

RED STAR RISING:
THE COVERAGE OF MIKHAIL GORBACHEV
BY U.S. NETWORK TELEVISION, 1984-86

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Beth Knobel
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation presents a case study of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's coverage by U.S. television news. This work aims to increase the current understanding of both the effect of politicians on the media, and the effect of the press on policy making.

My dissertation addresses three main questions. First, how did Gorbachev cultivate positive media coverage from the American press? Second, what kind of coverage did the American media give Gorbachev? Third, did the press coverage have an effect on U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union? I limited my examination to Gorbachev's first two years in power, when I theorized that the effect of the media would be greatest, and to television news because it is the single largest source of news for the American citizenry. I performed a content analysis of nearly 900 network evening news reports on Gorbachev, 150 of which I viewed on tape, and interviewed journalists, policy makers and academics--both in the United States and Soviet Union--about Gorbachev's tactics and their effect.

I found that Gorbachev used the media strategically to further his policy goals. Even before he assumed the office of General Secretary of the Communist Party, Gorbachev began a deliberate campaign to solicit positive public opinion at home and in the West. Although Gorbachev was continually introducing new tactics during the time period of this study, not everything that he did was "strategic" in nature-

-that is to say, not everything Gorbachev did to cultivate press coverage created an effect or impression above and beyond the content of his message. In 1984 and 1985, Gorbachev's cultivation of media coverage was far more strategic than in 1986.

Gorbachev's emphasis on image and his attraction of positive press coverage affected both the style and substance of Soviet-American relations. "It [the press] has an effect on policy," as one Reagan administration official put it. The Reagan administration responded to Gorbachev by trying to neutralize Gorbachev's popularity. This response included policy actions, such as the renewed effort at arms control negotiations which later led to a treaty on intermediate range nuclear weapons. But the President also sought to match Gorbachev's momentum stylistically in what the networks termed "the battle for world public opinion."

For my mother and
in memory of my father

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CHAPTER ONE: RED STAR

Americans remain fascinated by Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev. The President of the Soviet Union has been the subject of several dozen books, and is undoubtedly one of the most important and--in some circles--admired figures in this century.¹ He has had great success in international relations, effectively ending the "Cold War" and making great strides in arms control. His record in the Soviet Union is more mixed, as evidenced both by the country's continuing economic problems and the dissolution of the Communist political system. Over the past six years, Gorbachev repeatedly tried to persuade his people to work harder, accept reforms, and stay united as one nation. On the international front, Gorbachev needed to persuade Ronald Reagan and the leaders of other Western powers to begin a new, warmer relationship with the Soviet Union. Persuasion of the Soviet public and of the world community proved critical to the reform process begun by Gorbachev. These reforms have led to dramatic changes both inside and outside the Soviet Union. Despite continuing problems at home, one

¹ Despite current political developments, I will continue to refer to Gorbachev as the Soviet President and to his country as the Soviet Union. Even in the United States, Gorbachev is cited as one of the most admired men in the world. He first appeared on Gallup's poll of most admired men in 1987, when he tied for eighth place. Gorbachev placed second to Ronald Reagan in 1988 and to George Bush in 1989 and 1990. Raisa Gorbachev was rated the eighth most admired woman in 1987, in her only appearance on the list.

could argue quite plausibly that Gorbachev has had the largest single effect on international relations in the post-war era.

Before beginning his substantive programs--in fact, even before he became leader of the Soviet Union--Gorbachev began a deliberate campaign to solicit positive public opinion at home and in the West. It is my opinion, based on interviews with some members of his inner circle, that Gorbachev believed on some level that cultivation of a positive image at home and abroad could help enable him to pursue his policy goals. "Gorbachev felt that when he was using the media he was becoming more and more popular in the West," said Sergei Grigoriev, an interpreter in the Central Committee apparatus at the time who later served as a spokesman for Gorbachev. "It was increasing easy for him to convey his foreign policy because of the media."²

Gorbachev's most potent tool in his battle to cultivate an image was the media, particularly the Western press. The positive media coverage Gorbachev garnered early in his leadership was crucial in establishing his political power. Had he not built up his image, Gorbachev would have had a much more difficult, if not impossible, time in pursuing the substantive policies that have made him renowned. In short, Gorbachev's "media strategy" was an integral part of his pursuit of public policy.

² Interview with Sergei Grigoriev, November 8, 1991.

In order to identify and analyze Gorbachev's methods for eliciting positive press coverage, this dissertation will analyze the coverage of the Soviet leader by U.S. network television news. This work analyzes the ascent of Gorbachev by examining the reports featuring Gorbachev from the death of Yuri Andropov in February 1984--when he first appeared in reports on U.S. television--until the end 1986 --when he marked a watershed by releasing dissident Andre Sakharov from internal exile. By examining the coverage of Gorbachev by U.S. television, I will identify the actions that Gorbachev undertook to try to attract press coverage. Through this examination, I hope to determine whether Gorbachev did in fact affect the coverage given him by the U.S. media. I also hope to ascertain whether Gorbachev's media-seeking actions influenced U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, my intention in this dissertation is to investigate the way in which U.S. television covers foreign affairs. Very little has been written in the three decades since Cohen's seminal The Press and Foreign Policy about the way in which media coverage affects the making of international policy.³ My goal is to ascertain which of the roles played by the press 30 years ago are still played by the media in the 1990s, and how the press-government

³ Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

relationship has changed over time.⁴ Among the specific questions about Gorbachev, the press and policy making I hope to answer are the following:

- o How did the U.S. press cover the Soviet Union and its leader during the time period of this study?
- o More generally, how can a foreign leader influence the coverage given by the U.S. press?
- o How does press coverage in general affect the formation and implementation of U.S. foreign policy?

In this age of international communication and global networks, the role of the media is increasingly of importance and is worthy of in-depth study.

A. Methodology of the Study

My study, documented in the chapters that follow, presents the results of three separate processes. First, I document the coverage given Gorbachev by U.S. television. Second, I isolate the elements of Gorbachev's strategy for managing the U.S. media. And third, I relate Gorbachev's strategy to larger issues of U.S. foreign relations with the Soviet Union. This is aimed at assessing the effect of the media coverage on foreign policy making.

To uncover Gorbachev's media strategy, I analyzed the American television news reports on Gorbachev from his very

⁴ I have chosen to use Cohen's book as the basis for this study because, it is still the only full-length academic treatment of the media's role in the foreign policy making process. A search of the Social Science Citation Index shows that The Press and Foreign Policy has been quoted by several hundred scholars in articles concerning the media's role in the policy making process.

first appearance on American network television in February 1984 through the release of the dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov in December 1986. I chose to study the television coverage rather than television and print sources for several reasons. The first was because of the high viewership levels for the network television shows. Each one is seen by approximately 10 million American households (and over 25 million viewers) each evening, far outstretching the reach of any single newspaper or newsmagazine. Television is the single largest source of news for Americans--nearly seven in ten Americans report that television is one of their primary sources of news--and it is also the most trusted.⁵ Because of the great time it takes to analyze media coverage, I decided to limit my study to one kind of medium, and chose television over print for its pervasiveness. Secondly, the evening news reports on the three major networks, unlike other news organizations, are easily accessible. Vanderbilt University runs a Television News Archive which catalogs each nightly broadcast on ABC, CBS and NBC and makes copies of individual segments available for purchase. I would have liked to add

⁵ See the joint report of the Roper Organization, Network Television Association and the National Association of Broadcasters, "America's Watching: Attitudes Toward Television 1991." Furthermore, Harold Stanley and Richard Niemi wrote that if there were conflicting pieces of news reported by different news media, that 49 percent of respondents would believe television, while only 26 percent would believe newspapers, 7 percent radio and 5 percent magazines. See their Vital Statistics on American Politics (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1990).

the reports of Cable News Network and the Public Broadcasting Service's MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour to my study group, as well as morning news shows, but had no easy way to access to their reports.

Even after limiting myself to the network evening broadcasts, I was still faced with analyzing hundreds of hours of coverage. I limited the time period of the study, therefore, to the "rise" of Gorbachev. Intuitively, I believed that this would be the time in Gorbachev's political career when he would be learning how to work with the media most actively. Moreover, this intuition paralleled the research done on the agenda-setting effects of the media, which suggests that "among the most significant impacts of the press occur early on the policymaking process, when it is not yet clear which issues will be addressed and what questions will be decided."⁶

Starting with a total of over 900 stories mentioning Gorbachev in Vanderbilt University's Television News Index and Abstract from 1984-86, I eliminated the stories that mentioned Gorbachev only peripherally. This left 846 reports comprising over 37 hours of news which I analyzed from transcripts. Of these, I selected what I considered to be the most important stories for in-depth analysis. I chose this group based on several selection criteria. In

⁶ Martin Linsky, Impact: How the Press Affects Federal Policymaking (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), p. 87. This issue will be taken up in more depth in Chapter Three.

general, I chose "breaking" news stories surrounding Gorbachev's foreign trips, governmental actions, and policy proposals. I also examined many stories preceding, during and after the Reagan-Gorbachev summit meetings in Geneva and Reykjavik. I selected some stories which were analytical in nature--such as ones examining Gorbachev's rise to power, or the economic problems with which he had to grapple. I tried also to select stories where I thought from the transcript that the visual images might be an important component of the message of the whole report. (The visuals in a story about a Gorbachev speech broadcast from his office, for example, would probably be less important than those in a story about a speech made at a factory, where Gorbachev might also tour the plant and meet with workers.) One hundred fifty four reports were viewed on tape for more complete analysis. The examination was undertaken using tapes from Vanderbilt University's Television News Archive.

I then performed a content analysis. "Content analysis aims at systematically monitoring and summarizing the messages contained in the mass media," using a number of techniques.⁷ The point of any content analysis is to discern both quantifiable and qualitative patterns in the material studied. Accordingly, I gathered some numerical

⁷ Morris Janowitz and Paul Hirsh, eds., Reader in Public Opinion and Mass Communication, 3d edition (New York: Free Press, 1981), p. 215. The essay in this volume by Ole Holsti, "Content Analysis: An Introduction," provides a useful overview of media analysis techniques.

information about the stories in my study group which I could use to make comparisons among the networks--such as total seconds of time and number of stories dedicated to Gorbachev, most frequently quoted sources, and types of sources quoted. For the 154 stories I analyzed in depth, I also measured the number of different camera shots per story, the length of the average spoken quotation or "sound bite," and the number of sources shown speaking in the report. However, the bulk of my analysis was more qualitative in nature. I took detailed notes on the transcripts read to determine what angle was placed on the report by the introduction or narration, what new information was given by the report, what information and themes were repeated from earlier reports, and how the story came about (generated by a specific Gorbachev action or not). For the reports I saw, I completed a more detailed analysis of the visual information. Among the questions I asked were: What visuals were shown? From where was the film obtained? What information was conveyed by the footage, and how did it interact with the audio message? If the visuals were to be viewed without sound, what messages would they convey? My analysis was aimed at uncovering the tactics that comprised Gorbachev's media plan and at discerning how television covered Gorbachev.

To gain additional insights into the material, I interviewed American journalists and editors involved in the coverage of Gorbachev, as well as Soviet government

officials and journalists, to elicit their thoughts on how Gorbachev's media strategy worked. Then to assess the media strategy, link it to changes in American foreign policy making and assess larger issues of international security, I interviewed members of the American foreign policy making community and examined the memoirs of others unavailable for questioning. During these interviews, I started with a standard list of questions or a "standard instrument" and then added questions tailored to the specific interviewee. The standard instrument consisted of open-ended questions about Gorbachev's actions, the major news events of 1984-86 and their coverage, and the interviewee's area of expertise. The standard instrument is contained in Exhibit I-1. I also consulted public opinion polls to assess opinion changes among the American people. These methods allowed me to relate changes in public and elite opinion to changes in foreign policy.

I also undertook fieldwork. During the summer of 1991, I worked as an intern in the Moscow Bureau of NBC News. During the first two months of the summer, Bureau Chief Ike Seamans simply allowed me to tag along with NBC crews as I desired to see how they did their job and how Soviet officials worked with them. During the last month of the

EXHIBIT I-1

STANDARD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Where were you from 1984 and 1986? What were you doing?
What were your general feelings about Gorbachev as he came to power?
How does Gorbachev work with the media?
Who helped Gorbachev learn about the media?
Did Gorbachev's understanding of the media evolve?
What is the role of the KGB in press relations?

QUESTIONS ABOUT EVENTS

What was the importance of Gorbachev's trip to Great Britain? Of Thatcher's comment that the West could do business with him?
What were Gorbachev's objectives as he came into power?
What do you know about his "walkabouts?"
What do you know about the planning of the Geneva Summit?
What do you remember about the Geneva summit? About the coverage of the summit? About the interaction between the Soviets and Americans?
Do you remember the maneuvers over arms control proposals in the first half of 1986? What were Gorbachev's objectives? How much was substance and how much rhetoric?
What about the coverage of the Party Congress of February 1986? ABC gave this event enormous coverage. Any comments?
How well did Gorbachev handle the Chernobyl disaster? How well did the American media?
How well did Gorbachev handle the Daniloff-Zakharov affair? And how well did the American media?
What do you know about the planning of the Reykjavik summit?
What do you remember about the meeting at Reykjavik? How did it differ from the Geneva summit? Did it matter that it happened over a weekend? What do you think about the coverage of the summit and its aftermath?
What was Gorbachev seeking when he pardoned Sakharov?

QUESTIONS FOR JOURNALISTS

Did one network cover Gorbachev better? Why?
What were the problems of operating in the Soviet Union?
What were the internal politics of the networks during this time?

internship, I worked as a full-fledged production assistant at the bureau. This happened because there were two major events to cover: first, a Bush-Gorbachev summit in Moscow July 30-31 and, second, the coup d'etat of August 19-21. During the summer, I was able to learn about the operations of a network news bureau, to see how all the networks cover summits (because ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN pooled their operations to some degree during the summit), and to experience the coverage of a crisis. Despite my gratitude to NBC for providing me with a fascinating experience, I have tried to treat my discussion of NBC's coverage with the same critical eye I used to examine its competitors. This was made easier by the fact that none of the current staff members in the NBC Moscow Bureau were involved in the early coverage of Gorbachev.

B. The Gorbachev Phenomenon

Russian leaders as far back as Peter the Great have turned to the media to help rule their people. Peter established the first Russian newspaper, Vedomosti ("The Chronicle"), in 1703 to help inform his subjects and mold their views on political issues.⁸ Yet never before has the

⁸ Alexander Merkushev, "The Russian and Soviet Press: A Long Journey From Suppression to Freedom via Suppression and Glasnost," Discussion Paper D-10, Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, p. 1-2. Peter personally chose much of the material in the paper from articles translated from the German press. Accordingly, Vedomosti had a "greatly restricted ideological outlook."

media been used by a Soviet leader as it has been used by Gorbachev. Rather than dictating public opinion, Gorbachev has been involved in a program of persuasion of the general public almost from the day he took office. "We must realize that the time when management consisted of commands, prohibitions and exhortations has vanished into the past," Gorbachev explained to the Communist Party Central Committee.⁹ To lay the groundwork for 1989's radical changes in Eastern Europe, and before that for glasnost and perestroika, Gorbachev undertook public relations strategies which were unprecedented for a Soviet leader. "Virtually from the beginning of Gorbachev's tenure in power, an observer of Soviet politics could detect in the use of the media the operation of a key mechanism in effecting major change."¹⁰

By "public relations strategies" or "media strategies," I mean conscious actions for attracting and managing publicity. The coverage that public figures garner, after all, is not simply decided by the media. Policy makers' own actions strongly influence the coverage they receive. Among the many decisions that affect coverage of an event are whether reporters are allowed to be present, whether they can ask questions of the participants, and what images are

⁹ Pravda, June 26, 1987, p. 5.

