SUMMIT DIPLOMACY IN EAST-WEST RELATIONS

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SUMMIT DIPLOMACY

The meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev, like any U.S.-Soviet summit, is the focus of tremendous interest and expectations. This excitement is not just an artificial creation of the media. A summit is an event that has the power to transform traditional positions and attitudes.

Today conservatives inside and outside the administration distrust "big government" and the foreign-policy bureaucracy, raising the cry, "let Reagan be Reagan"; yet, they are generally skeptical about the impending summit, which gives Reagan the greatest opportunity to be himself and which forces policy decisions up to the highest political level. On the other hand, liberals and "pragmatists," who generally trust the professionals much more than they do Reagan, seem generally pleased to see a "high noon" in which everything will be entrusted to the erratic cowboy of their nightmares. The behavior of the State Department has been no less atypical. While the standard behavior of bureaucracies would lead us to expect that the State Department would seek to reserve the power over vital decisionmaking, the department seems to have been an earlier and more consistent advocate of a summit than either the president or the White House staff.

Because the Reagan-Gorbachev summit is the focus of so many paradoxical attitudes, it is a good occasion to reexamine not only current policy but also the more fundamental issue of how the United States reduces hostility between itself and the USSR.

THE COMMON-SENSE CASE FOR SUMMIT DIPLOMACY

Certain common-sense assumptions about the character of East-West relations profoundly affect expectations of summit diplomacy. These assumptions proceed roughly as follows: In the nuclear age the preservation of peace is the most urgent task of foreign policy. The great danger to peace lies in the recurrent tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. To reduce this tension diplomacy must go to its source, relations between the superpowers. For this purpose the best available instrument is the core of diplomacy, negotiation. Superpower talks will be most serious and promising when conducted at the highest level, by leaders of the two countries. It is the leaders who can communicate most
directly and honestly, and it is only they who have the authority to make a fundamental change in East-West relations. Thus, a summit is properly anticipated with great hopes, because it can be immensely significant if properly handled.

These views are certainly not silly; they do accede with common sense. However, almost all of them are questionable, as further reflection on the character of East-West relations will show.

THE ROLE OF TALKS IN EAST-WEST RELATIONS

Any nation's foreign policy is decided partly by its intentions toward other countries and partly by the way the world is: the international environment sometimes gives a country the opportunities to carry out its intentions and sometimes blocks those intentions with intractable realities. At other times the environment offers opportunities that had not been planned or foreseen but that are nevertheless appealing. Thus interaction with the environment continuously transforms a country's original intentions. To restate this theme in different terms, a nation's foreign policy arises from the combination of "pushes"—plans and initiatives—and "pulls"—external factors that drag foreign policy in a certain direction. These "pulls" should not be underestimated.

Recent history has shown again and again the importance of the environment to relations between the major powers. Throughout the nineteenth century, the relations of the Russian Empire with Britain and France were substantially determined by the decay of the Ottoman Empire, which gave Russia opportunities for expansion and put English and French interests at risk. In the same way the relations of Russia and of Japan were determined by the decay of China and Korea. In the decade before World War I relations between Russia and Austria were substantially determined by the state of the Balkans, Franco-German relations by the condition of Morocco, and so forth.

Because foreign policy is determined both by intention and environment, relations between major powers may be changed by following either of two methods. The direct bilateral method necessarily involves talks and negotiations. The other method changes relations by changing the environment—for instance, by policy toward third parties. For example, the absence of U.S.-Soviet confrontation over the Middle East since 1973 probably has little to do with the tone of East-West relations, which have been sometimes better than average, sometimes worse. The basic reason is Anwar Sadat's defection from his alliance with the USSR and his détente with Israel. Sadat's shift not only diminished the magnitude of potential Arab-Israeli conflicts, but it also deprived the Soviet Union of its most powerful client in the region, a client that had sometimes served as an instrument of Soviet plans and sometimes drawn the Soviet Union into its own quarrels. It can easily be argued that Henry Kissinger's diplomacy toward Egypt had a greater effect on the nature of the U.S.-Soviet relationship during that period than any bilateral U.S.-Soviet diplomacy, whether this consisted of attempts to deepen détente or of "sanctions" for Soviet "misconduct."

Another case displays the same phenomenon from the Soviet point of view. After the quasi-revolution of 1980 Poland became a significant source of disagreement in U.S.-Soviet relations. It is now much less significantly so—not because the United States and the USSR ever came to any meeting of the minds on Poland, but because the USSR succeeded in finding and arranging with its allies in Poland a way of crushing Solidarity without a Soviet invasion. As a result of the Jaruzelski coup, the Polish issue is, perhaps unfortunately, no longer as salient in U.S.-Soviet relations. The USSR achieved this change in the nature of U.S.-Soviet relations by actions with and against third parties, not by any dealing with the United States.

These two approaches to changing relationships between powers have very different implications for the role of talks and negotiations. If the direct and bilateral method is chosen, talks and negotiations play a very important part. If, on the other hand, a power's behavior is altered by changes in the environment it confronts, talks and negotiations are obviously less important. They may even be counterproductive. For example, except during brief intervals U.S. diplomacy has proceeded on the assumption that it is wisest to keep the Soviet Union out of the attempt to heal the Arab-Israeli conflict. This view is quite compatible with an awareness of the dangerous potential for superpower confrontation that this conflict creates. However, U.S. Middle East diplomacy has generally operated on the assumption that Soviet inclusion in the peace process would complicate a regional solution and make the reduction of tension in the Middle East a source of added tension in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. This assumption is quite plausible.

