "The U.S. administration is political scum that is liable to do anything." The cor-

diality of subsequent meetings in Washington and in Moscow grew from that moment in Reykjavik. And I even think that if not for that “moment of hope,” the famous press conference held several minutes after they said goodbye on the threshold of that Icelandic hut would not have been the same.

We, Gorbachev’s entourage, like Reagan’s people, were crowded in the rooms next to the living room where the talks between the two leaders took place. From time to time they invited foreign ministers or aides to come inside.⁴⁵ My personal impressions are only worth mentioning in one respect. After the first day of talks and the experts’ night sessions, spirits were elevated. But everything broke down on the last day. I remember tension growing as both we and our American colleagues awaited the end of the meeting. We didn’t want to talk about anything anymore. We stood by the windows, looking out on the dark ocean. Waiting, waiting, hoping. At last the tall white doors opened and, from the expressions of Reagan, Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, and Shultz, we understood that what had been anticipated—by the Soviet side at any rate—had not happened.

But this failure, apparent to all as Shultz said on the tarmac before leaving for the United States, was transformed into a ray of hope by Gorbachev just twenty minutes after his parting handshake with Reagan. There, in that famous press conference with hundreds of journalists from dozens of countries, Gorbachev expressed a burst of optimism that none of us had expected. Out of everything I’ve read about that press conference, an article published by *Der Spiegel* on October 24, 1986, stands out as the most accurate, sharp, and expressive. Anyone wishing to understand how things were should read that article. For this book, Gorbachev’s interpretation of Reykjavik is probably best reflected in the report he gave at a Politburo meeting several days later. Here are my notes:

Reykjavik’s resonance has been great. Beginning with speculation about who got the better of whom. But that was not our purpose in going there. Our initiative had a more important objective. The Geneva talks had reached a dead end. We felt the need for a significant breakthrough. Because time is working against mankind. . . .

And now Reykjavik happened. It turned out that on the first and second points of our platform—on strategic arms and medium-range mis-

45. Naturally I kept the transcripts of their talks, made by the interpreters. But unlike many of our past and present politicians, who allow themselves to trade in other people’s secrets as their own property, I don’t find it possible to reproduce them here. It is the exclusive right of the participants in the talks, or of the appropriate government agencies when declassification time comes.

siles—we got to the point of having our ministers start preparing draft agreements. This experience alone was very beneficial. We understand the president’s problems, he is not free in his decisions. And we did not dramatize the fact that the SDI and ABM problems stood in the way of Reykjavik being a complete success. We thought: Let the president consider what happened, let him consult with the Congress. Maybe another attempt will be necessary to breach the distance that separates us. We can wait. And we’re not rescinding the proposals we advanced in Reykjavik. . . .

We shouldn’t get desperate. Reykjavik helped us in the critical process of realizing where we stand. Everyone saw that agreement is possible. Reykjavik led us to conclude that the necessity for dialogue is even greater now. That is why Reykjavik left me an even greater optimist. . . . We are asked whether the world has become safer after Reykjavik. We need to be precise here. We shouldn’t oversimplify. I would not by any means call Reykjavik a failure. It was a step in a very complex and difficult dialogue, in a search for solutions. We must redouble our efforts in this search.

The Americans stubbornly sought to drag us back to that with which our delegates at the Geneva talks have been struggling for so long. But we were determined. We wanted to give a real and practical expression to our agreement at the Geneva summit. In other words, to give a real impetus to the process of nuclear disarmament. Indeed, before we were talking about limitations on nuclear arms. Now we are talking about their reduction and elimination. And thus about the need to thwart any attempts at gaining superiority. That is why the central point of the summit was the problem of observing the ABM treaty. The American stance at Reykjavik showed that they have not given up the goal of gaining an advantage here. That is why they did not have the character or courage, the responsibility or political determination, to cross this line. Because that would mean ending their dependence on the military-industrial complex. . . .

But we still haven’t lost hope. We planned Reykjavik as an event that would create significant opportunities for everyone to figure out where things really stand: for the Europeans, for the Americans, and for ourselves.