¹⁰ Ellen Mickiewicz, "Mobilization and Reform: Political Communication Policy Under Gorbachev," PS: Political Science and Politics, June 1989, p. 199.

available for photographing. Even the time of day at which the event is held can affect news coverage. What actions the policy maker undertakes may make a difference as well. As media scholar Jarol Manheim explained, "Simple as the gesture may be, it is of great symbolic value in the game of public diplomacy."¹¹

Gorbachev repeatedly used media-management techniques to cultivate press coverage in the Soviet Union and around the world, heightening his image as an open, dynamic leader. "Gorbachev was in a way a new breed of Soviet politician who understood the power and the influence of the press, especially the electronic media," explained Melor Sturua, veteran political columnist for the Soviet newspaper Izvestia.¹² Gorbachev's tools for influencing the press included numerous media management techniques that are familiar to Western politicians, including photo opportunities, meetings with constituents, interviews with journalists, and well-publicized events with other world leaders. But because of his relative youth and dynamism, Gorbachev relied in particular on television:

Television had been the enemy of Brezhnev, Andropov, Tikhonov and Chernenko, since they were too old and too ill to project an image of strength and ability. It was an image which could be superimposed on still photographs, but not before live television cameras. For Gorbachev, on

¹¹ Jarol Manheim, All of the People, All of the Time (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), p. 153.

¹² Interview with Melor Sturua, November 1, 1990.

the other hand, television was an ally, enhancing his popularity.¹³

Gorbachev's telegenic personality and, moreover, his ability to talk extemporaneously were keys to his seduction of television. For the Soviet people, perhaps the most surprising change was Gorbachev's ability to talk without prepared remarks, which was absolutely unprecedented. "He could speak without papers, without written-for-him speeches, he could deliver them himself without any preparation or homework," said Izvestia's Sturua, "and that's why he wasn't afraid of television, he wasn't afraid of the press."¹⁴ Gorbachev's "charm offensive" did not seem to affect Ronald Reagan, however. "I can't claim that I believed from the start that Mikhail Gorbachev was going to be a different sort of Soviet leader," Reagan wrote in his memoirs. "We'd have to be as tough as ever in dealing with the Soviets."¹⁵

The new way in which Gorbachev used the media was revolutionary. Because Western-style media management techniques were so rarely used by Soviet leaders, Gorbachev created a sudden, positive reaction by employing them:

No previous Soviet leader has received so much immediate publicity or such an enthusiastic welcome from the general public. Gorbachev's

¹³ Zhores Medvedev, Gorbachev (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), p. 160.

¹⁴ Interview with Melor Sturua, November 1, 1990.

¹⁵ Ronald Reagan, An American Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 614-615.

popularity was closely linked to his energetic, charismatic, competent and obviously intelligent personality.¹⁶

Moreover, Gorbachev looked particularly good because he was often compared to his predecessors--Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. Because there had been three elderly, sickly Soviet General Secretaries in the early 1980s--who made little progress on U.S.-Soviet issues during those years--the expectations for Gorbachev were very low when he came to power explained Bill Keller, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Moscow correspondent for The New York Times:

He seemed to be a genius. But you have to keep in mind that he had an easy act to follow, he had a whole series of easy acts to follow. Nobody had great expectations that a Soviet leader would be media-genic, that he was gonna be stylish in appearance, you know, seemingly affable, you know, fresh and lively. He had a lot going for him just because he was so unexpected.¹⁷

Gorbachev's strategy worked with remarkable effectiveness to produce positive media coverage, creating for him a powerful image throughout the world. Even in this country, national polls found that Gorbachev's favorable rating rose from 38 percent in 1985 to as high as 78 percent in 1988.¹⁸ Even after the dramatic events following the military coup this summer, Gorbachev's popularity level with the American

¹⁶ Medvedev, p. 183.

¹⁷ Interview with Bill Keller, November 20, 1990.

¹⁸ See ABC's Poll of February, 1985 and the Gallup Polls, 1985-90.

people remained at approximately 65 percent.¹⁹ I will show throughout this study how public opinion in the United states became more positive during Gorbachev's first two years in office in response to the Soviet leader's actions.

c. Results: The Effect of the Media

More generally, this dissertation is concerned with using the case study of Gorbachev to examine the way in which the media affect the policy making process. This phenomenon is called "media effects" in the literature about political communications. The debate over what effect the media have on public opinion and behavior has raged for almost 70 years, since the communications industry was in its infancy. Walter Lippmann was one of the first to systematically investigate the notion of public opinion in the United States, and the pioneering work of Paul Lazarsfeld in the 1940s was the first to examine the effect of the press in detail.²⁰ Simply put, Lazarsfeld held that the media had only a limited effect on public opinion.²¹

¹⁹ Wall Street Journal/NBC News Poll, August 29, 1991.

²⁰ Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922).

²¹ Lazarsfeld's work includes Radio and the Printed Page (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940); with Bernard Cerelson and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944); with Robert Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," in L. Byson, ed., Communication of Ideas (New York: Harper and Row, 1948); and with Frank Stanton, Communications Research 1948-49 (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949).

Lazarsfeld's studies suggested that audiences were selective in attention and recall based on such personal characteristics as age, living situation, and political views. Media campaigns, he argued, were therefore capable of causing minor rather than massive changes in opinions and attitudes. This paradigm, known as "the model of limited effects," was dominant for more than 25 years.

But as the media changed, viewing patterns evolved, and politicians became more skilled in working with the press, alternative paradigms were introduced which suggested that the media's effects were large and substantial. These alternative models fell into three groups.²² The institutional model suggested that the media tell citizens what to think about--that acts as a powerful agenda setter. This model was put forward by Bernard Cohen, and backed up by many others, including McCombs and Shaw and also of Iyengar and Kinder.²³ This school of thought held that the

²² This classification is suggested by Elihu Katz, "Communications Research Since Lazarsfeld," in Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 51, Supplement, 1987.

²³ See M.E. McCombs and D.L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," in Public Opinion Quarterly, 36: 176-87, 1974; and Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, News That Matters (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). See also Steven Chaffee and John Hochheimer, "The Beginnings of Political Communications Research in the United States: Origins of the Limited Effects Model," in E. M. Rogers and Francis Balle, eds., Media Revolution in America and Western Europe (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1982); G. Ray Funkhousert, "The Issues of the Sixties: An Exploratory Study in the Dynamics of Public Opinion," in Public Opinion Quarterly, 37, Spring 1973; and Arthur H. Miller et. al., "Type-Set Politics: Impact of Newspapers on Public Confidence," American Political Science Review, No. 73, March 1979.

media have stepped in to fill the gap in agenda-setting caused by the decay of such political institutions as political parties. Controlled experiments with television viewers showed that while the media were not successful at telling viewers what to think about certain issues, that the press was remarkably successful in telling viewers which issues to think about.

The second paradigm, the critical model, held that the press tells citizens what not to think about or what not to think.²⁴ As in the institutional model, these critics held that citizens are acquiescent to media influence and that the media can give shape to political and social reality. Unlike the institutional model, the critical paradigm assumes that the media tend to reinforce the status quo and therefore steers the public away from controversial ideas.

And thirdly, the technological model holds that the media suggest how to think.²⁵ McLuhan's adage, "the medium

²⁴ For proponents of this view, see George Gerber and Larry Gross, "Living With Television: The Violence Profile," Journal of Communication 26: 173-199, 1976; Todd Gitlin, "Media Sociology, The Dominant Paradigm" in Theory and Society 6:205-253, 1978; M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in The Dialectics of Enlightenment (London: Allen Lane, 1973); and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Return to the Concept of Powerful Mass Media," in H. Eguchi and K. Sata, eds, Studies of Broadcasting #9 (Tokyo: NHK, 1973).

²⁵ The main proponent of this view is Marshall McLuhan, as in his Understanding Media (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964). A more modern proponent of this view is Camille Paglia, author of Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). This paradigm is critiqued in an upcoming book by Neil Postman as well as in his Amusing Ourselves to Death (New York: Viking, 1985). A number of excellent studies have been done on how technology has effected

is the message," sums up the main point of this paradigm-- that the technological attributes of the media have fundamentally changed the way we think and how we organize our lives. This model attributes even greater power to the media than the institutional or critical paradigms.

None of these three "strong effects" schools of thought can be considered wholly wrong or right, in that there is analytical evidence to support all three. Rather, the models represent three fundamentally different ways to think about the power of the media. The results of my study best support the institutional model--that the media tell their audience what to think about. The public opinion data from the period 1984 through 1986 coupled with the interviews I completed suggest that the media coverage of Gorbachev made the general public and policy elites think about the Soviet Union and its leader. The press coverage given Gorbachev, as I will show in Chapters Three through Six, often suggested how to interpret the news involving Gorbachev. The meeting at Reykjavik, for example, was quickly declared a failure by a majority of the American press including television. While this declaration did not dictate public opinion, it was so pervasive in the American press that anyone reading a newspaper or hearing a news broadcast would

society such as the study on the influence of print on Renaissance scholarship by Elizabeth Einstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

have virtually no choice but to consider its merit. In addition, that Americans were thinking about Gorbachev is evidenced by the fact that his name was assumed to be a "household word" by the major American polling organizations the beginning of 1986.²⁶ Not coincidentally, my study best supports the model put forth by Cohen in The Press and Foreign Policy.

But how specifically do the media tell their audience what to think about? Cohen presented seven different roles that the press can fulfill in the foreign policy making process. He came upon these roles following interviews with 62 journalists in the 1950s. Those reporters who believed that the press is a neutral observer attributed the press with three roles in the foreign policy making process: as an informer, an interpreter of information, or an instrument for the governors. Cohen explained that in these roles, "The press can be considered to be a handmaiden to the three branches of our constitutional government, bringing them into closer communication and contact."²⁷ But those reporters who saw the press as a participant attributed four different roles to the media: as an indicator of public opinion, a critic of governmental action, an advocate of particular policies, or even as a policy maker in and of

²⁶ Neither Gallup, Harris, nor any of the television network polling operations gave respondents the option of answering "never heard of him" after January 1986 as they had previously.

²⁷ ibid., p. 31.

itself. In these roles, said Cohen, the press can be considered a "fourth branch of government."²⁸ Cohen found examples of the press influencing policy making in all seven of these ways when he wrote his study.

In the coverage of Gorbachev, I too found that the press played all seven of the roles outlined by Cohen. Let me turn to each of the roles in turn to illustrate the effect of the press on the foreign policy making process:

1. Press as an informer.

"It is impossible to escape the conclusion that most reporters in the foreign affairs field understand their primary role and their chief responsibility to be the providing of factual information," wrote Cohen.²⁹ I doubt that there is a serious reporter currently at work today who does not think that his or her primary duty is to provide information to the public. Certainly, the reporting about Gorbachev was filled with information not only about the man himself but also about Soviet society, history and government, as well as American politics. This raw information fed foreign policy decision making.

2. Press as an interpreter of information.

Members of the Reagan administration interviewed for this dissertation asserted that the interpretive ability of

²⁸ This term, of course, was termed by Douglass Cater in The Fourth Branch of Government (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).

²⁹ Cohen., p. 22-23.

the press gives the media a great deal of its power to influence policy making. As an example, they cited the summit meeting at Reykjavik, which was declared a failure by most major American newspapers and magazines as well as by the three networks. By declaring the summit a failure, the media strongly influenced many members of the public to believe, at least initially, that it was a failure. Even as the press flew home from Reykjavik, "The tendency already existed to blame the U.S. and the President for what had happened," remembered Donald Regan, the President's Chief-of-Staff. "Subsequent coverage heaped blame on Reagan."³⁰ But on that occasion, the administration was able after an enormous media effort to convince some members of the public that Reykjavik was not the initial failure the press made it out to be (see Chapter Six for a more complete discussion of the Reykjavik summit).

The Reagan administration understood the power of the press to influence opinion, which is why they spent so much of their time involved in media relations. Bernard Kalb, State Department Spokesman from 1985-86, explained that it was important for the administration to get its message to the news networks because the public is dependent on the press for an understanding of policy. "People are gonna read [pronouncements about policy] and say, hey, it says it's a big success. I don't know why but it must be a

³⁰ Donald T. Regan, For the Record (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988), p. 354.

success."³¹ When policies did not receive positive press coverage, the administration occasionally changed its position, and often altered the way it portrayed its position in response. Cohen said that the public is particularly reliant on the media to interpret actions in the realm of foreign policy, where individual citizens are less likely to learn the ramifications of a policy in their daily life than they might be about domestic policy. This remains true today. Therefore, the role of the press in interpreting the news about Gorbachev and Soviet-American affairs was of particular importance.

3. Press as an instrument for the governors.

Cohen realized 30 years ago how vulnerable the media were to the actions of policy makers, particularly the President:

The more neutral the press is--that is, the more it tries faithfully to transmit a record of "what transpires"...the more easily it lends itself to the uses of others, and particularly to public officials whom reporters have come to regard as prime sources of news merely by virtue of their positions in government.³²

Reporters interviewed by Cohen often complained of "being used" by officials, but accepted being an instrument of the governors as an unavoidable part of reporting in a democracy, where the press is an intermediary between officials and the governed. I wonder how those same

³¹ Interview with Bernard Kalb, October 7, 1991.

³² Cohen, p. 28.

reporters would have felt if they were covering the Reagan administration, where governmental manipulation of the media reached high levels. Reagan's successful media strategy has been documented in several recent books.³³ Its centerpiece was "the story line of the day," chosen by top presidential staffers each morning, whose issues and images were framed to advance the President's agenda:

Reagan's highly skilled first-term White House team played the image game unabashedly. These political strategists saw a direct linkage between the president's image, his reputation, his standing in the polls, his seduction of the media--and his leverage with Congress and his success at governing...They sold more than policies, they sold the presidency.³⁴

Understanding the unavailability of covering the President, the White House insured positive coverage by providing television reporters with a steady diet of appealing visual images. By doing so, they usually influenced the content of the nightly news and built popular support for administration policies. Gorbachev, too, seemed to learn these media management skills throughout the period of my study. By doing so, he became able to influence the content of the news in the Soviet Union and abroad, which often helped him pursue certain policy goals.

³³ See Hedrick Smith, The Power Game (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988) and Mark Hertsgaard, On Bended Knee (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988).

³⁴ Smith, p. 398.

4. Press as an indicator of public opinion.

Cohen theorized that governors often took the opinions of the press to directly reflect the feelings of the public. "In other words, the press is public opinion, and thus represents it manifestly or directly."³⁵ Some reporters interviewed by Cohen suggested that as far as the President and other governors were concerned, what was heard in the press constituted the most important single element in the determination of public opinion on foreign policy issues. Bad press could, therefore, discourage certain policies, and positive press coverage could encourage others. In the 1990s, the press remains an important indicator of public opinion. "Much measurement of opinion is done by reading," wrote Hennessy. "Politicians avidly read newspaper stories and other expressions of opinion."³⁶ And accordingly, public opinion influences which policies are pursued. The positive press coverage given Gorbachev in his earliest days as General Secretary, for example, was seen by the White House as an indicator of the public's positive view of the new Soviet leader. As Donald Regan recalled:

The imagination of many U.S. media pundits had been captured by the energy and flair of Gorbachev, and the papers and airways buzzed with speculation that Reagan, the Great Communicator,

³⁵ Cohen, p. 32.