Of course, talks and negotiations did play a very important part in earlier diplomacy, in spite of the influence of the environment. What were the most important talks and negotiations about, and what accounted for their importance? It was the preparation, consummation, prevention, and dissolution of alliances and alliances-like agreements that, directly or indirectly, probably accounted for a very large part of the important negotiation and diplomatic talks conducted in pre-1914 diplomacy. Even when the many-sided international context jelled into two sides before World War I—the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy) and the Entente (France, Britain, and Russia)—most of the major world events and crises concerned attempts to break up or consolidate one or the other side: beginning, for example, with the attempt of Germany to break up the Entente (the First Moroccan crisis) and the Russo-German Bulyegey summit in 1905, the Anglo-German arms-control talks after 1908, and so on.

These maneuvers over alignments and alliances cannot continue in the same way in the present period, which is one of bipolarity, in which international politics centers around two "superpowers." It is possible to add or subtract from the alliances (although this is surprisingly rare) but it is not in the same sense to break up or consolidate their central pole, the dominant superpower. In a system including many great powers, the greatest possible transformation that diplomacy could achieve was the transfer of a great power from one alignment to another. As history has shown, this could be brought about only by talks and negotiations. In a bipolar world this transformation is no longer possible, and the power of negotiation in world politics is, accordingly, greatly reduced.

Arms-control treaties do require detailed negotiation, and they are probably the most important area of the East-West relationship in which negotiation...
is necessary. However, arms-control negotiations cannot promise as fundamental a transformation of the relationship as would the conclusion of an alliance. Bipolarity implies, unfortunately, that an antagonistic relationship between the superpowers is virtually fated. Whatever antagonism results from ideology or historical cause—and it cannot be negligible—is piled on top of this structural opposition. By barring the choice of general war as a solution to problems in the relationship, nuclear deterrence reduces the potential variability of the U.S.-Soviet relationship toward one extreme. Bipolarity reduces the variability of the relationship toward the other extreme by making real friendship almost impossible. The outcome is a relationship of relative immobility. The limits within which the U.S.-Soviet relationship can vary—narrow compared to most relationships between states—must ultimately give the two countries less to talk about.

Another contemporary factor that increases the “pulls” of the environment, and decreases the importance of talks and negotiations in superpower diplomacy, is the nature of the “Third World” in the 1980s. Briefly requires some hasty generalization about this capacious and rather artificial category. The endemic paradox both between and within Third World states creates not only opportunities for superpower intervention—opportunities that are frequently hard to resist—but also real pleas for intervention in internal politics. Such pleas for intervention from Angola, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Ethiopia/Eritrea to both sides are well known. Less well known are Third World pleas for greater regional interventionism, such as those of Anwar Sadat. The Soviet Union is constantly tempted with requests for regional intervention. The captured Grenada documents show that Grenada was not, as American conservatives tend to presuppose, an example of successful Soviet “subversion.” Rather it was the New Jewel Movement, seeking to be assigned revolutionary tasks, that constantly approached Cuba and the USSR and persistently solicited greater activism by Cuba and the USSR in the Caribbean. These opportunities or temptations for Third World intervention tend to come suddenly, because they emerge from disorder—disorder not well understood by either the Americans or the Soviets. Because they emerge suddenly, they are not fitted very easily into a foreign-policy plan or strategy—especially if there is, to begin with, no foreign-policy strategy, as is frequently the case in the United States and possibly in the Soviet Union as well.

In the present difficult state of East-West relations, the United States’s most important task is to change that environment within which Soviet foreign policy works in order to remove potential sources of conflict. Arms control, at least in principle, affords one such opportunity by reducing or regulating temptations to change the military balance, and this does require negotiation. Apart from this, the most important way the United States can change the Soviet foreign-policy environment is by removing sources of regional conflict, especially in the Third World. This may be done in a way that is “friendly,” in which the outcome is satisfactory to the Soviet Union, or “hostile,” in which the outcome is unsatisfactory (as Jaruzelski’s coup was to the United States) but leaves the Soviets no easy response. The result for East-West relations in either case can be rather similar. Finally, the United States can affect Soviet behavior by unilateral changes at home. President Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative

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(SDI) is a spectacular, if unintended, example. SDI was not proposed with the intent of altering Soviet foreign policy, yet, the Soviet desire to cancel SDI was so great that it immediately caused the Soviet Union to return to the negotiating table and to propose far-reaching, new cuts in offensive weapons.

**HOW THE UNITED STATES COMMUNICATES WITH THE RUSSIANS**

If the United States does need to communicate with the Soviet Union, how does it do it? Communication, it has widely been assumed, necessitates diplomatic talks. The Soviets, however, are well aware of U.S. actions toward them without being told, and they usually have a sense of whether U.S. actions are in their interest. It is in cases where a superpower’s own actions are ambiguous, or where a distinction needs to be made about which actions of the other side are most objectionable (or welcome), that diplomatic talks become an indispensable mode of communication. It is too simple to say, as is often done when calling for a summit, that the United States is not communicating with the Russians unless it is talking to them, and that it is not talking to them unless it sets up formal exchanges between high-level officials.