As the “year of Reykjavik” drew to a close, Gorbachev was coming to the realization that our success in foreign affairs—where things seemed to gain momentum—was correlated with our domestic situation. In other words, realization of the “Reykjavik idea” depended on the progress of perestroika.

Unfortunately, for global politics as well as for perestroika, the West did not see the watershed meaning that Gorbachev attached to “the Reykjavik idea.” They continued to scrutinize this “unusual Soviet leader,” losing time

which was so precious to Gorbachev. The West Europeans bristled about Reykjavik, suspecting the USSR and the United States of planning a "condominium" at their expense. Gorbachev's December 15 meeting with the British ambassador is interesting in this connection. The ambassador brought a letter from Thatcher. Gorbachev read it and said: "Well, she sure ripped Reagan and me apart. But the realism that you want us to practice, Madam, is at a dead end. That was proved by Geneva." He got angry and rather impolitely scolded the ambassador, who promised to tell the prime minister everything. "I have good reason for saying all this," Gorbachev snapped as they parted.⁴⁶

Reagan was under a lot of pressure at home. Immediately after Reykjavik the U.S. administration started backtracking, denying the charge that it had been ready "to make concessions to the Soviets" or that the president had fallen into a trap set by the cunning Gorbachev. The United States refused to observe the de facto SALT II agreement, launched a 131st new-design bomber, began flexing its muscles in policy toward Syria and Nicaragua, and reaffirmed the policy of "crusading against communism."⁴⁷

Gorbachev was not disconcerted by this backsliding, but it helped continue the stereotypes of confrontation and "class approach" in his thinking. Most important, it strengthened the hand of the enemies of perestroika and new thinking, of those advocates of power politics in his entourage, in the Party apparatus, and in society at large. Here are some of Gorbachev's statements from October to December of 1986 about American actions following Reykjavik:

What does America want? They are distorting, revising Reykjavik, backing away from it. They've returned to provocations, disrupting the climate of relations. . . . We're at a very difficult stage. We have to respond in a big way, but not so as to provoke a further acceleration in the arms race. . . .

The results of Reykjavik, despite the absence of specific agreements, exceeded expectations. And now the Americans have begun to back away. Reykjavik was a success in the peace process. It scared the Americans, and so they've returned to a hard line. They are acting this way because they can't change the process we've started.

46. Of all the West European leaders, Thatcher was publicly the most insistent upon continued reliance on nuclear deterrence (and on maintenance of British nuclear forces). *Ed. note.*

47. Signed in 1979, the SALT II Treaty had never been ratified by the U.S. Congress. Reagan had campaigned against it as a "fatally flawed" agreement but, as president, had observed its limitations until deciding to commit a relatively minor (chiefly symbolic) "violation" with the deployment of a new strategic bomber. *Ed. note.*

Yes, on the central issue—the arms race—Gorbachev did not back down. But even in this area he did not see the problem "in all its complexity." For example, it would have been a real breakthrough toward strengthening the West's trust had we extended our moratorium on nuclear tests. But no! Gorbachev yielded to the pressure of our military-industrial complex and their argument that we risked being left behind.⁴⁸ Even from the public relations standpoint, it was untimely. We decided to announce the resumption of nuclear tests on December 18, right before Christmas and New Year's! I wrote a memo to Gorbachev, which he sent to the Politburo. But Shevardnadze and Dobrynin shot me down. Shevardnadze called to say that now that a decision had been made, it didn't much matter when we announced it. There was no good in it, only bad, and so there was nothing to be gained by delaying our announcement. That's true too, I noted at the time.