³⁶ Bernard Hennessy, Public Opinion, 5th Ed. (Monterey: Brooks/Cole, 1985), p. 56-57.

might be beaten at his own game by this dynamic new Soviet leader.³⁷

Because of Gorbachev's perceived popularity, Reagan was quick to try to deal with the Soviet leader, even inviting Gorbachev to a summit meeting during the Soviet's first few days in power. The role of the press as a reflector of popular opinion may, however, be somewhat less powerful than it was 30 years ago. Politicians have many other indicators of public opinion to which they may now easily turn, such as polls and focus groups.

5. Press as a critic of governmental action.

The very fact that the American Constitution has an amendment that guarantees free speech and a free press illustrates how important it is to the preservation of the democratic system to have a press which is permitted to criticize the government. Reporters interviewed by Cohen in the 1950s took this responsibility very seriously, seeing the role of the press as governmental critic with the same unanimity as the role as informer. "We are the fourth estate, and it is our duty to monitor--to watch and interpret--what our government does," explained one reporter.³⁸ The press covering Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan continued the tradition of criticizing the government. On numerous occasions, the press criticized Gorbachev outright or at least insinuated that what he was

³⁷ Regan, p. 303.

³⁸ Cited in Cohen, p. 34.

doing was harmful. Following both the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in April 1986, and the arrest of journalist Nicholas Daniloff in September of that year, the American press criticized Gorbachev for maintaining nearly three weeks of silence. The U.S. press also criticized Reagan's policies regarding the Soviet Union. For example, the networks criticized Reagan for maintaining his support for the Strategic Defense Initiative during the Reykjavik summit, when the President could have traded SDI for substantial Soviet cuts in nuclear weapons. This kind of criticism helped form popular and elite opinion in much the same way as did the press' power to interpret. Despite the presence of governmental criticism in the press, such writers as Mark Hertsgaard contend that the press was far kinder during the Reagan era than they should have been due to the increased sophistication of government officials in managing the media.³⁹

6. Press as an advocate of particular policies.

Before the 1840s, the American press was "expected to present a partisan viewpoint."⁴⁰ Objective journalism as we have come to know it was born in 1848 with the opening of the Associated Press, whose reporting had to be objective enough to satisfy a wide variety of clients.⁴¹ Because of

³⁹ Hertsgaard, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Michael Schudson, Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 4.

⁴¹ ibid.

the widespread belief that today's press should be objective, the media usually do their policy advocacy through editorials--in essays on the editorial page for newspapers and magazines, and in editorial commentaries on television. But Cohen admitted that policy advocacy also happened in news coverage, and that remains true today. Clearly, during the time of my study, the television networks showed their advocacy of certain policies through the commentaries of John Chancellor (NBC), Bill Moyers (CBS), and George Will (ABC). But the networks advocated policies in their news coverage at times. The most obvious example I found in the coverage of Gorbachev was the advocacy by all three networks of a Reagan-Gorbachev summit meeting.⁴² Such direct advocacy remains relatively rare, but it certainly happens.

7. Press as a policy maker.

As a result of the other six roles of the press, Cohen argued that the media itself can become a participant in the foreign policy making process. "Foreign affairs reporters are actors in the process, trying to influence the opinions of both the public and the government official," he wrote.⁴³ Press coverage influences the decision making process today as much as, if not more than, it did in Cohen's time. The American media have arguably been transformed during the

⁴² I take this matter up in more detail in Chapter Four.

⁴³ Cohen, p. 39.

last 30 years to a full-fledged actor in the American political process. Moreover, today reporters are known to become participants in the policy making process in some other ways. Reporters have been known to give to policy makers information directly. One well-known example of this occurred during the 1980 campaign, when journalist George Will helped prepare candidate Ronald Reagan for the presidential debates.⁴⁴ Also, many journalists and government officials now go through "a revolving door" into each other's fields of work.⁴⁵ Some people, such as David Broder of The Washington Post, have criticized this policy, saying that it compromises the freedom of the press.⁴⁶ Others such as columnists Pat Buchanan, Carl Rowan, and William Safire have defended this practice, for reasons including that it increases each profession's understanding of the other.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See David Broder, Behind The Front Page (New York: Touchstone, 1987), p. 352-54.

⁴⁵ For discussions of this issue, see James McEnteer, "Changing Lanes On the Inside Track: The Career Shuttle Between Journalism, Politics and Government," Discussion Paper D-8, May 1991; and Lewis W. Wolfson, "Through the Revolving Door: Blurring the Line Between The Press and Government," Research Paper R-4, June 1991, both published by the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University.

⁴⁶ Broder launched his criticism in a speech at the National Press Club, November 29, 1988.

⁴⁷ See Patrick Buchanan, "Self-appointed Priests of Print," The Washington Times, December 28, 1988; Carl Rowan, "'In and Out' Journalists," The Washington Post, December 21, 1988; and William Safire, "Color Me Tainted," The New York Times, December 12, 1988.

It seems then that despite giant technological changes, the role of press in policy making has not changed fundamentally in the past three decades. In numerous ways, the media continue to affect the substance and process of American foreign policy. If anything has changed in the intervening three decades, it is that politicians and journalists have become highly aware of the power of the press. Politicians, in particular, have refined their tactics for harnessing the power of the press. Accordingly, it is no surprise that the policy makers and journalists interviewed for this work credit the media with having an effect on the conduct of Soviet-American relations during the first years of the Gorbachev era.

D. Results: Television News

Some patterns regarding television news emerged from my examination of the coverage of Gorbachev. Overall, ABC News gave the most coverage to Gorbachev. Although ABC ran just six more stories than its competitors overall during the study period--286 for ABC versus 280 each for CBS and NBC--it dedicated more time to the Soviet leader. ABC showed almost 14 hours of news on Gorbachev during the study period, as opposed to 12 hours on NBC and just over 11 hours on CBS.⁴⁸ The level of coverage varied month to month,

⁴⁸ Vanderbilt University's records round the length of each story to the nearest 10 seconds. Using this measure, the time dedicated to Gorbachev-related news was 13.85 hours on ABC, 12.14 hours on NBC and 11.23 hours on CBS.

given the events, with the most coverage being given months with summit meetings.

A closer examination reveals that ABC may also have been presenting a slower, more analytical brand of news than its competitors. This can be judged in four ways:

- o First, the average length of a story on ABC was longer than on the other networks. The average story length from among the 154 segments I viewed was 2 minutes 19 seconds on ABC, about 12 percent longer than the reports on CBS (2 minutes 2 seconds on average) and NBC (2 minutes 3 seconds on average).
- o Second, each shot in an ABC report lasted longer on average than the shots of its competitors. The average shot lasted 7.2 seconds on ABC, somewhat longer than NBC's 6.6 second average. However, the average shot on a CBS report was fully one-quarter shorter than on ABC, measuring about 5.4 seconds. Coupled with the fact that each CBS report had more shots per report than its competitors, these shorter average shots indicate that CBS has a different, faster style of presentation than its competitors.⁴⁹
- o Third, ABC used longer "sound bites" from sources than its competitors. Overall, the average length of a "sound bite" in the segments viewed on tape was a scant

⁴⁹ CBS averaged 22.7 shots on average in each of its reports. This is more than 20 percent more than NBC (averaging 18.4 shots per report) and ABC (averaging 19.2 shots per report).

8.9 seconds. When viewed by network, this translated to an average of 9.9 seconds on ABC, 8.75 seconds on CBS (11 percent shorter than ABC) and only 7.65 seconds on NBC (nearly 23 percent shorter than ABC).

o Lastly, a higher percentage of the total report consisted of sources talking on ABC. Twenty-six percent of the average ABC report viewed were sound bites, versus 24 percent on CBS and 19 percent on NBC.

These statistics, viewed together, indicate that ABC was presenting longer stories, with more time for audiences to pick up each visual cue, and with more information from direct from sources.

These differences appear to be intentional to some degree. Each network has its own style, its own way of presenting the news. This style, says William Wheatley, former executive producer of NBC Nightly News:

Partially depends on the correspondent's storytelling, on some extent it depends on the editors. They have a certain amount of input into how the stories are cut. Producers also have different styles.⁵⁰

At CBS News, for example, there is a deliberate effort to create fast-paced, highly produced broadcast. CBS News producer Mark Katkov explained that CBS:

Has always prided itself on the finely honed story. I mean we really agonize over every line in the script, every shot that goes in the piece, and really try polish it to pack a lot into it.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Interview with William Wheatley, April 18, 1991.

⁵¹ Interview with Mark Katkov, June 19, 1991.

The choice of news style by each network is a complicated process, but is ultimately aimed at differentiating each broadcast from its competitors, in hopes of attracting an audience.

As much as the networks tried to create a unique product, they were limited before Gorbachev's ascent to power and even into his first few months as General Secretary by strict limits on what they could film. As I discuss in Chapter Two, television reporters operating in the Soviet Union before glasnost were extremely limited by the Soviet government as to what events and locations they could videotape for their reports. Subsequently, all the network reports during 1984 and 1985 share a surprising number of images. Several images appear again and again in all three networks' reports, taking on some kind of symbolic value. Among these are the following:

- o The Kremlin. Exterior shots of the Kremlin were commonly used to symbolize the Soviet government. The image conveyed both the remoteness of the Soviet government from its citizens and the government's authority.
- o St. Basil's Cathedral. The beautiful on Red Square was often used to represent the history and people of the Soviet Union. In particular, the cathedral was often used as a backdrop for statements of Soviet public opinion. The grandeur of the sixteenth century cathedral when compared to the gray apartment complexes

which dominate the modern Soviet Union also created a subtle statement against the Communist regime.

- o The Soviet flag. The flag appeared in virtually every graphic used in a story about Gorbachev. It represented the Soviet government.
- o Military parade. One of the more visually interesting, and hence oft-repeated images, was of the Soviet military parade through Red Square. Contrary to American popular belief, there was no military parade on May 1st, the international worker's day, when there is only a parade of people through Red Square. Military equipment was paraded twice yearly, on Victory Day (May 9th) and the anniversary of the Communist Revolution (November 7th).⁵² These parades represented Soviet military power, and the once-perceived Soviet threat to the West.
- o The Soviet news commentator. Numerous governmental actions were announced on the Soviet evening news, Vremya (meaning "time" in Russian). Accordingly, the U.S. networks often repeated the visual of the Soviet newscaster delivering a bulletin. This image also subtly cast suspicions on the Soviet governmental system, implying that the government was propagandizing their own citizens rather than communicating with the people directly.

⁵² The dissolution of the Communist Party is, of course, likely to change all this.

- o Melting metal. Many reports showed antiquated Soviet factories to illustrate the nation's economic problems. In particular, several reports showed factory workers melting down metal or performing similar processes that, when filmed, showed glowing orange sparks on-screen. This image represented low, not high, technology.
- o People waiting on line. Soviets stand in line for nearly everything--food, clothes, gasoline and alcohol. The image of citizens waiting in line came to symbolize for U.S. television the economic problems of the Soviet Union.

Communications research has shown that television communicates not only through its words but through its images.⁵³ In the chapters that follow, I often present my interpretation of what the images surrounding the coverage of Gorbachev convey. My analysis is not, of course, the only possible one, but I have tried to think broadly about what television's images evoke.

An analysis of the people quoted in the stories concerning Gorbachev presents an indicator of the network's reliance on official sources. The reports in the study group present 906 "sound bites" by 289 different people, not

⁵³ See for example David Altheide, Media Power (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985); Doris A. Graber, Processing the News (White Plains: Longman, 1988) and her "Seeing is Remembering: How Visuals Contribute to Television News," Journal of Communications 40(3), Summer 1990. I take up this subject in more depth in Chapter Seven.

including unidentified "men on the street." Exhibit I-2 presents more detailed information on the sources quoted. The media were more reliant on American government sources than any other single source for information regarding Gorbachev. More than one-third of the quotations came from U.S. government officials, who were quoted more than twice as often as Soviet government officials. The American officials quoted most often came from the Executive Branch, with Reagan himself quoted on 103 separate occasions. Professors, experts, and other professionals were the third-most quoted category of sources on Gorbachev related news after Soviet officials. Exhibit I-3 details the 10 most frequently quoted people in the study group. Not surprisingly, the list of frequent sources contains the highest level officials of both countries--including the U.S. Secretary of State and the Soviet Foreign Minister, the press spokesman for both leaders, and the chief arms control negotiators for both nations. President Reagan was the most frequently quoted source, followed by Gorbachev with 73 different appearances.

The networks also relied on a handful of experts for commentary about the Soviet leader. Dimitri Simes of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was the most frequent foreign affairs expert quoted on Gorbachev, with 12 appearances during the study period. William Hyland of the

EXHIBIT I-2

CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES OF SOURCES

NETWORK NEWS STORIES INVOLVING MIKHAIL GORBACHEV, 1984-86

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number of Mentions</u>
U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	357 consisting of
Executive Branch Exclusive of State Dept & Military	164
State Department	92
Members of Congress	73
Military Figures	28
SOVIET GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	171
EXPERTS/PROFESSIONAL	126
JOURNALISTS	63
FORMER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	55
EUROPEAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	41
BUSINESS/INTEREST GROUP LEADERS	36
OTHER	27
SOVIET DISSIDENTS	17
NON-EUROPEAN, NON-U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	13
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TOTAL	906

EXHIBIT I-3

MOST FREQUENTLY QUOTED SOURCES

NETWORK NEWS STORIES INVOLVING MIKHAIL GORBACHEV, 1984-86

<u>Name</u>	-----Appearances on-----			<u>Total</u>
	<u>ABC</u>	<u>CBS</u>	<u>NBC</u>	
RONALD REAGAN President of the U.S.	35	35	33	103
MIKHAIL GORBACHEV Soviet General Secretary	31	19	23	73
GEORGE SHULTZ U.S. Secretary of State	16	12	12	40
LARRY SPEAKES U.S. Presidential Spokesman	8	5	8	21
CASPAR WEINBERGER U.S. Secretary of Defense	9	5	6	20
GEORGI ARBATOV Director, Soviet U.S.-Canada Institute and member Communist Party Central Committee	8	3	7	18
MAX KAMPELMAN Chief U.S. Arms Control Negotiator	6	7	4	17
EDUARD SHEVARDNADZE Soviet Foreign Minister	5	5	4	14
VIKTOR KARPOV Chief Soviet Arms Control Negotiator	4	4	5	13
GENNADI GERASIMOV Soviet Foreign Ministry Spokesman	7	2	3	12

Council on Foreign Relations was the second most-often quoted of the experts from 1984 through 1987, appearing on 10 different programs. Marshall Goldman of the Harvard Russian Research Center and Wellseley College was the third most frequently-appearing expert, with 9 appearances, the same as Professor Jonathan Sanders of Columbia University's Soviet research center. The most frequently appearing woman was Professor Condoleeza Rice of Stanford University, who appeared only twice. She was also the only person of color among the frequently appearing experts. The fact that the same few people kept appearing over and over meant that the networks presented a relatively small range of opinions on Gorbachev. Exhibit I-4 details the frequently quoted authorities on Gorbachev.