**SUMMITS AND THE NATURE OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS**

Thinking further about the intrinsic character of East-West relations challenges the common-sense assumptions that bilateral relations define the U.S.-Soviet relationship and that bilateral communication is the key to improving those relations. The expectations aroused by the summits are rooted most deeply in these assumptions. If these assumptions are questioned, it must also be asked whether or not summits divert a nation’s energy from the greatest successes possible in East-West relations and narrow its vision to one crevice of the relationship where progress is particularly obstructed. Whatever may be the technical objections to summits as a diplomatic instrument, the cultural taste for summits is unlikely to wane until the governing assumptions themselves are questioned.

**SUMMIT MEETINGS AS A TOOL OF DIPLOMACY**

Such thoughtful observers of diplomacy as Sir Harold Nicolson, Henry Kissinger, George F. Kennan, and Dean Acheson have tended to be skeptical about the value of summit diplomacy. Their critique can be summarized and elaborated along the following lines.

Summit meetings differ from ordinary diplomatic contacts in that they involve officials with the greatest authority in their countries; in that they are thus unusual; and in that, because of this, they are very dramatic and therefore unusually public. Summit meetings, because of their high-level character, offer the possibility of resolving problems that only top-level leaders have the authority to resolve, and thus of settling such issues more quickly. Yet these potential advantages carry with them corresponding dangers.

It is too simple to say that the United States is not talking with the Russians unless it sets up formal exchanges between high-level officials.
The advantages of ordinary diplomacy are that it is calm, quiet, and usually secret. Moreover, it usually allows time to consider proposals and formulate responses without haste, precisely because the negotiators lack ultimate authority: it is understood that any major departure from a nation’s position can be negotiated only subject to higher approval. (Conference diplomacy, such as that which occurs in the United Nations and other international organizations, is an exception; it resembles summit diplomacy in its short deadlines, high pressure, and the impossibility of negotiating entirely ad referendum.)

At a summit, on the other hand, the leader of a nation has no escape route. He cannot plead the need to consult others. Yet, at the same time, it often proves that a national leader cannot deliver his country. Woodrow Wilson, at the 1919 Versailles summit, negotiated an entire peace settlement that his countrymen roundly rejected.

These problems are illustrated by the summit held between Wilhelm II of Germany and Nikolai II of Russia at Bјorogy in July 1905. In terms of immediate results this was perhaps the most successful summit in history. It reversed the entire structure of alliances in Europe, since its outcome was an alliance between Germany and Russia, which implicitly breached the alliance between Russia and France. This was an incredible master stroke for Germany, which thus broke out of the tightening “ring of steel.” It can also be argued, given the catastrophic war into which the French alliance was shortly to lead Russia, that this reorientation was profoundly in the Russian national interest. Here, at least, was a meaningful and fortunate summit.

Nevertheless, most readers will never have heard of Bјorogy, and for good reason—the treaty was quickly canceled by both parties. When Nikolai II reported the triumphant result to his foreign minister, Count Lamsdorf, Lamsdorf could not believe his eyes or ears. He had to explain to his sovereign that the Bјorogy treaty ran counter to the entire relationship with France, which had been the foundation of Russian foreign policy for over a decade, and thus had to be discarded. It is somewhat more puzzling that Wilhelm’s foreign minister, Count Bülow, was also so upset that he threatened to resign if the treaty was not canceled. Bülow doubtless understood that the treaty that had been extracted from the weak Nikolai by playing on the transient emotions of resentment,SENTIMENTALITY, and monarchic solidarity, could not withstand the whole course of Russian foreign policy, the vast official apparatus that elaborated upon that policy, and the Russian national interest that seemed to be served by it. The result was disappointed hopes, a feeling of betrayal, and increased uncertainty and anxiety in every European foreign ministry.

This diplomatic incident reveals several intrinsic problems of summit diplomacy. Precisely because he was emperor and autocrat of all the Russias, Nikolai could not stall or deflect Wilhelm’s persuasive arguments. Yet, at the same time, even a nominally absolute ruler could not deliver his government and his society. Diplomacy, if it is to contribute to the pacification of human conflict, must build on a solid and plausible interpretation of the national interest over the long term. Particular diplomatic events should be prepared so as to maximize the chances of success and cushion the impact of possible failure; there should be careful follow-through after every event. Summit meetings often violate these axioms of good diplomacy. They may tempt leaders to violate them. An attempt to achieve results by a special effort that is not based on a consistent concept of national interest and not integrated into the broad stream of diplomacy can only result in a stillborn initiative—the outcome of Bјorogy—or the transformation of diplomacy into a patchwork of sudden shifts and reversals. This characterized diplomacy among the renaissance Italian city-states, where an alliance was succeeded by a poisoning, and in the contemporary Middle East, where rulers announce the merger of their countries one month and cancel, via shortwave, for each other’s murder the next. This is diplomacy of a kind, but it does fulfill the diplomatic function of systematizing and disciplining the complex and erratic contact of societies.

**SUMMIT DIPLOMACY AND THE PERSONAL FACTOR**

The violation of axioms of good diplomacy can be avoided if summit meetings are carefully prepared for in advance. Unfortunately summits tend not to be integrated into the course of national diplomacy, because the contemporary turn to summit diplomacy is itself the result of dissatisfaction with ordinary diplomacy. Perhaps the strongest motive for summit meetings in recent times has been the belief that “human contact” at the highest level will resolve problems that the system has left unsolved.

