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# The Day Of the Soviet Watchers

With the Summit Nearing,  
Experts Are at a Premium

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With spies defecting, not quite defecting and reflecting, with the administration examining every accumulated nuance for its global import, with the media regarding the Reagan-Gorbachev summit as if it were a psychic and political thumb wrestle, every house—including the White House—wants experts.

Sovietology, like Halley's comet and crawfish étouffe, is in.

Unlike scholars of, say, the Renaissance lyric, Sovietologists suddenly find themselves deluged with phone calls. Jerry Hough, who teaches Soviet politics at Duke University, said, "I came back to my office the other day and I had calls from everybody. Even People magazine."

Yesterday Ronald Reagan called on the Sovietologists. Six of them sat around a table in the Cabinet Room along with George Shultz, Robert McFarlane and Caspar Weinberger, spoke briefly on a range of subjects and answered questions from the president.

Reagan, of course, has access to Soviet experts from the State Department, the CIA and other agencies and may even rehearse for the summit as he did for his presidential debates. In his preparations, he has already met with Richard Nixon and defector Arkady Shevchenko, the former Soviet diplomat.

Before yesterday's meeting, however, his only known outside academic advice on the summit came from cultural historian Suzanne Massie—who said after the meeting, earlier this fall, that the president "doesn't know anything about the [Soviet] people at all. He's in the same position as other Americans, despite all his advisers . . ."

Massie, whose expertise is mainly in the tsarist period, is a bestselling author but not highly regarded as an authority on contemporary Soviet society by most in the field. Yesterday's visitors, however, are among the most prominent names in Sovietology:

William Hyland, editor of Foreign Affairs and a former deputy to Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft; James Billington, author of "The Icon and the Axe" and director of the Wilson Center; Arnold Horelick, former intelligence officer on Soviet affairs and director of Soviet studies at the Rand Corp. in California; Nina Tumarkin, professor at Wellesley College and an expert on domestic Soviet politics; Adam Ulam, professor at Harvard and author of "The Bolsheviks"; and Richard Pipes, former expert on Soviet affairs in the Reagan administration, and now at Harvard.

With the exception of Hyland, who is a moderate on Soviet-American issues, and Tumarkin, who

is relatively liberal, Reagan's guests have reputations as hard-line analysts.

"It sounds to me like Reagan invited people who tell him things he likes to hear," said one scholar who was not present at the meeting.

Although it is difficult to draw an ideological map of Sovietology in this country—the way one might with, say, economics, putting the capital of monetarism in Chicago—there are certain centers for certain viewpoints.

Harvard, dominated by Pipes and Ulam, has a hard-line reputation as do such think tanks as the Hoover Institute at Stanford University and the Heritage Foundation in Washington. Columbia University's W. Averell Harriman Institute, with Seweryn Bialer, Marshall Shulman and Jonathan Sanders, Princeton University, with Stephen Cohen, and the Brookings Institution, with Helmut Sonnenfeldt and Raymond Garthoff, are considered less rigid.

"But no one in the field has any illusions about the Soviet Union," Sonnenfeldt said. "The differences come on how susceptible the Russians may be to internal reform and on how the United States should deal with questions of arms control and foreign policy."

Here are four Sovietologists and a glimpse at some of their particular concerns leading up to the summit:

*Stephen Cohen is, of all his colleagues, probably the leading advocate of detente—a very lonely position these days. He is unhappy because "there's no real debate at all anymore in the country, even among Sovietologists." A professor at Princeton University, a columnist for The Nation and a frequent commentator on NBC opposite Richard Pipes, Cohen is the author of "Sovieticus" and a biography of Nikolai Bukharin, one of Stalin's reformist rivals for power in the 1920s.*

“Ever since Reagan got to the affairs has disappeared. The spectrum among Sovietologists has narrowed to those who advocate cold war, the Right and the administration, and those who advocate a chilly war, the faltering Democrats. And this is mirrored in the media. Take a show like ‘Nightline.’ They usually have one guest who is an administration supporter or a hard-on-defense Democrat. And who is the other guest? A Soviet! As if you couldn’t find a more moderate American point of view before you spill over into Moscow’s rhetoric.”

“I think a lot of Sovietologists and politicians are just too cautious, for political reasons, to suggest that maybe, just maybe, there are alternatives to cold war or chilly war. Or hot war for that matter. I can think of a lot of my colleagues who were considered pro-détente 10 years ago and they just will not come forward in public now and say the things they say in private. And I’ve met with congressmen who will tell me that they agree with me about the need for points of détente. So I’ll say, ‘Well, I’ll be looking forward to your speech on the subject.’ Forget it.”

“Except to criticize rhetoric or Star Wars, there is no substantial opposition to Reagan’s Soviet policies at all. Whatever I think of him I realize that Reagan has been able to lead this country ideologically and politically like no one else in recent memory, and as a result a conventional wisdom exists: ‘Détente failed because the Soviets betrayed us.’”

“Think of it. The only political figure who still uses the term détente is Richard Nixon!”

“I think a lot of my colleagues haven’t so much gotten more conservative as they’ve gotten tired of being bashed over the head and called nasty names. I’m no different. I get a little tired, believe me, of getting called ‘pro-Soviet,’ but the price of dissent in this country is pretty cheap. What can they do to us?”