It is interesting to examine in more detail the patterns of appearance by these experts. As is illustrated by Exhibit I-4, many of the experts concentrated their appearances on one of the three networks. Dimitri Simes, for example, appeared nine times on CBS out of 12 appearances. William Hyland appeared five times on ABC out of his 10 appearances. And Jonathan Sanders appeared eight out of nine times on CBS. Some of this concentration is due to the fact that several of these men were paid consultants to a particular network. Jonathan Sanders, for example, spent three years as a consultant for CBS before eventually joining the network as a full-time reporter in 1988. A

EXHIBIT I-4

MOST OFTEN-QUOTED EXPERTS ON GORBACHEV

ON NETWORK EVENING NEWS, 1984-86

Name and Affiliation	-----Appearances on-----			
	<u>ABC</u>	<u>CBS</u>	<u>NBC</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
DIMITRI SIMES* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	2	9	1	12
WILLIAM HYLAND <u>Foreign Affairs</u> and the Council on Foreign Relations	5	2	3	10
MARSHALL GOLDMAN Harvard University Russian Research Center & Wellseley College	5	4	0	9
JONATHAN SANDERS* Columbia University's Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union	1	8	0	9
MARTIN MCCAULEY University of London	1	6	0	7
HELMUT SONNENFELDT Brookings Institution	2	1	3	6
SEWERYN BIALER Columbia University's Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union	2	2	1	5
PETER FRANK University of Essex	3	1	0	4
THANE GUSTAFSON Stanford University	4	0	0	4
ED HEWITT Brookings Institution	3	0	0	3
ROBERT LEGVOLD** Columbia University's Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union	3	0	0	3
CONDOLEEZA RICE** Stanford University	2	0	0	2

* = Identified on Screen as a CBS News Consultant

** = Although not identified on Screen, worked as an ABC Consultant

few who were not paid consultants, like Professor Peter Frank of the University of Essex in the United Kingdom, probably appeared frequently on the same network because of editorial contacts there. But in general, the experts who did not have a contract with one of the networks appeared with more regular frequency across the three networks' broadcasts.

Now that I have presented background information, let me turn to the nature of the study presented in the following chapters. Chapter Two presents background information on Mikhail Gorbachev and on the nature of television reporting from the Soviet Union. Chapters Three through Six contain a detailed account of the television coverage given Gorbachev from February 1984 through December 1986, with particular emphasis on what Gorbachev did to cultivate coverage and how press coverage affected policy making. Chapter Seven presents conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO: GORBACHEV AND THE PRESS

Before turning to the press coverage of Gorbachev, it is worthwhile to delve into the man and his background. Gorbachev's rise to power was nothing less than remarkable considering his background and the system through which he rose. "Only Gorbachev's combination of ambition, self-confidence, and faith could have given him the patience to survive in Party politics," explained Robert Kaiser of The Washington Post.¹ Beginning at an early age, Gorbachev demonstrated great political skills and instincts, and tremendous ambition. Lucky breaks and patronage also seem to have played a role in his rise.

Yet as well known as Gorbachev has become, researchers still know very little about the man personally--about the way he thinks. Gorbachev has declined all biographers requests for interviews, and has zealously guarded his privacy. When he has expounded upon his views in interviews and in his own writings, such as the best seller Perestroika, he has been less than forthcoming.² Little in Gorbachev's biography before his ascent to the leadership of the Communist Party suggests that he would the image-conscious, strategic-minded reformer he had turned out to

¹ Robert Kaiser, Why Gorbachev Happened: His Triumphs and His Failures (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 48.

² Mikhail Gorbachev, Perestroika (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

be. Still, it is safe to say that Gorbachev's ascent to the leadership of the Soviet government indicates that he is an intelligent man who is able to think strategically.

A. The Biography of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev³

Gorbachev was born to a peasant family of farmers on March 2, 1931 in the village of Privolnoye in the Stavropol region of southern Russia, a fertile part of the North Caucasus. Gorbachev's formative years were spent against the backdrop of the Second World War, in which his father fought. The drain of manpower meant that children often helped out in the fields, and at age 14, Gorbachev began to work in summers and at sowing time as an assistant combine operator. Gorbachev's hard work was rewarded with a prestigious award, which along with the help of the local Communist Party organization helped him gain access to Moscow State University, the country's preeminent educational institution. Gorbachev's early years were also

³ I have compiled the information in this biography from a number of different sources. Among them are Dusko Doder and Louise Branson, Gorbachev: Heretic in the Kremlin (New York: Viking, 1990); Kaiser, op.cit.; Zhores Medvedev, op.cit.; Dev Murarka, Gorbachov: The Limits of Power (London: Hutchinson, 1988); Yury Patchenkin, Gorbachev, A Concise Biography (unpublished manuscript, 1990); Christian Schmidt-Hauer, Gorbachev, The Path to Power (Topsfield: Salem House, 1986); Gail Sheehy, The Man Who Changed the World (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Hedrick Smith, The New Russians (New York: Random House, 1991); and Michel Tatu, Gorbachev: L'U.R.S.S. Va T'Elle Changer? (Paris: Le Centurion, 1987). Most of the details of Gorbachev's biography, although not all, cross check from one biography to the other. When facts do not cross check, I have noted the sources used.

marked by a love of acting. Reflecting his outgoing personality, Gorbachev starred in many school plays before attending the university.

Gorbachev made his first trip to Moscow in September 1950 to begin his studies at the university. He began a course in law, a choice which has never been fully explained in that it was considered a fairly low prestige profession at the time. As he drifted toward politics, Gorbachev became more involved in the young Communist league, the Komsomol, and rose slowly through its ranks at the law school to a position of leadership. He became a candidate member in the Communist Party in 1951, and a full member the following year.

Gorbachev's five years at the university were important in several ways. Not only was his political career beginning, but at this time his political philosophy began its real development. Zdenek Mlynar, a Czech who was one of Gorbachev's closest friends at the university, recalled that in private conversations Gorbachev would criticize Stalinism (although not its leader). At the university, he met Raisa Maximovna Titorenko, a beautiful, intelligent and ambitious student of philosophy. They were married in September, 1953.

At graduation time in 1955, Gorbachev decided (or perhaps was required by the local officials who had helped him gain entrance to the university) to return with his

young wife to his home region of Stavropol, where he took a position in the Stavropol krai (region) Komsomol. It was a job where as a political organizer, he would develop the grass roots skills he would later need for political success: how to talk with people, how to address an audience, how to run a program.

There are Komsomol organizations in every factory, plant, school, college, institute, kolkhoz and sovkhos [state farm], as well as in army units. Gorbachev's work now involved visiting these local organizations, speaking at their meetings and conferences, supervising elections and appointments, arranging weekly meetings of the town Komsomol committee and being present at the weekly meetings of the Stavropol city Party Committee.⁴

Gorbachev must have done fairly well because he rose quickly through the local Komsomol ranks. By the age of 29, he had risen to the level where he met local party leaders and attended major functions in Moscow. By December 1962, following a brief stint supervising agricultural output, Gorbachev finally decided to abandon the Komsomol route into politics and dedicate himself to the Communist Party. He received a large promotion and was put in charge of party personnel placement in Stavropol. This new position also allowed him to begin meeting the Moscow dignitaries who came down to Stavropol to visit its famous health spas.

In Stavropol in 1960-64, Gorbachev worked under and befriended the first of his patrons, Fedor Kulakov. Kulakov was appointed to the Central Committee in 1964 by Brezhnev,

⁴ Medvedev, p.48.

and rose to be a member of the Politburo. His influence helped Gorbachev obtain higher and higher positions, including leader of the Stavropol City Communist Party in 1966, a post comparable to a U.S. mayor. During this time, both Gorbachevs completed their educations. He took a course in Agricultural Economics at the Stavropol Agricultural Institute's evening school over five years, 1962-67, which seemed natural for the leader of a major agricultural area. Raisa Gorbachev finished the equivalent of a doctorate at the Lenin Pedological Institute. Through the end of the 1960s, Mikhail Gorbachev continued his slow steady rise to power, becoming second secretary of the krai committee in 1968, with responsibility for agricultural performance.

In April 1970, Gorbachev got an enormous boost when he was named to replace Kulakov as first secretary of Stavropol krai when Kulakov was appointed Secretary of Agriculture. The position of first secretary can be likened to an American governor. Election to the Soviet Central Committee (which has under 400 members) soon followed. "Gorbachev had become a member of the Soviet elite."⁵ By this time, Gorbachev was demonstrating the political style we see today. He often addressed local audiences, and spoke to them in a non-dogmatic, straightforward way. He also began

⁵ Martin McCauley, ed., The Soviet Union Under Gorbachev (New York: St. Martin's, 1987), p. 13.

to realize that his appearance in the local media could help build his political power. "Long before glasnost became state policy in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev paid special attention to the press, trying to change the journalists' old style and methods of work."⁶ Gorbachev encouraged glasnost in Stavropol, publishing the documents from Party meetings and arranging press conferences for the local press. He was also known to grab local journalists by the lapels of their coats and start commenting about some article in the paper, lobbying the reporter for sharper coverage of pertinent issues:

Alexander Mayatsky, a former editor of Stavropolskaya Pravda, the local party organ, told Time that Gorbachev discouraged the local editors from checking everything they wanted to write with the Party leadership, encouraging them to make their own decisions. Mayatsky said Gorbachev occasionally approached him on the street to suggest he pursue some topic Gorbachev considered important.⁷

Gorbachev's attempts to garner positive press apparently worked, although it is difficult to say how much of it was due to Gorbachev's attempts to work with the media and how much was a result of the ritual glorification in the press of the local leader. In any case, Gorbachev "created his own personality cult in the area and the local press was full of extravagant tributes to him."⁸ During this time,

⁶ Petchenkin, p. 96.

⁷ Kaiser, p. 42.

⁸ Medvedev, p. 26.

Gorbachev often traveled with his wife, which was very unusual for the Soviet politicians of the time. Over the eight years that followed, the agricultural results in the Stavropol region were solid. In particular, Gorbachev gained from his association with the Ipatovsky method, a successful experiment in grain harvesting in 1977. July 16th's Pravda published an interview with Gorbachev about the experiment, marking the first time he received positive national publicity.

Gorbachev also continued to benefit not only from Kulakov's presence on the Politburo, but the presence of two other natives of the northern Caucuses: Mikhail Suslov and Yuri Andropov. Suslov was one of the most powerful members of the Politburo under Brezhnev, responsible for ideology. Yuri Andropov had worked up through the party apparatus, serving as ambassador to Hungary before becoming head of the Committee for State Security--better known as the KGB--in 1967. Andropov and Gorbachev shared a feeling that the Soviet Union needed changes--reforms and modernizations. Gorbachev formed his bonds with Suslov and Andropov when they came to Stavropol's health spas where, as the ranking party member, Gorbachev would play host to them. Sheehy furthermore suggests that Suslov, Andropov and Gorbachev were brought together by a common affliction with diabetes.⁹

⁹ Sheehy, p. 120.

Ironically, it was Kulakov's death in 1978 that provided Gorbachev with his next stepping stone--Gorbachev took his job as the Agriculture Secretary. At Kulakov's funeral, Gorbachev made his first appearance on Soviet national television, delivering the official eulogy from atop Lenin's mausoleum as a representative of Stavropol.

Gorbachev's tenure as Agriculture Secretary would be declared a failure if judged solely on agricultural performance. From 1978-84, the Soviet harvests were poor and agricultural output began to decline, falling far short of the quotas demanded by the Soviet Five-Year Economic Plan. The 1979 harvest was 179 million metric tons, some 60 million tons less than the preceding year. In 1980, when Gorbachev became a member of the Politburo, the harvest rose to 189 million tons but fell again to a disastrous 160 million tons the next year.¹⁰ Not all the problems were Gorbachev's--he inherited a weak production system where worker productivity was less than half that of an American farm worker and then had the bad luck of several seasons of poor weather. By 1982, though, the Agriculture Secretary was under tremendous pressure. "Gorbachev was saved by fate" from being a scapegoat for the poor agricultural performance by the death of Brezhnev in November 1982.¹¹ Gorbachev's retention of power during these years of

¹⁰ Quoted in Medvedev, p. 103-111.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 118.

agricultural troubles resulted from his close relations with Andropov and other members of Andropov's cadre in the Politburo.

When Andropov succeeded Brezhnev as General Secretary, Gorbachev's star rose as well. Andropov's reign was short but important, for he began the reform process that Gorbachev would establish fully. It was also an important time for Gorbachev, who emerged from the background under Andropov's leadership:

In 1982, Andropov's close personal relationship with Gorbachev was not known, except in high party circles. The relationship grew stronger after Andropov's accession, although he was sufficiently skilled in political tactics to advance the younger man gradually, making the upward progression look more natural.¹²

Andropov gave Gorbachev more domestic responsibilities, and started bringing him into foreign affairs policy making. It was in this time that Gorbachev made a trip to Canada and took a larger role in greeting foreign visitors. Gorbachev came back from Canada with an important new ally in the Soviet ambassador, Aleksandr Yakovlev, and a greater understanding of the West. But it is important to note that the outgoing media style the West would soon come to know from Gorbachev was not apparent in Canada. Gorbachev's trip to the Canada received no coverage by U.S. network television and very little from the print media, because Western experts had not yet identified him as a possible

¹² ibid, p. 45.

Soviet leader. Surprisingly, a review of the Canadian press reveals that the visit also received relatively little coverage. The press accounts of the visit say little about Gorbachev's personality, although he seemed to have impressed many of those whom he met.¹³

Andropov's death in February, 1984 brought with it the power struggle that brought Konstantin Chernenko to power. Chernenko was an aging and frail man whose ascent was the result of a deal between two warring factions in the Politburo. "Gorbachev was consecrated as the 'crown prince,' and in return the Old Guard was allowed to bow out gracefully."¹⁴ Gorbachev assumed increasing amounts of power as Chernenko's illness worsened. He made two important trips abroad as the Kremlin's number two. In June, 1984, he went to Italy for the funeral of the Italian communist leader, Enrico Berlinguer. Jeff Trimble covered the funeral while Rome bureau chief for U.S. News & World Report, and confirms that as in Canada, Gorbachev seemed uninterested in cultivating media coverage:

I can tell you from personal experience that that guy would have jumped off a building to avoid talking to a reporter. He was on the reviewing stand, and there was sort of a mourning parade, and there were reporters clustered around calling questions up to him in Russian and things, and he would not even look at them. Now the Gorbachev we

¹³ See for example John Cochran's interview with the former Canadian Agriculture Minister, NBC, March 11, 1985.

¹⁴ Schmidt-Hauer, p. 97.

know would have gone and talked to them, right?
But this was a very different Gorbachev.¹⁵

In December 1984, Gorbachev traveled to Great Britain, where he attracted extremely positive coverage (see Chapter Three for a detailed account) and began to make an image for himself in the West. He had already begun to develop a high international profile by March 11, 1985, when Chernenko passed away and Gorbachev was named General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

B. What Kind of Strategy?

When I started this study, I assumed that Gorbachev crafted some kind of formal media strategy with his advisors when he came into office, the way that an American politician would. It is not clear how much Gorbachev turned to Reagan's example in thinking about how to use the media. In fact, even some of his closest advisors said they did not know exactly how Gorbachev became aware of the power of the media to affect policy making.