This belief at first seems natural. On reflection, however, it is rather mysterious. Why should human contact between heads of state transform attitudes more than human contact between subordinate officials? This belief seems to be based on a series of assumptions: that a summit is the way to truly understand foreign leaders; that it will bring out the best in the feelings and dispositions of the participants; that the participants will treat each other well and gain respect for one another; and that this improvement in personal relations will reduce conflict between the countries involved. These assumptions had great influence in the 1980s. Neville Chamberlain reported the result of a summit with Hitler, in the words of the Cabinet note-taker, as follows:

*In his view Hitler had certain standards... he would not deliberately deceive a man whom he respected and with whom he had been in negotiation, and he was sure that Herr Hitler now felt some respect for him. When Herr Hitler announced that he meant to do something it was certain that he would do it.*

Deep down, this hope in the power of human contact surely rests on the belief that conflict between nations is not the outcome of opposed interests and beliefs but some kind of dreadful misunderstanding. Because conflicts are not deeply rooted, they can be removed simply by personal choice. Once again Neville Chamberlain gave this belief classic formulation in a letter to his foreign secretary, Lord Halifax, saying that Hitler and Mussolini were "men of moods—catch them in the right mood and they will give you anything you ask for."*+*

*Public Record Office CAB 3525, CAB 42 (88), Meeting of the Cabinet, 24.9.38., Evening Meeting, p. 178.
+Public Record Office F993/678.
Somehow allied to this notion is the even stranger idea that if deep differences exist, a summit is the place to air them and work them out. As Chamberlain told the astonished Soviet ambassador in July 1937, "If only we could sit down at a table with the Germans and run through all their complaints and claims with a pencil, this would greatly relieve all tension."**

These sentiments from the 1930s have been cited not because the present period is similar, but because they show the tenacity of certain core illusions about the role of human contact in resolving international tension.

The other assumptions that support these core beliefs are also quite misleading. Summit participants do not necessarily have a motive for being nice to one another. De Gaulle writes in his memoirs:

...I was starting from scratch....In France, no following and no reputation. Abroad neither credit nor standing. But this very destitution showed me my line of conduct. It was by adopting without compromise the cause of national recovery that I could acquire authority. It was by acting as the inflexible champion of the nation and of the State....

On a simpler level, it depends entirely on the situation (and particularly on domestic public opinion) whether a leader will find it more advantageous to be friendly or hostile in a given summit. Richard Nixon found it in his interest to engage in a vehement public quarrel with Nikita Khrushchev during the 1959 Moscow "kitchen debate." After the 1961 Vienna summit president Kennedy’s aides found it advantageous to leak that "President Kennedy has shown his steel" (Nessewek, June 12, 1961). Khrushchev actually broke up the 1960 Paris summit; he was under strong domestic pressure, after the downing of the U-2, to show his anger toward the United States.

One of the unexamined assumptions the U.S. bureaucracy has made when considering possible summits since 1985 has been that the occasion would be "go well" because both parties would have an interest in its not "falling." Western public opinion would consider a summit that ended in irreconcilable public disagreement to be a failure. Could it not be in the interest of a Soviet leader to have such an outcome in certain circumstances? In the case of Andropov, who was operating a rigid and summarilistic strategy to prevent deployment of new intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) and who did engage in a virtually unprecedented walkout from the arms-control talks, this was an especially dangerous possibility. In the case of Gorbachev it is less likely, but cannot be ruled out.

When summit participants are nice to one another, the outcome is not necessarily good. The desire not to be disagreeable, a desire that human contact often does increase, can lead participants to gloss over real disagreements on the matter at issue or make agreements that are imprecise. If the motive is human warmth rather than an adjustment of national positions, the result is likely to be only a postponement of disagreement and conflict.

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Sir Alexander Cadogan, a professional diplomat, had the same obsession.

(Mémoires de guerre: 2 Appel, 1940-1942 (Paris: Pion, 1942), p. 70.

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**Yet this account of the problems of summit diplomacy has generally reflected Western expectations and Western public opinion. How do summits look from
the Soviet point of view? Despite the "realism" often attributed to Soviet diplomacy, official Soviet judgments on the summit institution tend to be highly favorable. As an authoritative diplomatic manual states it

The USSR gives special significance to... meetings of the heads of governments and states and party leaders, or as they have come to be known, "summit meetings..." The Soviet government has often made the point that such meetings can lead to a serious change in international relations, for the heads of governments and states and the highest party leaders possess the necessary power and authority to make decisions of major international significance.

... Each meeting is prepared in advance, for to not achieve any results from a meeting, or to an ending in total failure due to ill-preparedness is not evidence of good diplomacy. However, the desire of the Soviet Union for this kind of meeting is not always met with a corresponding desire from its partners.