*Richard Pipes was the Reagan administration’s hard-line and most influential adviser on Soviet affairs until he left for Harvard toward the end of 1982. Pipes articulated the belief, subsequently accepted by the president, that the Soviet Union faces severe economic problems and may be susceptible to pressures from the United States and western Europe for various reforms. Pipes, the author of “Survival Is Not Enough,” even believes that in order to preserve its position, the Soviet elite may one day have to reform the system substantially. He once said the chance for nuclear war was “40 percent.”*

“Sure, détente has been discussed, quite simply, is Soviet actions in the past 10 years. Afghanistan, human rights, how many examples do you need?”

“You know, no one talked about a détente or a dialogue with Nazi Germany in 1939—and there was good reason for that.”

“There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the Soviet leadership really wants some kind of meaningful accord. The only optimistic thing in regard to Gorbachev is that he does have a realistic view of the economic situation in his country.”

“I won’t tell you exactly what I said to the president at lunch, but if I had to give him advice in a nutshell it would be this: I’d say, ‘Be cautious about summits because you’re at such a disadvantage.’ The president has to deal with Congress, with public opinion, but the Soviet leader doesn’t have to worry about any of that. While the president hears people telling him he must go halfway on this or that proposition, Gorbachev does not have to deal with that. In essence, Gorbachev can reach over the president’s head.”

*Peter Reddaway will soon become secretary of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies in Washington. A senior lecturer at the London School of Economics, Reddaway’s specific area of interest is dissent and emigration. He is the coauthor of “Soviet Psychiatric Abuse.” In a telephone interview from London, Reddaway spoke about his current concern—“the areas in which Gorbachev will allow reform, and where not.”*

“Jewish emigration is a rather special area because letting people leave the Soviet Union is not a radical blow to the status quo. It doesn’t actually liberalize the place except in a marginal way. Gorbachev was part of the leadership that clamped down on Soviet emigration in the ‘80s but he has made signals now that emigration could be used as a kind of political bargaining chip.”

“For example, there are rumors that the Soviets are trying to establish better relations with the Israelis. And, recently, the head of the Soviet state bank met with some westerners and said that if trade terms with the West were improved and relaxed, letting 50,000 Jews leave the country would not be such a great problem.”

“I’m most pessimistic on the question of the national minorities, the peoples who are looking for greater autonomy or even real sovereignty. It’s almost impossible for Gorbachev to make concessions there. If you do that, you undermine central control, politically and economically.”

“I see the area of greatest possibility—the Soviets may ease up on liberal intellectuals, like Roy Medvedev, who call for restricted forms of capitalism within the overall economy. You see Gorbachev has two priorities: consolidating his own political control and improving the economy. He needs the liberal intelligentsia, and has dropped hints to that effect.”

“But, please, don’t get me wrong. I’m interested in the possibilities of change within the Soviet Union, but I think we need a hard line in dealing with the Russians. The Soviet regime is an inherently expansionist country, and, no matter how nice we are to them, that’s not going to change.”

*Jonathan Sanders spends a substantial part of his day at Columbia University’s W. Averell Harriman Institute watching live transmissions of Soviet television programs. With the help of a weatherproof 16-foot satellite dish (“It’s red so everybody knows it’s pulling in the Soviet Union”), he watches Russian exercise programs, news broadcasts and even commercials.*

“The other night I got up at 4:30 in the morning because I couldn’t wait to see how things were going on “Vremya,” the major evening news show. It was the night they finally gave out information on the Soviets’ interview with Reagan, and it was fascinating to see how they handled it. There were plenty of reports here in the States about how Izvestia edited out certain passages, but the television version—and television is how most people are getting their news now—was incredible.”

“The correspondent just got on the air and gave a two-minute spiel. First he blasted Reagan for his comments on Vietnam. Then the guy said, ‘If he can’t understand the past, how is he going to understand the future?’ Right after that he did try to emphasize how Reagan said he was hoping for world peace, and so on.”

“But there was no footage. No real details of what the president actually said. It would be as if some major American correspondent had an interview with Gorbachev but did nothing but publish a tiny commentary.”

“There’s always a lot of anticipatory journalism in this country. You know, ‘How will this or that affect the summit?’ The Soviets hardly ever get into that sort of thing on television. But you’re starting to see it now in very subtle ways. They will make little comments on stories about how something may or may not affect the ‘meeting at the highest level’—which is the term they use for summit. You still see a lot of neg-

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ative imagery about the United States—antinuclear protests in Europe, men on subway grates and so on—but they seem to be tempering it a bit with things like Humphrey the Whale.

“To tell you the truth, though, I’ve been just as interested in another Soviet television phenomenon these days, and that’s the idea of commercials. They schedule about six or seven of them together and list them in the magazine I call TV Guide-ski. I love the one about a multifunctional children’s seat. The motto is: ‘If he’s old enough to sit, let him sit comfortably.’

“I saw a fantastic antismoking commercial recently that showed a guy shooting himself with a contraption that looked like a shotgun that shoots deadly cigarettes. The guy blows his own head off and the voice-over says, ‘Every time you smoke, you’re killing yourself.’”