Despite his enormous success in generating positive media coverage, those close to him believe that when he assumed office in 1985, Gorbachev had no organized strategy for dealing with the media. Soviet Foreign Ministry Spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov, who served as Gorbachev's de

¹⁵ Interview with Jeff Trimble, November 23, 1990.

facto spokesman from 1986 to 1990, said that there was no preconceived plan to cultivate positive press coverage:

Everything was being done by improvisation, just like stopping here and there. It was improvisation. It is wrong to say that it was a grand p.r. exercise, something like this, no.¹⁶

Gorbachev's government probably did not conceive the need for such a strategic media plan, nor did it have the organizational capacity to organize the sort of media strategy we see in the west. The lack of organization capacity is illustrated by Gorbachev's reliance on the press offices of, first, the Party's Central Committee and, later, the Foreign Ministry to manage his public relations. "We never had Press Secretaries to our number ones, to our Presidents or General Secretaries. It was no need to have them. They didn't communicate with the press, they gave orders," explained Izvestia's Sturua.¹⁷ Gorbachev was following the standard operating procedures of his predecessors in depending on the services of the Central Committee for his press relations. He shifted more and more responsibility for his press relations to the Foreign Ministry "because Gerasimov was there and he was doing a good job and it was convenient," said Jeff Trimble of U.S. News, who served as the magazine's Moscow Bureau Chief from

¹⁶ Interview with Gennadi Gerasimov, November 21, 1990.

¹⁷ Interview with Melor Sturua, November 1, 1990.

1986 to 1991.¹⁸ Consonant with Gorbachev's increasing sophistication in dealing with the media, he finally opened a Presidential press office in March, 1990.

To say that there was no overreaching strategy is not to say that Gorbachev did not learn how to work with the media. Over time, sources suggest and the content of U.S. television news reports bear out that Gorbachev learned to use the media strategically. "It was an organic process. As things began to open up, they learned more and more, and they learned not to be afraid," agreed Jonathan Sanders, a Moscow correspondent for CBS News:

It wasn't all of a sudden as if somebody shone a bright light and Gorbachev said, 'I see the light! I see the light! We can use the American media.' He learned it...And he also had some kind of naturally propensity for this.¹⁹

This learning process was slow and subtle, but steady. The public's response probably encouraged Gorbachev to think more about the role of the press. "After a few of his public appearances, the feedback was so powerful that then the people who worked with Gorbachev realized that he could indeed use the media to his advantage," explained Vladimir Pozner, a Soviet journalist.²⁰ According to Pozner,

¹⁸ Interview with Jeff Trimble, November 23, 1990.

¹⁹ Interview with Jonathan Sanders, November 20, 1990. Sanders was a professor at Columbia University and director of the Harriman Institute for the Advanced Study of the Soviet Union before joining CBS News first as a consultant, then as a correspondent. He was one of the early experts on Gorbachev.

²⁰ Interview with Vladimir Pozner, November 22, 1990.

Gorbachev did not receive the kind of image counseling that Western politicians receive. Trimble of U.S. News, like Pozner, believes that Gorbachev's flair for handling the media comes naturally, not from studying:

I certainly can't see him studying or being coached on how to handle himself. I suspect that they've given Raisa some coaching about how to speak and how to control her voice a bit, but I've never sensed that with Gorbachev, that they sat him down and said this is what you have to do to present a better image the way the Bush advisors do.²¹

Nor were there frequent or lengthy post-mortems of Soviet-held media events. "No time for that because Gorbachev is so busy," explained Gerasimov. "Of course [we'd often have a] short session, summary of what's happened but [we would discuss things] mainly in political terms, not in p.r. terms."²² Rather, it seems that learning took place on a simple basis: what seemed to work was repeated.

One of the most interesting questions in all of this is who or what helped Gorbachev learn about the media? Little in Gorbachev's biography suggests that he should have had such a sophisticated understanding of how to work with the media. Those familiar with Gorbachev agree almost unanimously that Aleksandr Yakovlev, Gorbachev's closest advisor, was responsible for honing Gorbachev's media skills. Yakovlev was a member of the Central Committee

²¹ Interview with Jeff Trimble, November 23, 1990.

²² Interview with Gennadi Gerasimov, November 21, 1990.

apparatus under Brezhnev, and had studied at Columbia University as one of the first Soviet exchange students in 1959. He rose through the Central Committee offices, eventually serving as the head of the Propaganda Department. Yakovlev was "exiled" to Canada in 1973 to be the Soviet Ambassador there after some reported disagreements with Politburo member Mikhail Suslov. In Canada, "he had a very deep first hand knowledge of how the western democracy and the western press works," explained Izvestia's Sturua.²³ Yakovlev tried to share his experience with Gorbachev in 1983 during Gorbachev's 10-day visit to Canada:

Buckled side-by-side in an old Convair prop-driven plane, the two men talked privately for hours...Each evening after touring that day's dairy farm or meatpacking plant, Gorbachev and Yakovlev would stroll off together, leaning toward each other in intense conversation...Within a month, Yakovlev was back in Moscow...Other men have made their way into Gorbachev's inner circle and contributed to the upheaval called perestroika, but none has been so indispensable as Yakovlev.²⁴

Yakovlev had himself been greatly influenced by Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, with whom he met frequently. "Trudeau saw in Yakovlev the best of what the Soviet Union had to offer," explained Ivan L. Head, Trudeau's foreign policy advisor.²⁵ Shortly after Gorbachev's visit, Yakovlev

²³ Interview with Melor Sturua, November 1, 1990.

²⁴ Bill Keller, "Moscow's Other Mind," The New York Times Magazine, February 19, 1989, p. 31-33.

²⁵ Quoted in Keller, "Moscow's Other Mind," p. 42.

was recalled to Moscow where he became head of a prominent foreign policy think tank--The Institute of World Economy and International Relations. When Gorbachev became General Secretary, Yakovlev became head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee, where he was able to shape Gorbachev's media relations and more generally guide perestroika. The importance of Yakovlev's role in Gorbachev's media strategy specifically and perestroika generally cannot be stressed enough. As Sergei Grigoriev, another of Gorbachev's former press secretaries, put, "If someone deserves to be called 'Man of the Decade,' it's Yakovlev."²⁶

But Yakovlev was not Gorbachev's sole media advisor. Another man involved in shaping Gorbachev's media strategy was Anatoli Chernayev, who served as Gorbachev's personal assistant with responsibility for foreign relations. Chernayev was a young lecturer at Moscow State University when Gorbachev was a student there in the 1950s, but Chernayev eventually left the school and went to work in the government. He later served the deputy chief of the International Department of the Central Committee before becoming an advisor to Gorbachev on foreign policy. According to Soviet officials, Chernayev in Gorbachev's first years helped prepare the General Secretary's remarks for publication in the Soviet newspapers, and supervised the

²⁶ Interview with Sergei Grigoriev, November 8, 1991.

editing of reports on Gorbachev before they were aired on the national television news programs. "He [Chernayev] would normally read Gorbachev's remarks and shorten them for the news to be read on the radio or on television. He would also make statements in the name of Gorbachev," explained Alexander Merkushev, head of the English language service of the Tass news agency.²⁷ Chernayev, because he was an assistant to Gorbachev, usually remained behind the scenes.

Gennadi Gerasimov, who served as Gorbachev's de facto press secretary from 1986-90, was another integral ingredient in Gorbachev's approach to media relations. While it is not clear how much Gerasimov helped form Gorbachev's initial approach to the media, he undoubtedly had an effect on the quality of relations with the foreign press during his years as spokesman. "Gennadi Gerasimov modernized, Americanized, revolutionized the press conference in the Soviet Union," said CBS's Jonathan Sanders. "He opened up channels of communication and access to information that never existed."²⁸ Gerasimov was particularly important in defining Gorbachev's image for American television because, as he explained, Gerasimov catered to the needs of U.S. television reporters, providing them with witty "sound bites" in English:

²⁷ Interview with Alexander Merkushev, December 11, 1990.

²⁸ Interview with Jonathan Sanders, November 20, 1990.

The standard procedure is that after my briefing is over, American, British and maybe some other t.v. companies they putting me in the corner and asking me the same questions. First I wondered, "Why you ask me the same questions [I answered in the press conference]?" Just to answer in English, in English. They want it in English.²⁹

There were also numerous unnameable others from the foreign ministry who also assisted in the development of Gorbachev's media style, bringing their observations about the media from their posts around the world.

In addition, a cadre of senior Soviet officials influenced Gorbachev's thinking about the media. One of these men was Anatoly Dobrynin, who spent 24 years as the Soviet Ambassador to the United States. "He understood the press corps as well as Henry Kissinger," explained Bill Kovach, former Washington Bureau Chief of The New York Times.³⁰ Valentin Falin, head of the Novosti Press Agency, who served as Soviet ambassador to West Germany in the 1970s, also advised Gorbachev. Georgi Arbatov and his staff at the USA-Canada Institute were also cited as advisors to Gorbachev on a number of issues, including media. Another advisor was Nikolai Shishlin, a member of the Communist Party Central Committee. "Shishlin had good contacts particularly at NBC and had handled a good bit of the media relations going back to the Olympics," said Wyatt Andrews,

²⁹ Interview with Gennadi Gerasimov, November 21, 1990.

³⁰ Interview with Bill Kovach, May 10, 1990.

former Moscow correspondent for CBS News.³¹ This suggests that Gorbachev's media policy may have been influenced by the press policies and techniques developed during in the 1980 Olympic Games, which was the first time that the Soviets ran a full-scale, western-style press operation.

The bulk of Gorbachev's success with the media, however, should be credited to the Soviet leader himself. Gorbachev had a natural sense of how to deal with the media which was an extension of his dynamic personality. Several of the correspondents I interviewed--despite the usual skepticism found in journalists-- said that Gorbachev's personal charisma is virtually unparalleled in all the world. As John Kohan of Time Magazine put it:

The only person I can compare him to in my experience is the Pope, John Paul II. There's a kind of dynamism about him, he locks people in...you have this feeling [with Gorbachev] that for whatever second he's shaking your hand and talking to you, that's the most important moment.³²

Jeff Trimble of U.S. News says that like the Pope or the Reverend Billy Graham, one can feel Gorbachev's presence in a room:

These guys have an aura of some kind, and it's indisputable. You can see it when anyone comes out from meeting Gorbachev. Thatcher, anybody. These tough, seasoned politicians, they come out

³¹ Interview with Wyatt Andrews, May 23, 1991.

³² Interview with John Kohan, November 21, 1990.

and say, "Gorbachev, God, I met Gorbachev. I'll give him anything."³³

Gorbachev's strong personality would prove to be many of the factors which encouraged media coverage by the American press.

c. Reporting About Gorbachev

Before analyzing the coverage of Gorbachev, it is also helpful to understand something about the foreign press corps covering Gorbachev. Before Gorbachev, and even into the first year after he came to power, foreign journalists in the Soviet Union were under very strict control. Sources and access were extremely limited. As Bill Keller of The New York Times put it, sources usually consisted only of government officials and Soviet citizens who had little to lose:

In the old days, they tell me--I wasn't here in the old days--you basically had contact with dissidents, occasionally official spokesmen who came out and lied to you in the stiffest possible way, sort of the designated liars, and these people in the cultural community who once they got to know you, you would have these kind of kitchen table conversations with them and you could actually make friends. But they were inhibited by the danger of speaking too freely and too publicly.³⁴

Permission to film for television reporters was equally controlled. Steve Hurst recalled how hard it was to film

³³ Interview with Jeff Trimble, November 23, 1990.

³⁴ Interview with Bill Keller, November 20, 1990.

stories for NBC, for which he worked in Moscow from 1985-87:

To take a picture inside a food store, for example, which we often tried to do to illustrate the economy-- nothing is quite as illustrative of the economy as to show a grocery store--it was literally impossible. I remember when I was working for NBC here there was a grocery store around the corner from our office. And if we wanted to do that we had to literally just burst in with the camera rolling and get as much as we could before they'd throw us out. There was no way to go. I remember wanting to do a story about the farmers market. It took me two months to get permission to do that. And then we were accompanied by a Soviet television person who told, "No, you can't do that."³⁵

Hurst said that filming even the most mundane images was problematic:

I recall one cold winter day, we were trying to do a story--again this is in those days--illustrative of how cold it was. And there's a thermometer on a building, a big thermometer, on a building opposite the central post office. We drove down there, parked, got out and started to take a picture. And a militia man comes up and goes "No, you can't take a picture of the thermometer." Those stories just go on and on and on.

The similarity in images used by U.S. television networks before 1986 (described in Chapters Three and Four) can be explained to a great extent by the limits under which reporters had to work.

Of course, the limitations of reporters in the 1980s were nothing like those faced by Moscow reporters in the 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s. The Soviet Main Administration for Literary Affairs--better known by the

³⁵ Interview with Steve Hurst, November 24, 1990. Hurst worked for the Associated Press in Moscow from 1979-80 and 1981-84.

Soviet acronym "Glavlit"--censored all western copy from 1946 until 1961, although there had been censors before as well. Glavlit's censors were famous for reducing multi-page stories to a single innocuous sentence. Television reports were also censored, leading television correspondents to design elaborate schemes to smuggle film out of the country past the censors. Worst of all for the Americans, the Soviets controlled the telephone and telegraphs out of Moscow, and could keep the foreign correspondents from contacting the Western world. This kept the frustrated correspondents from transmitting many stories, even the announcement of the death of Stalin.³⁶

Censorship ended in 1961 but Glavlit was replaced with another Soviet organization aimed at controlling the foreign media. Novosti, also known as APN (for Agency Press Novosti), was formed to act as a liaison for the American reporters, arranging interviews and travel. Reporters quickly learned that Novosti was little more than a KGB front. In addition to keeping watch over foreign reporters, "Novosti's ability to sabotage what the Soviets considered an unfavorable story and its plain incompetence was legendary."³⁷ Still, the American networks were dependent until the early 1980s on Novosti to provide camera crews.

³⁶ Whitman Bassow, The Moscow Reporters (New York: William Morrow, 1988), p. 142.

³⁷ ibid, p. 326.

Even after they were allowed to have their own crews, the networks remained dependent on Novosti for transmission of their material by satellite to the United States. Until 1989, television correspondents had to make the drive to the state television station, in north Moscow, to make their satellite feed. Now, the Moscow bureaus funnel their signal to their satellites through the facilities of Soviet Central Television, although they hope to receive permission to bring in the equipment which would allow them to broadcast without involving the Soviets at all. As technology changed, Novosti's ability to affect and monitor foreign coverage waned.

Technological changes have transformed reporting from the Soviet Union. Palm sized super eight cameras go where cameras could never film before. "Like everyone else, I have a network of people who shoot on video eight for me," said CBS' Jonathan Sanders.³⁸ Contact with the West can be instantaneous due to telex machines and satellite telephone lines (one dials a U.S. number and reaches a Moscow news office).

Other changes in reporting have been brought about by glasnost. Television reporters can shoot freely, and sources abound. Not only are average citizens able to talk to reporters, but government officials are in general more readily available for interviews than their American

³⁸ Interview with Jonathan Sanders, November 20, 1990.

counterparts. "[Foreign Minister at the time Eduard] Shevardnadze stops and talks to me all the time. He'll be coming out of a press conference and I'll call his name in Russian and he'll walk over and talk to me," explained Sanders.³⁹ This happens less frequently in the West where politicians have become guarded about their media relations, Sanders asserted. In addition, the harassment of reporters has stopped. In the era before glasnost, foreign reporters were routinely followed by KGB agents and occasionally accosted. "The tailing was not necessarily to prevent the meetings [with sources] but to let you know that they're [the KGB] there, so that the next one might not take place," explained Esther Fein of The New York Times.⁴⁰ In the Gorbachev era, even the KGB began to hold press briefings for foreign correspondents.