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The 1964 edition makes the manual's last point clearer:

In the course of events, these partners—the Western countries—evade such meetings, for it is advantageous for them to come into conflict with the sumptuous policy which the broad masses, even of their own countries, approve, but which they do not want to follow. Therefore they often avoid one another international meeting so as not to show their true face.*

This attitude evidently has a great deal to do with the fact that a summit can be used as an element in a strategy designed to sway Western public opinion and put pressure on Western leaders to make concessions. To the extent that judgment from the outside is possible, this seems to be Gorbachev's approach to the Geneva summit. Gorbachev's Paris visit and the release of an apparently radical, new arms-control proposal seem orchestrated to focus pressure on the Geneva summit, with the aim of forcing President Reagan to cancel the Strategic Defense Initiative in return for "deep cuts" in offensive nuclear systems. This strategy deploys powerful resources, but it appears increasingly doubtful that it will work. Since the peace movement at the end of the 1980s attempts to mobilize Western noncommunist public opinion have been a major instrument, sometimes the foremost instrument, of Soviet foreign policy. These campaigns have repeatedly created major headaches for the United States, but it is difficult to think of issues on which the Soviets have actually won. If the campaigns are unsuccessful, they may trap the Soviet Union in an impasse designed to trap the West. Such was the outcome of Andropov's campaign to stop INF deployment. One has to wonder whether the Soviet Union's capacity to mobilize Western public opinion, like America's capacity for power projection, is not a mixed blessing because it tempts the USSR to take ambitious initiatives that are unlikely to succeed. If so, summits—as part of this Soviet capacity to mobilize public opinion—can be a dangerous temptation for the Soviet Union as well as the West.

WHERE A SUMMIT CAN BE USEFUL

The foregoing case against summits is a powerful one, but it has been developed by those who see things largely from the standpoint of the professional diplomat, and this standpoint is inevitably limited. Political leaders often have wider horizons than do diplomats, and they almost always have wider popular support. They frequently have more initiative and are more open. Above all, they have more authority. These were the traits that permitted de Gaulle to pull out of Algeria and Sadat to go to Jerusalem.

The authority of the top leader is one of the biggest resources of a superpower. It is worth more than several aircraft carriers but in is seldom used fully or effectively in support of policy; much of it is wasted on meetings with Cub Scouts. Under certain conditions it ought to be possible to turn a summit meeting into a turbine that will use this vast reserve of energy. Two means suggest themselves.

One is the use of the president for "public diplomacy," as Gorbachev is using himself, to state a position, define the structure of diplomatic interaction, and put the other side in a difficult situation. Whether or not "public diplomacy" is legitimately part of diplomacy, it is part of modern superpower tactics, and it can be powerfully effective through a properly orchestrated summit.

Second and more important, the president's authority can be used to complete or push through negotiations that have been partially completed at the working level. The Camp David agreement—perhaps the finest hour of the Carter administration—is a good example. The Egyptian-Israeli peace process, begun "at the summit," had logged down in intractable wranglings among the negotiators. To reverse the sense of frustration and disillusionment would probably have been impossible without the summit at Camp David. At the summit Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin were able to use their personal authority to decide contentious issues, while Carter was able to use his personal relationships to persuade, and his authority as U.S. president to pressure, both men into making compromises.

Finally, it must always be remembered that the significance of a summit is not exhausted by what happens between the Soviet Union and the United States—or even between the American public and its government. Preparation for a summit forces an administration to make policy decisions on many issues that it has not faced squarely. This will be particularly true of the Reagan administration, within which feuding factions have been free to continue advocating contradictory lines of policy. For this reason alone, regardless of the outcome of the formal meetings, the Geneva summit is likely to be a watershed in the history of the Reagan administration.

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REQUISITES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUMMIT

On the basis of historical experience, it is possible to sketch certain criteria that a summit must meet to be successful and meaningful.

First, it must have a purpose. If one side has a definite purpose and the other simply intends to emerge from the meeting as advantageously as possible, the side with a clear purpose will have an enormous advantage.

Second, the outcome of a summit should be controlled and predictable within certain limits. Otherwise a summit contradicts its own purpose—the use of the president's great authority—because it risks damaging the president. The
President should not be put in the position of being sent ahead of the army to probe for buried mines with his bayonet.

Control or predictability can be achieved in several ways. First, at a summit among friendly leaders, such as the NATO allies, it is virtually assured by common interest. Any visible disagreement and recrimination is unlikely to go beyond certain limits. Meetings between U.S. and Soviet leaders are much more open-ended. In such a case, the element of predictability can be managed by holding a "get-acquainted" summit for which there are no substantive expectations. Far better is the summit that ratifies or (like Camp David) completes a diplomatic fabric that has been carefully prepared over a span of time and at a lower level. Experience has shown that this is the kind of summit that most effectively uses the real potential of summits while minimizing their temptations and dangers.

The symbolic aspect of summits is central and cannot be wished away. Yet one can ask that the symbolism of a summit be handled so as to assure that what is symbolized is something real. Although the 1972 Moscow summit may have exaggerated détente, détente did exist. On the other hand, the "spirit of Geneva" in 1955 and the "spirit of Camp David" in 1959 never represented anything real.

If no substantive diplomatic agreements have been prepared before a summit, the inevitable symbolic weight of a summit makes it crucial to prepare, well beforehand, big and imaginative public diplomacy initiatives, such as the "Open Skies" proposal made by Eisenhower in 1955.

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2. THE GENEVA SUMMIT

THE ROAD TO THE SUMMIT

On arriving in office in 1981 the Reagan administration broke with the expectation that had gradually become established since 1972: that summit diplomacy was a normal and inevitable part of U.S.-Soviet relations. Rather, the administration let it be known that it had no particular interest in a summit. This departure from routine, somewhat brave under the circumstances, left a mixed legacy. On the one hand, it established, despite the subsequent turn to favoring a summit, that the United States is capable of doing without these occasions. On the other hand, the long delay has vastly increased the expectations focused on the Reagan-Gorbachev summit.

The first real glimmer of Reagan administration interest in a summit seems to have come in the summer of 1982, but nothing came of this. After Yuri Andropov became general secretary, summit feelers were hastily extended again in early 1983, with the United States taking the initiative. American interest in a summit, however, seemed to die down following the summer of that year.