And once again on Afghanistan. If Gorbachev had told the Politburo then, in late 1986, that we were going to pull out, many aspects of perestroika would have gone more quickly and successfully. We needed, as Dobrynin suggested, an "Afghan Reykjavik." It didn't happen. Karmal was replaced by Najib.⁴⁹ Gorbachev had a long talk with him in December, one on one. Then there was a Politburo discussion. The conclusion: we have driven ourselves into a dead end. But what lessons did we learn? Here are some excerpts from my notes of the November 13 Politburo meeting:

Gorbachev: If we go on in the same way, we'll have to fight for another twenty-thirty years! They'll soon be calling it "the Weird War." In six years we haven't learned how to fight there! Here we are trying to get some notion of where to deploy a tank corps, but this is a different kind of war. . . . Like in Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique. So a reasonable question—should we stop, or completely embarrass ourselves militarily as well? (Gromyko admitted that there had been "a lack of attention to social and other conditions when we agreed to provide military assistance," that the situation was worse than six months before, that time was against us and we could not wait any longer.)

Chebrikov: The border has not been closed. We have not done all we could. The Mujahideen changed their tactics. We will not achieve anything by military means. We need political decisions. We have to work with Najib.

48. The Soviet unilateral moratorium on nuclear tests had by this time lasted nearly eighteen months. *Ed. note.*

49. Sayid Muhammed Najibullah. *Ed. note.*

Shevardnadze: We have to end the war in Afghanistan. Let us specify the deadline for a pullout. Let us give a free hand to Najib. And "restrain" our comrades there, explain to them that they are dealing with an independent state, not with an occupied country.

Akhromeyev gave a brilliant analysis. "We [?] have lost the battle for the people. Most Afghans now support the counterrevolution. We [?] lost touch with the peasants, who didn't gain anything from the revolution. Eighty percent of the country's territory is in the hands of the Mujahideen, and the life of peasants is better there than in the areas controlled by the government."

Gorbachev made an angry speech about those in charge of Afghan affairs—both here in Moscow and there, in Afghanistan:

We had a clearly defined goal—to work toward establishment of a friendly [?!] and neutral country, and then get out. We don't want to establish socialism there, do we? We don't want the United States to move in with their bases. As long as there are no airfields there, or military bases or military camps, the rest is up to the Afghans. But no one is following this strategy. . . . We have to do everything ourselves and make our Afghan partners listen and obey. Our strategic goal is to finish everything in one, maximum two years, and withdraw our troops.

We did "finish" in two years. But why not in two months? Why not long before this discussion? Because—as is clear from Gorbachev's words about the United States—the Afghan problem, as in the beginning of that adventure, was still seen primarily in terms of "global confrontation" and only secondarily in light of the "new thinking."

And one more thing. Gorbachev was held back by the concept of "parity between two superpowers." and other aspects of the old foreign-policy thinking contained in the reports from the high-level, top-secret agencies of the military-industrial complex. He let himself be convinced that we had "an answer to SDI" and that it would be a real surprise for them. I tried to give him "different information," particularly from the astronaut V. Aksenov, who was involved in this sphere and brought me data and analyses showing that the project for our own SDI was just "throwing money down a black hole." But these attempts on my part met with immediate rebuff: "You don't know anything about this, stay out of it!"

Our domestic situation was not very encouraging. The concept of "acceleration," which was now almost two years old, was obviously not working.

The economic results of the year were dismal. Our finances were a very grave problem. In the last two five-year periods we'd spent 150 billion rubles more on economic development than we had intended. And where had they come from?

First, from sources unconnected with industrial production, namely, the export of oil and precious metals. We had a policy of exploiting demand on the world market. But market conditions changed, and we were left with nothing. Second, from vodka revenues. We were keeping the people drunk, destroying the basis of productivity, and undermining morality and order in the country. And we did not get either quality or quantity. Third, from raising prices on so-called luxury items such as furs and carpets. In the eleventh five-year period we received 50 billion in revenues from raising prices here. Gorbachev said the following at a Politburo meeting on October 30:

All this has undermined the financial system. As a result, we started borrowing from the population and increasing monetary emissions. Wages came into conflict with productivity. There is much more money than there are goods. And now the situation has us all by the throat. People stopped working. Indeed, if they cannot buy anything with the money they earn, then why work? This is a very serious problem. Now 25 percent of all enterprises cannot meet the plan, and 13 percent only incur losses. . . .