The U.S. press corps in Moscow has included over the years many extremely talented journalists--some like John Reed were known primarily for their reporting from the Soviet Union, while for others like Walter Cronkite, Moscow was one in a number of assignments in a famous career. "Overall, it's a very good group because the editorial offices tend to send the best and the brightest," explained Gennadi Gerasimov, former spokesman for the Soviet Foreign

³⁹ ibid.

⁴⁰ Interview with Esther Fein, November 22, 1990.

Ministry.⁴¹ At the same time, the Moscow reporters are not without critics. Andrew Nagorski, who served as a correspondent in Moscow for Newsweek in 1981 and 1982, said that for numerous reasons, many of his colleagues-- particularly those who did not speak Russian--were limited in their reporting:

My first weeks in Moscow convinced me that those correspondents who took full advantage of the reporting opportunities in the Soviet Union were a distinct minority...Some were not particularly interested in either traveling around the country on their own or meeting many Russians...There was the ever-present fear of becoming the victim of a government provocation or of sparking retaliation by the authorities.⁴²

Many of the reporters in Moscow have been criticized for not knowing the Russian language. Some people, like Craig Whitney of The New York Times, believe that it is "criminal for editors to send anyone to Moscow without knowledge of the Russian language."⁴³ Others, like Robert Korengold formerly of UPI and Newsweek, maintain that given the choice between sending a good reporter who doesn't know Russian or a Russian speaker without good journalistic instincts, "I would opt for the journalist first on the assumption that he will pick up the language."⁴⁴ In general, most of the print

⁴¹ Interview with Gennadi Gerasimov, November 21, 1990.

⁴² Andrew Nagorski, Reluctant Farewell (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1985), p. 45-47.

⁴³ Quoted in Bassow, p. 347.

⁴⁴ ibid.

correspondents in Moscow during the Gorbachev era speak Russian, while few of the television reporters do. Of those reporters who covered Gorbachev during the study period of February 1984 to December 1986, only Frank Bourgholtzer, Steve Hurst, and Marvin Kalb--all of NBC--spoke Russian with any fluency. However, all three networks did and still do employ Russian speaking producers and production assistants. The heavy reliance on producers to do the day-to-day reporting in Russian is a hallmark of the American television production system, according to producer/correspondent Claire Shipman of CNN. "The TV correspondents for Europe, they all speak Russian," she said.⁴⁵ At the American networks, Shipman explained the producers are expected to do the journalistic work that allows the correspondent to excel on the air.

D. The Three Networks

It is also useful, before turning to the coverage of Gorbachev, to know something about the operations of the three news networks during the time period covered by this study. The networks shared one overarching similarity at this time: all three networks changed hands during the 1985 or 1986 and were sold to large, cost-conscious companies.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Interview with Claire Shipman, November 24, 1991.

⁴⁶ It was no coincidence that the networks were sold during the same two years. All three were undervalued--meaning that the total value of any network's stock was less than the actual value of the

yet each network faced a different internal political situation, which influenced its reporting about the Soviet leader.

Of the three networks, the most has been written about the problems that CBS News was facing at this time.⁴⁷

Simply put, a management team in power from 1982 to 1986 fundamentally changed the workings of the news division. Beginning in 1982, the presidency of CBS News was passed to Van Gordon Sauter, veteran of CBS's radio and television operations. A colorful and controversial man, Sauter transformed CBS News--critics say he destroyed it--into a more entertainment-oriented organization. At the heart of the problems was Sauter's definition of news, which was different than the hard-hitting, high quality product CBS had been producing since the days of Edward R. Murrow. Instead, Sauter wanted to capitalize on the comparative advantage that television had over print outlets in trying

network. In 1984, for example, ABC stock was trading for approximately \$42 dollars, suggesting that the value of the network was \$1.2 billion. The book value was \$60 a share, suggesting a value of \$2 billion. "But Wall Street said that if the company were broken up and sold it would be worth about \$4 billion," wrote Ken Auletta in Three Blind Mice (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 26. The relaxation of several FCC regulations on station ownership also invited takeovers. For example, in 1982 the FCC repealed its "anti-trafficking" regulation, no longer requiring people to own a station for three years before selling it.

⁴⁷ See Peter Boyer, Who Killed CBS? (New York: Random House, 1988), Ed Joyce, Prime Times, Bad Times (New York: Doubleday, 1988), and Peter McCade, Bad News At Black Rock (New York: Arbor House, 1987). There were also dozens of articles in newspapers and magazines about CBS' management problems.

to capture emotions. In short, Sauter's approach to news became known as "Moments Television." As Boyer explained it in his book about CBS:

What the moments doctrine amounted to, of course, was a deftly designed cover for the infiltration of entertainment values into the news. It completely changed the way CBS reported the day's news because it completely changed what news was. There were no moments to be found in a minute-fifteen report on unemployment told by a CBS News correspondent standing outside the Department of Labor in Washington D.C. There was, however, a moment of the highest sort if the CBS News camera studied the strained and expectant face of a young Pittsburgh mother as she stood (babe in arms) beside an employment line as he husband asked for a job.⁴⁸

For the Moscow correspondent and others in foreign bureaus, moments television was particularly challenging because Sauter found most stories on foreign policy to be boring, not the kind of moments television he wanted. Wyatt Andrews, CBS's Moscow correspondent from 1986-87, said that his distance from New York coupled with the high productivity of the Moscow bureau (with only a skeleton staff) protected him from feeling the brunt of the troubles brewing at headquarters. Although Andrews said that the fixed costs of operating in Moscow were high, "our cost per story was nothing and the stuff made a difference on the air. So I was largely insulated from that kind of crap by virtue of where I was and what the story was doing."⁴⁹ But

⁴⁸ Boyer, p. 164-65.

⁴⁹ Interview with Wyatt Andrews, May 23, 1991.

for many of the staff at CBS News, moments television was a disastrous change, one that made them feel like the soul of their organization was evaporating. Various acts of poor management by the Sauter team made morale fall further.

In the fall of 1983, one of Sauter's deputies, Ed Joyce, stepped in to replace him when Sauter was promoted to a corporate position. Things got even worse. "Ed Joyce was isolated and unpopular almost from the start," reported Boyer.⁵⁰ By the summer of 1985 and into 1986, CBS News was afflicted by cutbacks and low staff morale. CBS's management tried to quell the problems by firing Joyce in December 1985 and returning Sauter to the presidency of the news division, but this brought only more tumult. As Bill Powell and Jonathan Alter wrote in their Newsweek cover story which proclaimed, "Civil War At CBS," "Once the most prestigious corporation in the most glamorous of industries, CBS today is a financially ailing, deeply demoralized organization churning with dissention."⁵¹ The matter completely decayed after Lawrence Tisch, head of the Loews Corporation, waged a battle for and won control of CBS in September 1986, following an unsuccessful attempt by maverick businessman Ted Turner to buy CBS in 1985. Tisch in the months that followed began to dismantle the company,

⁵⁰ ibid., p. 299.

⁵¹ Bill Powell and Jonathan Alter, "Civil War at CBS," Newsweek, September 15, 1986, p. 46.

selling off such assets as CBS's publishing division.

Although Sauter was ousted, drastic cutbacks were made at CBS News between July 1986 and March 1987.⁵² CBS, arguably, has never fully recovered.

As the production process at CBS News crumbled, the quality of its product declined. Throughout my analysis of the coverage of Gorbachev, I found that CBS's reports contained less information overall than their competitors' reports. Although CBS scored some journalistic coups during my study period--it was the first network, for example, to recognize the significance of Gorbachev's first televised "walkabout" in Leningrad in May, 1985 (see Chapter Four)--it often presented a more shallow portrait of the news than ABC and NBC. Michael Massing, writing for the Columbia Journalism Review in 1986 also found that CBS's broadcasts were less informative following the advent of moments television:

Massing studied more than a month's worth of Evening News broadcasts...and found not only that the broadcast was less serious than it had been under [former anchorman Walter] Cronkite--that was old news by then--but that it wasn't even doing moments journalism very well. The production was undisciplined, relying upon whiz-bang editing that

⁵² Layoffs in the CBS Broadcast Group, of which CBS News is a division, started in 1985, and there were several rounds of firings. The cutback with the greatest impact on news occurred in March 1987 when 215 people or about 15 percent of the staff was fired and \$33 million was cut from the news budget.

obscured meaning, and the writing was sophomoric and often unintelligible.⁵³

These attributes--fast editing, extremely short sound bites, and stilted, value-laden language--are evident throughout the CBS coverage of Gorbachev.

Although CBS's management problems received the most attention from the media, CBS was not the first network to grapple with new management in the mid-1980s. ABC merged in March 1985 with Capital Cities Communications, a broadcasting and publishing company with almost \$1 billion per year in revenues and a reputation for strict cost management.⁵⁴ As Washington Journalism Review explained, cutbacks and increased attention to finances followed:

Capital Cities Communication, the legendarily lean company that bought ABC, is setting the pace, putting pressure on its rivals by instituting economies that range from wholesale firings to eliminating the executive messenger service.⁵⁵

The months following the merger were most noteworthy for causing what Auletta terms "a clash of cultures" at ABC.⁵⁶

⁵³ Boyer, p. 349. Massing's assessment runs counter to CBS Producer Mark Katkov's statement during our interview of June 19, 1991 that CBS has historically tried to create a well-produced, carefully composed broadcast.

⁵⁴ Although there was officially a merger of the two companies, the matter is better thought of as a takeover by Capital Cities, in that Capital Cities was in charge of network management.

⁵⁵ Barbara Matusow, "Learning to Do With Less," Washington Journalism Review, July 1986, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Auletta, p. 107.

Capital Cities' progressive style of management met resistance at the more traditional ABC.

The change in management had a direct effect on ABC News. ABC, which had traditionally had a smaller and weaker news department than its two competitors, had been strengthening its news organization dramatically in the years before the merger. The network's expanded commitment to news, begun in the late-1970s, was funded by ABC's success in the prime time ratings. To rebuild the news division, ABC turned to its proven franchise builder Roone Arledge, who had turned ABC Sports into the dominant force in the industry. Arledge was named president of the news division in 1977 and slowly built up ABC News, benefiting from an increased budget that allowed for more equipment and more staff. In particular, Arledge strengthened ABC by luring on- and off-air talent from his competitors with lucrative contracts, even trying unsuccessfully to entice anchormen Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather. But the merger with Capital Cities interfered with Arledge's manner of operations. There was a new emphasis on economy, which Arledge argued undermined quality. Moreover, Arledge did not get along with the Capital Cities-appointed head of the network, John Sias, who he perceived as a cost-cutting zealot with a rather odd personality. "Arledge was so miserable the first year of Cap Cities' reign that he became even more reclusive than usual. His office door stayed

shut. He returned fewer calls. Visits to the newsroom became rarer."⁵⁷ The split between the old guard and the new guard created a tense situation at ABC News.

One thing that did not change because of the ABC/Capital Cities merger was ABC's relative emphasis on foreign news. Even the title of the show, "World News Tonight," conveys its international slant. This emphasis can be attributed to the presence on the ABC News staff of several key figures with an interest in international affairs. Anchorman Peter Jennings, who reported from several foreign bureaus earlier in his career, was cited by many of his colleagues and competitors as a reason for ABC's relative emphasis on foreign reporting. "Jennings has always tended to be a lot more sophisticated and interested and cosmopolitan about international affairs, and would tend to give more time to it," said Lawrence Grossman, former president of NBC News.⁵⁸ The news executives shared Jennings' interest in international affairs. "The producer at ABC at the time was Bill Lord, who I think had more interest in foreign news than not only his competitors but also his successor, Paul Friedman." explained William Wheatley of NBC.⁵⁹ Accordingly, ABC dedicated more overall time to news about Soviet leader Gorbachev during 1985 and

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵⁸ Interview with Lawrence Grossman, October 24, 1990.

⁵⁹ Interview with William Wheatley, April 18, 1991.

1986 than its competitors. Still, the network trimmed its coverage somewhat, traveling somewhat less frequently and with fewer crews.

NBC was also going through a time of change. The president of NBC News from 1984 to 1988, Lawrence K. Grossman, was trying to revive the news division, which was suffering from a lack of strong leadership. "We always seemed to be the last to arrive at a major event and the last to leave," said one former NBC executive. "There was no sense of leadership or of direction and no sense of what the priorities really were."⁶⁰ Grossman tried to start new programs, cater more to the needs of affiliates, and raise morale. In general, Grossman succeeded in less than a year in improving both operations and morale. Unfortunately, he also had to cut costs. In 1984, for example, NBC News posted a total loss of \$110 million on a budget of \$250 million, and some 86 news employees were laid off in October 1984. At the same time, the network overall was doing extremely well, moving into first place in the prime time ratings and posting high earnings.

But like its two competitors, NBC became the object of a corporate takeover. General Electric (GE), the industrial giant, bought the network in December, 1985 in what was then the largest non-oil business merger in U.S. history.

⁶⁰ Quoted in "General Electric and the National Broadcasting Company: A Clash of Cultures," Kennedy School of Government Case Study Number C16-90-939-0, 1989, p.7.

Ironically, part of NBC had been owned by GE at the time of the network's founding in 1926.⁶¹ The sale prompted anxiety throughout the network. Staff in the entertainment division worried that "GE would be so preoccupied with the bottom line that it would not have the patience to nurture as [former NBC President Grant] Tinker had outstanding series."⁶² At NBC news, there was an even bigger worry: that General Electric might try to censor stories to protect its interests in defense and consumer electronics. As at ABC, there was something of a clash of cultures between the NBC and GE staffs. NBC executives were feeling rather confident at the time, with NBC making money overall, holding first place in the prime time ratings, and with Nightly News finally surpassing CBS Evening News for highest ratings among the evening news shows. But GE's approach, as expressed by its CEO Jack Welch, often required "changing the institution while it's still winning."⁶³

Fears were only heightened when General Electric quickly launched the same sort of cost-cutting regimes at NBC that had Capital Cities at ABC. This included personnel cutbacks and tightened budgets. Welch set the tone by choosing the head of GE's Financial Services Division,

⁶¹ After the network was created, ownership of NBC was passed to a GE subsidiary, RCA. RCA became an independent company in 1933 and retained control of NBC until the network's sale in 1985.

⁶² Auletta, p. 85.

⁶³ ibid., p. 87.

Robert Wright, to head the network.⁶⁴ Grossman resisted making any cuts to the news division, initially arguing for an increase in the news budget to keep Nightly News first in the ratings even though NBC News was losing money overall. As a compromise, Grossman and Welch ended up bringing in the management consulting firm McKinsey & Company to determine funding needs and increase efficiency. Although the McKinsey team reportedly helped "clear the air," details of Grossman's battles with GE over the news budget were the subject of several leaks to the press by the autumn of 1986 --an embarrassing breach of GE's corporate culture.

During the time period of this study, there was occasional friction at another level--between NBC's Moscow correspondent and his producers in New York. Moscow correspondent Steve Hurst, who later left NBC for CNN, said that he resented the tendency of the New York staff to second guess his news judgment. "Whose judgment is better, mine or someone sitting in Atlanta, Georgia or New York? In terms of the events of a particular day, well, obviously mine," he said.⁶⁵ Despite his daily involvement with the Moscow story, Hurst said that he often clashed with New York because they wanted to shape the content of his stories:

I would come together with my little basket of news, say here it is, and they'd say okay, here's

⁶⁴ Wright had experience in broadcasting, most recently as executive vice president of Cox Communications, the cable company.