With the death of Andropov in February 1984, Konstantin Chernenko became general secretary and allowed his predecessor's war scare to decline. In spite of Chernenko's somewhat less hostile disposition toward the United States, the American attitude toward a summit was one of only restrained interest until last June. When the United States relaxed its conditions for the meeting, however, the USSR again played hard to get.

In March 1985 Chernenko died. The Reagan administration moved at once (without waiting to see how far Gorbachev would establish his authority) to propose a summit, delivering a letter at the funeral itself. The Soviets shortly agreed in principle, but a long minuet ensued over the date and the degree to which the agenda and substance of the meeting would be prearranged.

THE PARTICIPANTS

It is possible to understand the dynamics of the Geneva summit only by understanding how the differences in the status and background of the two leaders structure their risks and tactics, and govern the opportunities themselves.
To begin with, Reagan and Gorbachev are in very different positions, because of the different ways by which they have come to hold political power. In the United States power is conferred by means of election, and a president tends to have the greatest power and authority at the beginning of his term. In the Soviet Union there is no clear and legitimate method of succession. Designation by the previous leader does not work: Lenin did not want Stalin to succeed him, Stalin did not want Beria or Khrushchev, Brezhnev did not want Andropov, Chernenko did not want Gorbachev. Nor does election provide a standard means of succession. Khrushchev remained leader when an “arithmetic majority” of the Politburo (then the Presidium) opposed him. The Central Committee, which is supposed to elect the general secretary, appears to resemble the Privy Council in Britain: although it is made up of powerful people, it is probably not a functional legislative body (that is, one that conducts debates and votes for individuals whose election has not been predetermined by occurrences elsewhere). In fact, the Central Committee’s votes in “electing” its Politburo and secretaries have been unanimous for more than fifty years.

The choice of a new general secretary is thus made by a hidden process of bargaining among politically powerful individuals. The normal outcome of this process is not a clear-cut victory of one individual or faction, as in Western presidential elections, but a dividing-up of power among factions. The consequence of this mode of succession is, as Myron Rash has pointed out, that a new general secretary is not presented with power as is the president of the United States; he must accumulate power through factional maneuvering, policy initiatives, and dealings with foreign leaders (such as summit conferences).

It is true that Gorbachev has moved with exceptional speed to remove important opponents such as Romanov and Tikhonov from power. The characteristics of Soviet succession themselves may be changing in a way that is not understood very well: Andropov and Chernenko as well as Gorbachev gained formal authority, and perhaps power, with unusual speed. Nevertheless, Gorbachev is surely in the position of needing to gather power. He did not inherit the office of chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, held by Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko, although he probably would have liked to hold that position and the position of chairman of the Council of Ministers. Unlike Reagan, Gorbachev has a number of powerful officials within his own government, such as Vladya Grishin and Dinyushkin Khyusov, who are his enemies. Moreover, in a country where personal patron-client ties are important, Gorbachev has within his government many officials that he did not appoint and who owe him nothing, while Reagan is responsible for the appointment of everyone within the executive branch. Finally, to the extent that Gorbachev is embarking on real reforms of the ossified Soviet bureaucracy, there must be many important constituency that secretly oppose him. Policy opposition is apparent in the censorship of his speeches in the Soviet press: many of the most radical or innovative passages are simply not printed.

Thus the two leaders come to the summit holding very different levels of political power. President Reagan’s power is at its peak, or even somewhat declining. Gorbachev still faces the task of consolidating and increasing his power. This difference is potentially important for the conduct of the summit. President Reagan is vulnerable to the disappointment of American and European public opinion in a way that Gorbachev is not. However, given that the two leaders are in different stages of their political careers in different systems, Gorbachev has much more to gain or lose than Reagan through his conduct of the summit. The summit can help or hinder Gorbachev in establishing his authority over foreign policy, an area where he has no background and has apparently faced opposition. It is possible that Reagan could manipulate Gorbachev’s dependence on success at the summit to U.S. advantage. The very summit invitation to Gorbachev at the moment he was named to office, however, has already helped Gorbachev consolidate his authority as leader. This effect does not seem to have been considered at the time the offer was made.

This difference in personal circumstances will affect the attitudes and tactics of the two leaders. Reagan will be "looking to history"—a mood that could lead him in either of two directions. On the one hand, it could increase his desire to go down in history as a peacemaker. On the other hand, it will surely make him less willing to give up SDI, which he evidently sees as part of the legacy he will leave behind. Gorbachev will not be "looking to history" but looking for tactical gains that will increase his political power and aid the Soviet Union in the short term. It will be easier for him to take a position that diverges from his long-term preference, because he probably foresees a long political lifetime to change and build on what he achieves now.

**THE ISSUES**

**Arms Control**

Arms control will be the biggest issue at the summit—and the most important influence on perceptions of the summit—in spite of the effort that the United States will probably make to prevent this outcome. Since the late 1960s the American and European publics have tended to see arms control as the very core of U.S.-Soviet relations, a feeling only increased by the Reagan administration’s emphasis on the President’s personal interest in arms control. In a sense arms control is a topic particularly appropriate to a summit, because U.S.-Soviet conflicts over arms control are more likely to be resolved by negotiation than are most other conflicts, such as the regional ones.