What should we do? Strictly observe the plan for the remainder of this five-year period. No new projects. Some suggest raising prices, but we cannot do that. The people have not seen any benefit from perestroika yet. No material gain. And if we now raise prices, you can imagine the political consequences. We would discredit perestroika completely. . . . And concerning aid to other countries—no promises to anyone, no matter what they ask for.

But just a month later, Gorbachev was forced to change his position on prices. On December 4 there was a conflict about this issue at a Politburo meeting. The Council of Ministers submitted their calculations, justifying the need to raise prices. Gorbachev now agreed, there was simply no other way. He was supported by Ryzhkov, Solomentsev, Nikonov, Murakhovsky, and Biryukova.⁵⁰ Ligachev denounced the move from a purely populist perspective, "in defense of the poor." He had the support of Vorotnikov and

50. Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, Mikhail Solomentsev, Vsevolod Murakhovsky, Aleksandr Nikonov, and Aleksandra Biryukova were other senior officials—of moderate to conservative bent—concerned with the economy. *Ed. note.*

Shevardnadze.⁵¹ Ligachev said that "twenty-five million people live on incomes of less than 50 rubles per month, 50 million on less than 80 rubles. It is unacceptable to raise prices in these conditions."

Gorbachev's point, that perestroika would not work if we observed the strict egalitarianism of a "welfare state," did not convince them. He also warned that we'd ruin all of our designs if we listened to those who'd become used to living off the state without working at all. The debate was deadlocked, and passions reached the point where the disputants weren't even listening to each other. Gorbachev then said that, in this situation, he saw his duty as general secretary to close the discussion and return the proposal to the Council of Ministers for further refinement. "Otherwise we'll soon be throwing punches," he concluded; "this Politburo is already on the verge of a serious split."

Gorbachev saw personnel as the root of all our problems and was intensively preparing, all through December, for the Central Committee plenum on cadres scheduled for January. He asked everyone known for a reformist orientation to state their "purely personal" opinion (in writing) about the cadre policies we needed. At that moment, he still wasn't thinking about the inherent failures of the system itself, regardless of which cadres were running it. At least I never heard anything like that from him. Gorbachev admitted the following to his closest advisers while discussing preparations for this plenum:

We didn't think it would be so hard. It's turned out to be so terribly difficult in the economy, in the social sphere, in the Party itself. Especially among the higher echelons. And what we have now isn't nearly as bad as what it'll be later. We've only just begun, and already we're seeing poor results.

There is a certain pessimism about the impact of our reforms. We are plagued by conservatism, complacency, inertia, an unwillingness to live in new ways. We got down to dealing with society, but we have not stirred it up yet. Some people believe that we started too radically, that we demand too much, that we are going too fast. But the situation is such that we cannot afford to go slow, life dictates increasing dynamism. Hence the cadre problem. It has a crucial significance. . . . We won't see new cadres come up unless we create an atmosphere of glasnost and criticism.

The cadre problem is a problem of the moral right to leadership. And our Party organs have many problems that make it nearly impossible to

51. Vitaly Vorotnikov was chair of the Russian Council of Ministers and a later member of Politburo. *Ed. note.*

replace cadres in other spheres. Don't be afraid of the truth in this question. We've already got past the initial shock of it.

The most difficult process is the democratization of society. We're all for it in principle, but it turns out that when you have to democratize yourself, it's a different, very difficult matter. It touches everyone's prestige. Everyone is wondering, "Will this democratization undermine my position?"

At the Politburo meeting on January 19, just before the plenum, he again broached the issue that was to have momentous consequences two years later:

Take our elections. You can place the ballot boxes, or the spot where you get the ballots, in such a way that there can be no secret voting. Abroad, we constantly hear that our elections are a sham. The problem here is not just in the act of casting votes, we have to look at the whole process. The main thing is that elections must be a serious matter, which is not the case right now. People vote and go home and do not care what happens after. We have spawned too much indifference.