⁶⁵ Interview with Steve Hurst, November 24, 1990.

how we see that basket of news. This is our concept of the report about the facts you have in your basket. And we would like to see them arranged in such a fashion. And only these bits used and the rest you can throw away. And there would often be heated discussions about that, but in the end, having also studied the networks, you knew how important it was for a correspondent to get his report on the air. So in the end, you would make your arguments, but collapse if you saw them going no where and say okay, unless you knew for example that you knew they were asking you to do something or say something that was wrong. So okay, we'll do it your way. It doesn't serve anybody.

While reluctant to talk about the matter, NBC's William Wheatley, one of Hurst's producers, confirmed that there were occasional clashes with the Moscow correspondent. According to Wheatley, the problems were not personal, but rather reflected the producers' feeling that Hurst's reporting was not always representing the right perspective. These internal problems--whether caused by office politics or a professional difference of opinion--hindered Hurst somewhat from getting his reports onto the broadcast. As Wheatley explained:

If there's a feeling that a correspondent's work isn't what you want it to be, it can effect [access] on the close calls, and you have to remember there's close calls every day of one sort or another. It can effect his access to the air.⁶⁶

Hurst says that his time at NBC demonstrates more generally how internal politics of all kinds can shape the final

⁶⁶ Interview with William Wheatley, April 18, 1991.

product of a news broadcast. At any of the networks, Hurst said:

A producer gets down on somebody--and it's not normally for the reasons that they should get down on somebody, in other words poor reporting or sloppy reporting, it's because this particular producer doesn't like that person's style--it doesn't matter, they'll just sit and let a story go idle.

Other Moscow correspondents, past and present, admitted that they to differing degrees suffered through different kinds of friction with headquarters. But to most of the reporters, internal politics is simply part of the job.

In summary, reporting on the Soviet Union during the beginning of the Gorbachev era can be viewed as a complicated process. The requirements of the networks and their internal political situations needed to be met by the correspondents under a situation which made news production difficult. As illustrated in the following four chapters, the correspondents still found much to say.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DEBUTANTE

The 13 months from Yuri Andropov's death to Konstantin Chernenko's passing were extremely important ones for Mikhail Gorbachev, for they were the months in which Gorbachev was formally introduced to the western world. It was during this time that many Western political leaders, as well as many members of the Western public, formed their initial impression of the Soviet leader. The image of Gorbachev conveyed by the American media, because it was one of the few available pieces of information about the new Soviet leader, was therefore an important factor in determining the American public's opinion of Gorbachev.

This is representative of the media's ability to "frame" public figures and public issues to simplify discussion.¹ A frame can be thought of as a kind of first impression, or a single definitional phrase used to identify a new political figure or issue. Gitlin's more formal definition explained frames as repeated definitional

¹ For a more detailed explanation of the media's ability to frame issues, see Cohen, p. 12-13 as well as A. Friedman, "Framing Pictures: The Role of Knowledge in Automatized Encoding and Memory for Gist," Journal of Experimental Psychology 108, 1979; Erving Goffman, Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); and Gaye Tuchman, Making News (New York: Free Press, 1978). Ranney credits psychologist E. C. Tolman with the original ideas of "cognitive maps." See his Purposive Behavior in Animals and Men (New York: Appleton-Century, 1932). Walter Lippmann talked of "maps" in people's heads which helped them understand the world in Public Opinion (New York, Pelican Books, 1922).

paradigms used throughout the press coverage of an individual or issue:

Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual.²

A good example of the power of media frames was the terming by many media organizations of men who chose not to serve in Vietnam as "draft dodgers" rather than "draft resisters." This frame implied that these men were morally wrong in avoiding a necessary social responsibility, not, as the second term implies, that they were engaging in morally justified civil disobedience.

Media frames are valuable because they speak to a problem brought about by advances in technology--that people know more about the world than ever before, yet can certify less of it through their own personal experience. Because most people in America are buried by an avalanche of information every day, they are in need of advice as to how to interpret and organize what learning. Media frames, therefore, help explain and perhaps even define culture.

But at the same time, media frames are problematic. They can oversimplify information, and leave lasting impressions which are not true. Moreover, they can dissuade citizens from believing new information which is in conflict with the frame. People tend to consume the mass media

² Gitlin, The Whole World is Watching, p. 7.

selectively, tending "to read and listen only to writers and broadcasters with whose political beliefs and preferences they already agreed."³ The research of Friedman, for example, suggests that people compare new information to the schemata they have in their mind already if an issue has been framed by the media. If the new information conflicts with the frame, it is largely ignored.⁴ Furthermore, frames are vulnerable to the influence of political public relations experts. Ronald Reagan, for example, could potentially have been "framed" as an actor who lacked the proper background to serve as President. Instead, Reagan emphasized his strength of character and competence during his handling of the first major event of his Presidency--the release of the 52 American hostages from Iran. This helped to create an image which lasted for years to come of Reagan as a strong leader.

In this time period, the statement by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that she could "do business" with the Soviet leader was chosen by U.S. television as the dominant frame concerning Gorbachev. By chosen, I do not mean that there was any formal selection process. Rather, Thatcher's impression, both attributed or not, was repeated time after time in stories about Gorbachev. This frame carried with it a whole set of unstated consequential

³ Ranney, p. 7.

⁴ Friedman, p. 316-355.

meanings to the politically aware, such as that if the conservative Mrs. Thatcher said something complementary of a Soviet leader then it must be true. Even to the politically naive, hearing the head of a major Western democracy declare that the Soviet leader was businesslike must have seemed a significant, meaningful change. This created a powerful, positive first impression. Whether purposefully or inadvertently, editors and correspondents used this frame over and over in the television reports concerning Gorbachev, magnifying the effect of the frame. Even today, correspondents still refer to Gorbachev as a man with whom the West can do business. This frame helps explain why in 1985, even though Americans continued to express suspicion about the Soviet Union, that they showed interest and optimism concerning Gorbachev.⁵

From Gorbachev's international debut in February 1984 until the middle of 1985, U.S. reporters also concentrated on examining the signs of power that surrounded the Soviet politician. Foreign reporters operating in the Soviet Union before Gorbachev's ascent, as I have described in Chapter Two, were very limited as to whom they could interview and what they could cover. This led them, like the Russian

⁵ For example, a January 1985 ABC News Poll showed that although three quarters of respondents thought it high time the U.S. and Soviet Union signed a nuclear arms control agreement, that nearly as many (72 percent) thought that the Soviets would cheat on any such agreement. Despite this cynicism about the Soviet government, 38 percent of respondents to another ABC poll said that they thought Soviet-American relations would improve under a Gorbachev administration.

people, to look for subtle signs to determine what was happening in Soviet politics--who stood next to whom, who nominated whom for office, even who made funeral arrangements for whom. The foreign reporters in Moscow were still following this standard operating procedure during the time Gorbachev came to power. Gorbachev would, over the months that followed his taking of office, begin to alter the standard operating procedures of both Soviet politics and the reporting of Soviet politics. He would soon allow reporters to cover him Western-style, and adapt a more western style of news management than his immediate predecessors. But in the earliest cycle of coverage of Gorbachev, the search for signs predominated.

A. First Appearances

Mikhail Gorbachev was first mentioned on U.S. television in February 1984, as a possible successor to his mentor, Yuri Andropov, following Andropov's death.⁶ Gorbachev was one of several Soviet figures discussed by American reporters before the emergence of Konstantin Chernenko as the new Soviet General Secretary. As the battle continued for the Kremlin's top position, U.S. television took notice of Gorbachev's attempts to solidify his power base. All three networks reported that even a few days after Andropov's death, the leadership situation in the

⁶ See NBC, February 10, 1984, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

Soviet capital remained confusing. As they had done in the past, the networks looked for signs which might reveal aspects of the power struggle. In a report on February 12, for example, ABC's Walter Rodgers reported that, "Mikhail Gorbachev, another possible successor, was seated prominently next to the Andropov family near the casket today." The next day, CBS noted:

On the day when Konstantin Chernenko assumed the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party, he and other members of the ruling Politburo again paid tribute to former leader Yuri Andropov. Chernenko...was flanked on the left by the man many considered to be his closest rival for the job, Mikhail Gorbachev, at 52, a relatively youthful protege of Andropov.⁷

Even though Chernenko assumed the high Kremlin office, Gorbachev had established himself as a man to watch.

The next sign of Gorbachev's increasing power was seen the following month when Gorbachev was given the prestigious role of nominating Chernenko to be President of the Soviet Union. Although in today's Soviet Union the Presidency is an important and powerful position, it was in 1984 a ceremonial post. The Presidency was bestowed on the General Secretary of the Communist Party to show that he also headed the government. When Chernenko was nominated to be President on April 11th, what was newsworthy to ABC's Peter Jennings was the signal the nomination sent about the solidification of Gorbachev's power: "Of greater interest

⁷ CBS, February 12, 1984, Mark Phillips reporting from Moscow.

was the man who put the 72 year old Chernenko's name in nomination, Mikhail Gorbachev is the Soviet leader's heir apparent." Gorbachev's nomination, agreed NBC, "suggests that Gorbachov [sic] has firmly secured the country's number two position."⁸

The sign that Gorbachev was clearly the Kremlin's second-in-command is very important in explaining his transformation into a newsworthy individual to American television. Gorbachev would, after all, be a likely successor to Chernenko. Moreover, even a month after Chernenko took office, it looked as if that succession could take place quickly. Chernenko's frailty was evident to the Moscow press corps. For example, NBC's correspondent Steve Mallory reported upon seeing Chernenko accept the presidency that, "the 72-year-old Chernenko seemed unsteady as he walked to the podium. His acceptance speech was often slurred. He seemed to have trouble catching his breath."⁹ Because Gorbachev was so clearly on the brink of power, American reporters had reason to watch him. Recently released evidence shows that the White House was watching Gorbachev during this time as well. Vice President George Bush tried to schedule a meeting with Gorbachev in April of 1984, sensing that Gorbachev would soon be leading the

⁸ NBC, April 11, 1984, Steve Mallory reporting from Moscow.

⁹ ibid.

Soviet Union.¹⁰ Yet Gorbachev was mentioned on U.S. television only three times during the summer and autumn of 1984; all these occurred in stories which called Chernenko's health into question. Until Gorbachev made a trip to the West in December of that year, he did very little that was of interest to American television.¹¹

B. Enter a Bear Smiling

The American public and the Western world got their first in-depth view of Gorbachev in December 1984, when the Soviet number-two man made a seven-day visit to Great Britain.¹² This trip would have repercussions for months to come because it created the first impression most westerners had of the up-and-coming Soviet leader. This was more than just a junket for Gorbachev--it was the opening foray of a public relations battle against President Reagan for the allegiance of the NATO allies.

The trip began to ease American television out of its role as a reader of signs, and to hint that Gorbachev would give the West substance and splash to cover in the future. Gorbachev could hardly have created a better impression. All three networks showed picture after picture of the

¹⁰ Argumenti i Facti, Issue 25, July 1991.

¹¹ Gorbachev's trip to Italy in June, 1984, for example, was not covered by U.S. television.

¹² The trip was scheduled to last eight days, but was cut one day short so that Gorbachev could return to Moscow for the funeral of Soviet Defense Minister Dimitri Ustinov.

genial Soviet, smiling in virtually every frame that was shown. All three networks covered the story with the same general angle: as a closer look at the man who would likely be head of the Soviet Union very soon, and whose style is very different. But to be true, Gorbachev did little during this trip that was strategic in nature. Rather, the press reacted strongly to the content of his message and to his personal style.

CBS gave the most overall time to the Gorbachev visit, ABC less still and NBC the least.¹³ Yet the reports aired throughout the trip often conformed to the same format. First, they explained who Gorbachev was and why he was important. Some also stated that Gorbachev was delivering a message to the U.S. through his statements in Britain. Second, they explained that Gorbachev was campaigning for stricter arms control limits and against the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (more widely known as "Star Wars"), the missile defense system under development since April, 1983. Then, they analyzed the Soviet leader's charisma and style. Last, they commented that though his style may have been different, there was no evidence that Gorbachev's political views differed significantly from those held by other Soviet

¹³ The Vanderbilt University Television News Abstract and Index shows that total coverage on Gorbachev from December 15-18 1984 totalled 7:30 in four stories on CBS, 4:50 in three stories on ABC and 2:30 in one story on NBC, all rounded to the nearest 10 seconds. However, at least one report on ABC is missing from this total because Vanderbilt indexes only the show broadcast in the Nashville, Tennessee area; the excluded story was added in a different version of the broadcast.

leaders. This format created drama: this Russian looks different, the stories said, but is he? And drama is an essential element of "good television." Television's ability to tell stories is what allows the medium to compete with newspapers as a source of information:

Television must get the maximum impact from its few minutes, and its producers and editors try to accomplish that by fitting each story into a larger theme and weaving into every account of what happened an explanation of what it means.¹⁴

This desire for larger, dramatic themes may account in part for why Gorbachev received so much coverage on the Britain trip.

NBC's main report on the Gorbachev visit, aired December 17th, demonstrates how the formulaic approach to covering Gorbachev worked. First, anchor Tom Brokaw described why this story was appearing on the nightly news:

This man is Mikhail Gorbachov [sic], and he is generally thought to be the second most powerful man in the Soviet Union, maybe even the next Soviet president; and so, his words are being measured very carefully during his current visit to London. Today he met with the British Foreign Secretary; but Steve Hurst reports that he was talking to a wider audience.

Next came reporter Steve Hurst's description of the arms control issues:

The Kremlin's number-two man put the Reagan administration on notice. He said the Soviets won't negotiate reducing nuclear weapons on Earth, until Washington agrees to ban development of weapons in outer space, the Star Wars project.

¹⁴ Ranney, p. 20.

The video accompanying this text showed Gorbachev speaking at a state dinner, looking serious. This seemed to underline the seriousness of the disagreement over Star Wars. The report contained two sound bites from British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, one on the substance of the arms race and another of her impression of Gorbachev. In this report, she made her famous statement, "I like Mr. Gorbachev. We can do business together." Hurst's report next moved into a more detailed discussion of the new-style Soviet:

Gorbachov [sic] is not from the mold that gave the world generation after generation of stodgy, dour Soviet leaders...Gorbachov is a bouncy man, quick with a smile and self-assured, apparently confident of his position.

The NBC report accompanied these words with film of a smiling, jovial Gorbachev, taken as Gorbachev posed for cameras while arriving for his visit with the British Foreign Secretary. These pictures came in stark contrast to the shots of Gorbachev aired earlier in the report. Here, Gorbachev looked as the text suggested--happy, self-confident, and agreeable. The report also contained a shot of Gorbachev's smiling wife Raisa. The presence of a Soviet leader's wife, particularly a young and pleasant looking one, reinforced the idea that leadership in the Soviet Union was undergoing a change. Soviet first ladies, unlike their American counterparts, had rarely appeared with their husbands in public. Hurst's report finished with the conclusion that there was unlikely to be a change in

substance despite Gorbachev's change in style from previous leaders:

Gorbachov [sic] may turn out to be the smiling messenger with words in the West nobody wants to hear, words that impose, in Washington's view, unacceptable preconditions on arms talks, talks already stalled for more than a year.

With Gorbachev looking amiable, and Mrs. Thatcher giving a positive view of him, viewers may have ended up with a feeling of conflict, if not confusion, after hearing the report's pessimistic conclusion.