Soviet strategy will seek to make Geneva an arms-control summit, using the event to focus pressures for an arms-control agreement—pressures from the Soviet Union, American public opinion, the NATO allies, and from some parts of the Reagan administration itself. The Soviets intend to dispose of SDI by offering deep cuts in strategic offensive forces. The present offer, however, includes conditions that are not "negotiable" in the light of the United States’ past negotiating record (nuclear "charges" would be the unit of account, British and French nuclear forces would be considered (a faux pas in Gorbachev’s pre-summit strategy), and American "forward based systems" would be included but comparable Soviet nuclear weapons would not). The United States cannot unilaterally negotiate away part of the "escalation ladder" facing the West of Europe and America, while at the same time directly or indirectly exerting pressure on the independent French and British deterrents. If these elements of the Soviet offer are substantially changed, however, the offer will become

Although Reagan is more vulnerable to the disappointment of U.S. and European public opinion, Gorbachev has much more to gain or lose at the summit.
hard to resist in practice. The Reagan administration’s own emphasis on deep cuts would make it hard to resist.

President Reagan, however, seems very determined not to abandon SDI. There are suggestions the Soviet side is becoming more aware of this. Such an awareness, together with the long lead times involved in SDI and the impossibility of verifying a ban on research and development, may create a narrow opening for an agreement. Given the timing, only initial elements of such an agreement could figure in a summit outcome.

How would the Americans manage arms-control issues at the summit if they did want an agreement? Ironically, the best bargaining situation would arise from standing firm through the summit. In this sense the pressures focused on the president at the summit are also an opportunity. Using this opportunity, however, would bring with it a heavy cost in public interpretations of the meaning of the summit.

Regional Issues

In practice regional issues will involve Third World areas where there is U.S.-Soviet conflict, whether indirect or by proxy, or where there is potential conflict: Central America, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Indochina, the Horn of Africa, and southern Africa. These are probably the most serious sources of conflict between the superpowers. Throughout the period of détente, the Soviet Union took the attitude that “wars of national liberation” should not be legitimized by relaxation of the direct Soviet relationship with the United States and with Western Europe. Certain U.S. officials have tried over the last three years or so to engage the Soviet Union in diplomatic talks on these regional problems. It is unclear whether this approach will help pacify the regional conflicts or admit the Soviet Union into areas (like the Middle East) where it has been excluded from openly influencing U.S. regional efforts. In any case, U.S. summit strategy is sure to reflect this approach. Reagan will want to emphasize these issues, in part to evade the focus on arms control. For that very reason, Gorbachev will seek to avoid the regional issues. Afghanistan is the only regional issue where the Soviet Union has actually been in negotiation (with an American ally, Pakistan). Yet recent shifts in Soviet coverage of the Afghan war suggest renewed commitment to that conflict. In general, the regional conflicts do not lend themselves to easy solution—certainly not at a summit—because the superpowers do not control many of the parties, because the moral and geopolitical “pulls” on the superpowers are strong, and because many of the conflicts themselves are complicated and intractable.

Human Rights

President Reagan has vowed to consider this subject at the summit, and the Reagan administration in fact has a record of raising it in high-level discussions with Soviet officials. The Soviet position is that they do not discuss internal affairs. In practice, however, they have remained and heard the subject discussed at other high-level meetings. The Soviet side is put in a difficult position by the Helsinki accords, which acknowledge the interconnection of security and human-rights issues and lay down standards that the USSR does not meet.

The basic reason for human rights conditions in the Soviet Union is the character of the political system. Outside influence on the observance of human rights is thus very limited. Still, Soviet dissidents believe that outside pressure on human rights is useful. It protects particular people whose cases become well known, and it contributes to a general atmosphere that puts the Soviet authorities on the defensive and makes them more cautious. Somewhat surprisingly, the record shows that the Soviet Union has been willing to make limited deals on human rights in return for concrete advantages. The Soviet government put up with Jackson-Vanik, with growing impatience, until it became clear that the payoff would be withheld under the Stevenson amendment. If there is an arms-control agreement, it ought to be possible to extract a very limited “bonus” that would release dissidents or permit some emigration.

The human-rights situation in the USSR has grown worse since 1979, reaching its nadir under Andropov. It remains unchanged under Gorbachev. The location and condition of the Sdamnov is still unknown; a recent article by Gini Chief Chehrikov, in Kommunist, defined a continued hard line against dissidents.

The emigration issue under Gorbachev has shown obscure signs of moving away from the line espoused during the ascendancy of Andropov, which attempted to close the door to any future Jewish emigration. There have been hints, perhaps connected with the Soviet and East European feelings toward Israel, that emigration might be possible under certain conditions.

Trade

There are recurrent pressures from inside the United States and the Reagan administration itself for freer trade, and minor agreements might emerge. Yet, there were few issues on which the experience of the 1970s so disappointed both sides; any major turns at the summit are thus unlikely.

Miscellaneous Agreements

A summit is usually marked by the signing of agreements on such subjects as the mutual investigation of “sewage treatment in a permeable environment.” These agreements provide something to sign when a summit produces no major agreements. One incidental political issue is, however, worth watching; whether any of the remaining sanctions imposed after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the attack on KAL Flight 007 are removed, given that the Soviet Union has not left Afghanistan or repented of killing the passengers. These sanctions, which tend to be imposed punitively and then dismantled silently, are an aspect of U.S.-Soviet relations that needs to be rethought.
OVERALL RELATIONS: THE SEARCH FOR A CODE OF CONDUCT

Specific issues of the kind enumerated above do not exhaust the content of summits. Western leaders have recurrently desired to explore the whole East-West relationship and what is wrong with it. For instance, Newsweek (June 12, 1961) reported the 1961 Vienna summit with Khrushchev thus: Mr. Kennedy concentrated on explaining to Khrushchev that the West is not in decline.