Gorbachev looked at the unfavorable state of inter-nationality relations in the context of ideological and personnel problems for the first time:

We've fallen victim to clichés here. The dialectic of the problem has been disregarded. And what do we have? The nationalities problem was dealt with by stuffing it into a box. But a new generation grew up. . . . The experience of decades has to be given serious analysis. But we lost sight of the process. Some problems are the result of mistakes, others of positive developments, of national revival. We have to analyze all this calmly. It is an ideological, personnel, and economic question. And everything will depend on reforming our psychology. We will have to consider a special Central Committee plenum on inter-nationality relations.⁵²

That plenum was only held some three years later, and by then it was "still-born," a platform that was outdated even before it was written.

The conclusion of "the year of Reykjavik" was marked by another inter-

52. Earlier in the year, the first serious instance of national unrest under perestroika occurred when large-scale rioting erupted in the capital of Soviet Kazakhstan, Alma-Ata, when the corrupt Brezhnev-era republican Party boss was replaced by an ethnic Russian official. And so, ironically, Gorbachev's policy of replacing stagnation-era cadres immediately collided with the latest grievances of the USSR's non-Russian national minorities. *Ed. note.*

nationally important event, namely, the end of Academician Sakharov's exile in Gorky. There are different versions of who initiated this, and I was not privy to the decision. I only know that Gorbachev had long felt uneasy about the Sakharov situation. I heard for the first time that a decision had been made to "end that affair" at a Politburo session on December 1. Gorbachev said, "Let Marchuk [Gury, the president of the Academy of Sciences] go to Gorky and tell him: Stop fooling around, the whole country is at work, we need all our patriotic forces.⁵³ We need your contribution, come back to Moscow. Both the apartments and the dacha are yours. If you need anything else, you'll get it. And let Marchuk also tell him that he consulted the Central Committee on this."

On December 16, at the conference with Central Committee department chiefs, Gorbachev explained the decision on Sakharov. I saw sarcastic smiles on the faces of most people present. Zimyanin, the ideology secretary who also oversaw the Academy of Sciences, was apparently hearing it for the first time. He nervously tapped the table with his fingers, then spat out impatiently: "Did he at least thank you?" Gorbachev ignored him and explained that we needed Sakharov "and his potential" for perestroika. "We'll see whether he's up to it or not. There are problems more important than this one!"

After nearly a year of working with Gorbachev, on the eve of 1987, I could summarize my observations of him as follows. He understood that perestroika would not happen fast. He still saw it as the modernization of society and possible only within the framework of the existing socioeconomic system. The initiator and executor of that system's improvement remained, for him, the Marxist-Leninist party. Here is one of his last remarks of that year (from a Central Committee meeting):

Our generation has no other choice but to restructure the country. We cannot do everything, but we will lay the foundations of acceleration. And we will be able to attract good, fresh forces to this cause. I am sure that the task of the Party will not be any simpler even when all the democratic and moral levers are working. We will have more work to do. And our work will be more and more difficult. We will need to change forms and methods, because we will be working in democratic conditions. The Party has to see everything, register and synthesize everything, look for talented peo-

53. This expression of Gorbachev's is explained by Sakharov putting forth conditions of his return. I do not remember what they were, freedom to several conscientious objectors, I believe.

ple, put them in the right places, conduct ongoing political work, always be with the people.

Working in democratic conditions was a formula that appeared in 1986. He often repeated it, but he was not understood. Maybe this was because he himself saw democracy—socialist of course—as something the Party could employ in restructuring society. But not yet as an underlying principle of the very existence of society, not yet as a universal human value. . . . This realization was still to come.

Gorbachev began the new year having Reykjavik under his belt, which, with all the qualifications, backsliding, doubts, and problems in the realization of its main idea, was the beginning of a shift in the history of international relations. Nineteen eighty-six was also a year of experiments in economic policy. I was far removed from the enormous work Gorbachev was doing in this sphere. I can only say that, ideologically, it did not exceed the parameters of a new NEP.

We carried the heavy burden of Afghanistan into the new year. For all of Gorbachev's determination to end the war—formed, as the reader has seen, much earlier—no significant steps were yet taken. And this, like the aftermath of Chernobyl, was a huge weight on all his further reform activities. It greatly restricted his freedom of political and economic maneuver, including his efforts to realize the idea of Reykjavik.