This impulse has several sources. It is fed by the understandable ambivalence of presidents facing the peculiar summit situation and the contradictory public demands swirling around it. A president wants to have a friendly talk but also to stand up for the American position. By having a "philosophical" talk about how both sides disagree these objectives can be reconciled.

The issue of defining East-West relations also arises on the agenda of summits pushed by a popular conception of how U.S.-Soviet relations can be fixed by getting both sides to submit to a mutual code of conduct. The high point of this conception in actual U.S.-Soviet diplomacy was the basic principles agreement of 1972.

History suggests that the impulse toward general ideological and historical discussion is best resisted. Of all the things that people and nations disagree on, ultimate worldviews are the most deeply ingrained, the least open to argument, the most elusive because of their complexity. Such discussions tend to get stuck at the level illustrated by Khrushchev's point that the first cosmonaut went up into space but didn't see God. It is better to try to improve U.S.-Soviet relations by beginning from concrete, limited problems on which there might be a common interest and working forward from there.

The entire notion of a "code of conduct" is open to question. Such an artificial and static concept does not allow for the flux and ambiguity of the real world. Resting on intentions alone, it does not allow for the strength of the "pulls" to which nations are subject. It encourages sudden, destabilizing policy shifts from complaisance to hostility: when one side believes the code of conduct is in force, it ties its own hands, only to become harshly punitive when it observes that the other side is not obeying it.

Tactically, president Kennedy's experience with Khrushchev in 1961 shows the problems of this approach. Kennedy did seek a historical and ideological discussion. It is well known that the discussion went badly. In fact, such discussions with Soviet officials are peculiarly difficult. They use a vocabulary in which the same words ("democracy," for instance) stand for different things, and thus one talks at cross-purposes. Furthermore, Soviet officials are habituated to arguing ideology, unlike U.S. officials. They are also habituated not to take it very seriously as a guide to tactical decisions.

THE PROSPECTS

It is impossible to say how the summit will unfold, and this is one of the problems of such an occasion. In the first place, the summit will appear successful if the

SUMMIT DIPLOMACY IN EAST-WEST RELATIONS

USSR wants this outcome. Even a substantively useful summit will not appear so if the Soviet leadership does not wish it. The summit is most likely to be genuinely useful if the U.S. side carefully prepares for it beforehand. The administration's ability to arrange the support of the allies and the Democratic leadership in the United States, so that the president does not appear isolated on SDI and other issues, will have a particularly great impact on the outcome.

The summit will be most useful if it is remembered that ( barring an arms-control agreement) the summit's effect on the environment of Soviet foreign policy, particularly on European and American public opinion, is likely to be more important than its direct effect on Soviet plans and intentions. Yet for a president building his political legacy the most important effect on public opinion will be the long-term effect. If the president's subordinates yield to the temptation to inflate the significance of the summit greatly, it will come to haunt them when subsequent U.S. and Soviet policy fail to support these expectations. History is strewn with summits that were talked up at the time but that did not help the presidents involved: Paris, 1960; Vienna, 1961; Glassboro, 1967; Moscow, 1974; Vladivostok, 1974; and Vienna, 1979. The president's approval rating in the polls actually dropped after the 1974 Moscow and Vladivostok summits and the 1975 Helsinki summit.

Because the summit is a temptation, it is a certain kind of success to resist that temptation. If President Reagan holds firm on SDI, it will be a triumph in terms of the creation of negotiating leverage. Given the dynamics of the situation, however, such stubbornness will be widely seen as successful only if it is linked to achieving some definite result after the summit.

The summit will create an image of the shape of U.S.-Soviet relations. Two images that may result are bad. One is an enthusiastic mini-détente or "spirit of Geneva" that would probably wither by summer. Nevertheless, before withering it could reduce the Reagan administration's foreign policy to incoherence, as the reaction to Afghanistan did to the Carter administration. Because the Reagan administration has witnessed a fragile revival of American confidence, this sequence of events might have a subtle demoralizing effect that would go beyond the second Reagan administration's own fate.

The other dangerous image would be an impression of intractable hostility between the superpowers. It would be easily for President Reagan to leave an impression of unwillingness to compromise and of opposition to Soviet initiatives without affirmative proposals on the U.S. side. The sense of a long twilight war, without elements that intrinsically moderate it or offer hope, is wholly unsatisfactory to the public consensus in the United States as well as in Europe.

If the administration finds the narrow ground between these two outcomes, the summit could be useful. It offers the Reagan administration a late opportunity to find a formula that defines, as "containment" did in very different circumstances, a U.S.-Soviet relationship that is neither cooperation nor unlimited conflict. A summit that communicated such a message would provide the foundation for a strong foreign policy and at the same time be profoundly reassuring to the American and European publics.
A president who embarks on summit diplomacy enters an enchanted wood, where rich treasures lie guarded by hidden traps and magical spells. Not the least of these spells is that, on the territory of a summit, nothing appears as it really is. If President Reagan can bring back from this peculiar region even a partial success for himself and for his country, he will have shown impressive qualities indeed.

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