The CBS coverage of Gorbachev's trip to Britain also showed how the search for signs was beginning to change. CBS opened the coverage of Gorbachev with a four-sentence story on the day of his arrival in London, and covered the Soviet leader for four days running. The second day, December 16, CBS's Tom Fenton delivered a two and one-half minute report on the West's first look at Gorbachev. The piece reveals how little was known about Gorbachev and, again, how little CBS expected to be able to learn from his visit. Fenton reported that the signs pointed to a rather uneventful visit:

The guessing game was in high gear today in Britain...Western officials were continuing their attempts to figure out what he's [Gorbachev] really like...In recent ceremonies back in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev now stands in a place of honor next to President Chernenko...Gorbachev will do all the things expected of important Communist guests...but he's not likely to reveal much about himself.¹⁵

¹⁵ CBS, December 15, 1984, Morton Dean anchoring and Tom Fenton reporting from London.

yet by the next day, it appeared Fenton had been wrong. Gorbachev was suddenly making a splash in Britain. In a two minute report on December 17, Fenton explained that Gorbachev had opened a diplomatic offensive in Britain against Star Wars that seemed to be working:

"Enter a bear smiling." That's how The London Times describes Gorbachev's visit to Britain. But the big question is why is he smiling. He won over the British press, which is something to smile about. He won over Britain's "Iron Lady", which is certainly something to smile about...And he seems to be exploiting a potential division in the Western alliance, and that is something to make him smile all the way back to the Kremlin.

The pictures backed up the text. Gorbachev appeared in six shots in Fenton's report and he was smiling broadly in five of them (in the sixth, he was merely listening to someone else). As Fenton started his report, for instance, viewers saw "the Bear," Gorbachev, enter a room, take off his coat and warmly greet Foreign Secretary Howe--these were the same pictures of the smiling confident Gorbachev that NBC used. The report then alternated between the smiling Gorbachev, the smiling Thatcher, and the news media, which the text declared Gorbachev "charmed." The images, regardless of text, seemed to present a reason to like this smiling visitor. Although this story also followed the general formula for covering Gorbachev, it concentrated on exposing Gorbachev's personal side. In addition to the physical representations of western-style charisma, Fenton used the word "style" three times in just 127 seconds. This

emphasized how different Gorbachev's style was perceived to be.

Television needs conflict in addition to drama to capture its audience, and the conflict came for CBS in the next day of Gorbachev's visit. On December 18th, CBS's anchor Dan Rather delivered a brisk three-sentence report about Gorbachev's response to human rights questions:

Top Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev continued his visit to Britain today and, for the first time, all was not exactly peaches and cream. When Gorbachev, said to be Moscow's second-ranking leader, met with members of the British Parliament, he was sharply questioned about Soviet human rights or lack of same. He is said to have snapped back, and I quote, "You govern your society and leave us to govern ours."

This short report contained several highly charged words which have negative connotations. Gorbachev was "sharply questioned" rather than asked and he "snapped back" instead of merely answered or responded. Because this was an anchor report, without the charming pictures of Gorbachev to counteract the words, CBS's criticism was more believable than it would have been if accompanied by footage of the smiling Soviet.

ABC's reports on the Gorbachev visit to London showed how the methods of reading Soviet signals could be made obsolete by a dynamic Kremlin leader. In the first of ABC's reports on the visit, on December 16th, reporter Walter Rodgers read Gorbachev as someone inexperienced in handling the media:

Mrs. Thatcher gave Gorbachev lessons on how to deal with Western photographers, although the Soviet official did not quickly grasp the elected politician's need to look at the cameras.

As with CBS's reporting, it was clear by the next day that Gorbachev could handle the western media quite well. "The good humored Gorbachev has been quite a hit in Britain practicing a new and pleasant soft-spoken Soviet diplomatic approach," said Rodgers.¹⁶ By the following night, Gorbachev's seductiveness was in full force. Rodgers' report again showed Gorbachev to be someone the West could do business with, even suggesting that Gorbachev looked like "a corporate executive instead of a political heir to Lenin" as he stepped out of a Rolls Royce limousine. Still, Rodgers looked to the signals which reflected Gorbachev's position:

At 53, Gorbachev is a rising star in the Kremlin hierarchy, second in the party leadership to Soviet President Chernenko, he sits in the front row and addresses major party functions.

The signals, Soviet political history, and the style showed by Gorbachev seemed to be in conflict, as is evidenced by the conclusion of ABC's report. Although Gorbachev represented the possibility of a fresh start, said Rodgers, his rigidity on Star Wars indicated he might simply continue the tough Soviet policies of the past.

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's assessment of the Soviet leader was central in all three networks'

¹⁶ ABC, December 17, 1984, Walter Rodgers reporting from London.

stories on the Gorbachev trip. Her comment that she liked Gorbachev and could do business with him was excerpted from a lengthy interview shown on British television. These comments first appeared on December 17th on CBS and NBC (they were paraphrased that evening on ABC), but they were cycled over and over as they became part of the "file footage" relating to Gorbachev. As early as the day after her assessment, Thatcher's comment was used again the ABC's report. Not only did the Prime Minister approve of Gorbachev's style, she agreed with him that an ever-escalating arms race is undesirable:

Obviously you can't stop research going ahead but I think one does not want to go into a higher and higher level of armaments, because between the two main power blocs, the Warsaw Pact countries and NATO, we've got to have balance, if we're both to feel secure.

She did not, however, drop her support of the "Star Wars" project, as Gorbachev hoped. Nevertheless, Thatcher's comments about Gorbachev had an enormous effect on American public opinion towards the Soviet. Thatcher's comments provided the first informed opinion by a Western leader about Gorbachev. The power of seeing her say before the camera "I like Mr. Gorbachev" created a positive frame through which all future events would be filtered. Accordingly, the first U.S. public opinion data regarding Gorbachev, an ABC/Washington Post poll in January 1985, showed that 38 percent of respondents thought that Superpower relations would improve under a Gorbachev

administration while only 6 percent thought relations would worsen. Thatcher's comment also had an effect on the Reagan administration. "I think that her statement probably had the most impact in terms of at least getting the more conservative parts of the administration prepared to think of Gorbachev as something different," explained Rozanne Ridgway, who served as Assistant Secretary Defense for European and Canadian Affairs under Reagan.¹⁷

Gorbachev's trip was brought to an early close by the death of Soviet Defense minister Dmitri Ustinov. On December 21st, Gorbachev in Scotland announced Ustinov's death and soon returned to Moscow for his funeral. U.S. reporters reverted to their search for signs of power in the funeral arrangements. In opening NBC's report on Ustinov's passing, Tom Brokaw explained that there was a "small clue to the leadership realignment in the Kremlin the way Ustinov's death notice was handled." Steve Mallory continued that:

Making the announcement outside the Soviet Union before the official statement from Moscow is most unusual, and further suggests that after Party Chairman Konstantin Chernenko, Gorbachev is the most powerful man in the Soviet Union.¹⁸

Viewers on CBS were instructed about the "several layers on meaning," while viewers on ABC saw signs indicating that a major figure had died: war movies and somber music appeared

¹⁷ Interview with Rozanne Ridgway, November 6, 1991.

¹⁸ NBC, December 21, 1984.

in place of regular Soviet television programming, a chess championship to be held in a Red Square building was canceled, and New Year's decorations were taken down.

But according to one of the reporters covering the Gorbachev trip, it was far from a "small clue" that Gorbachev announced Ustinov's death. Steve Hurst, based at the time at NBC's London bureau, said that Gorbachev's announcement was an overwhelming sign that he would be the next Soviet leader:

Gorbachev walked out with his shoes shined, his tie on and his wife at his side and walked up to reporters with the Gorbachev aplomb, this charisma, and looking at us all said, "Well, I'm leaving and here's what we did and you have any questions?" "Yeah, can you tell us if Marshall Ustinov has died. We hear that he has." And there's been no announcement yet. He just for the television cameras of the world said, "Yes, unfortunately the good comrade did die." But I think anyone who didn't report then, which NBC didn't--not for lack of me trying--that here is the next leader of the Soviet Union or at least couch it some way, that this has never happened before, the only reason it would happen is if this guy is actually running the country--it was very, very interesting that he showed himself then.¹⁹

Hurst speculated that the importance of Gorbachev's pronouncement was lost on most editors at the time, who were used to a more conservative style of reporting about Soviet affairs. Although Gorbachev's trip to Britain came to an anti-climactic ending, the excursion nevertheless established Gorbachev as an important figure in the Soviet Union and therefore someone for the world to watch.

¹⁹ Interview with Steve Hurst, November 24, 1990.

c. On Chernenko and the KGB

During the first two months of 1985, Gorbachev was most often mentioned by American television in stories that examined Chernenko's failing health. The Soviet leader was extremely ill, suffering from emphysema and deterioration of the liver and heart. There were 13 reports during January and February 1985 concerning Gorbachev, of which 10 discussed Chernenko's illness. Several of these stories were given prominent coverage. Even if "the U.S. government is not yet on a death watch," as one ABC report explained, the three television networks seemed to be.²⁰ NBC's broadcast of January 14th, for example, lead with a story which made it sound as if the Soviet leader's days were numbered. "It seems to come with that office. Soviet President Konstantin Chernenko is ill," said Tom Brokaw in his introduction. Chief Diplomatic Correspondent Marvin Kalb continued that Chernenko that day canceled a trip to meet with Warsaw Pact leaders. The cancellation set off speculation about who would succeed Chernenko and what effect a change in leadership would have on the upcoming Geneva arms talks:

The exact state of Chernenko's health is a secret --as jealously guarded as any other in the Kremlin. But U.S. officials believe he has probably suffered another setback in his fight against emphysema...Uncertainties at the top of the Kremlin leadership may affect the prospect of an arms control agreement.

²⁰ ABC, January 28, 1985, Barrie Dunsmore reporting from Moscow.

Even though arms control talks might not be affected, the death of Chernenko would be a big news story, replete with the drama of another battle for control of the Kremlin. By keeping the American public informed that a change in leadership was imminent, the networks primed their audience for the succession story when it came along. These interim reports kept advancing the continuing story of the changing Kremlin leadership.

The plot thickened on January 27th, when the London Sunday Times reported that Chernenko would step down from office due to his failing health and would be replaced by Gorbachev. NBC termed this a "crisis in the Kremlin."²¹ As CBS explained:

The Times, quoting what it calls "unofficial reports", says that Chernenko is being treated in the intensive care unit of a Kremlin hospital. The paper also claims that the ruling Politburo has approved a plan that has Mikhail Gorbachev, considered the Kremlin's number two man, taking over as the party secretary.²²

While the CBS report carried the main details, ABC's report on the following day explained the nuances behind this story. Most importantly, ABC theorized that the Times' information may have come from a Gorbachev supporter in the KGB:

The London Sunday Times, whose reporter is known to have sources in the KGB, says the Politburo has already decided to allow Chernenko to retire

²¹ NBC, January 28, 1985, Tom Brokaw anchoring and reporting.

²² CBS, January 27, 1985, Bob Schieffer anchoring and reporting.

gracefully by retaining the ceremonial position of president. Mikhail Gorbachev is the Politburo's choice to be the party's General Secretary, according to this account, in part because of his brilliant performance during his recent tour of Britain. According to most analysts this smacks of leaks inspired by Gorbachev supporters.²³

This report subtly cast doubt on the resignation rumor. First, ABC asserted, whether true or not, that the reporter had ties to the Soviet secret police. This association created the specter of propoganda, not news. Second, Dunsmore implied that this report was a Gorbachev leak and therefore unreliable. This report certainly could have been a leak, reflecting the KGB's understanding of the power of the western media. Third, the report cites Gorbachev's "brilliant performance" in London, implying that the Soviet was acting in Britain, trying successfully to create an image that wasn't really true. Therefore Gorbachev should not be trusted. For whatever reason, all three networks stopped following up on this story after two reports.

In fact, the KGB did and still does have a role in the shaping of news coming from the Soviet Union. "The KGB has always been probably the most savvy organization in the country in terms of mind control and that business," asserted veteran NBC correspondent Frank Bourgholtzer.²⁴ The 12th department of the KGB's first directorate is a

²³ ABC, January 28, 1985, Barrie Dunsmore reporting from London.

²⁴ Interview with Frank Bourgholtzer, November 25, 1990. Bourgholtzer now works for the Sacramento Bee and Christian Science Monitor television.

highly sophisticated public relations organizations, employing several hundred people, according to Jeff Trimble of U.S. News. The directorate influences public opinion in a number of different ways, including leaking stories and getting to know influential western visitors. Trimble, who is working on a book about the KGB, says that the organization is more adept at "spin control" than any other Soviet organization:

We sort of know who the guys are, who they talk to, and who they can influence. I mean there's one of them assigned to U.S. News who deals with Mort Zuckerman when he comes here and very definitely influences U.S. News' view of the Soviet Union and Gorbachev. Very definitely.²⁵

Many of the reporters now in Moscow have stories about getting information from KGB-related sources. Steve Hurst, for example, said that while at NBC he got information on several stories from a few people who he believed had ties to the KGB:

On another occasion, another guy told me exactly what I believe is the truth about what happened to the Korean airliner in '83. Seymour Hersh's book later said the same thing after a great deal of research. This guy told it to me in one night, shortly after it happened. I knew that he had contacts [with the KGB], not necessarily worked for them.²⁶

During the mid-1980s, the KGB was working very quietly to affect western public opinion, they may have done in the London Times story. Today, by comparison, the KGB shows

²⁵ Interview with Jeff Trimble, November 23, 1990.

²⁶ Interview with Steve Hurst, November 24, 1990.

many signs of glasnost. The KGB now has its own press office, and KGB officials are granting interviews and appearing on television.

The rumors were soon replaced by the reality of Chernenko's illness. On February 24th, the next time Gorbachev appeared on U.S. television, both Chernenko and Gorbachev were shown voting in the one-party election for the Supreme Soviet, a national assembly. Everyone in the Soviet Union was required by law to vote, so it would have looked extremely bad if the head of the government did not cast his ballot. "Balloting is such a serious event that Chernenko virtually had to be seen voting," explained Hurst.²⁷ So an extremely ill Chernenko came out in public for the first time in nearly two months. The story began all three network news shows that night--a Sunday night, typically a slow night for news.

Gorbachev capitalized on Chernenko's appearance in a remarkable, strategic way. Chernenko was scheduled to appear at his regular, central Moscow polling place and members of the foreign press were invited to watch. But as CBS explained, something "strange" happened:

Instead, Mikhail Gorbachev, the apparent Kremlin number-two, arrived. In great contrast to the later Chernenko appearance, Gorbachev seemed confident, even outgoing, joking with reporters

²⁷ NBC, February 24, 1985, Steve Hurst reporting from Moscow.

and bringing his wife, daughter and granddaughter along.²⁸

The event as seen on television could easily have been featuring an American, rather than a Soviet leader going to vote. The glare of the television lights, the easy-natured way the Gorbachev family posed for the cameras, and the light-hearted banter between the future leader and the reporters were reminiscent of a Ronald Reagan photo opportunity. Chernenko appeared on Soviet television several hours later, voting in a different, unspecified location, possibly a dressed up hospital room. U.S. viewers saw what the Soviets did--a weak, frail man, barely able to stand under his own power. These pictures confirmed all rumors by showing how sick Chernenko obviously was. This was, as it turned out, the last time Chernenko would be seen in public before his death. Therefore by contrast, Gorbachev looked and sounded vibrant, creating a positive impression both inside and outside the Soviet Union. And again, the images of the weak Chernenko and strong Gorbachev would become indelible as they were shown over and over in subsequent televised reports. This marked the first of Gorbachev's strategic media tactics. I call it strategic in that he succeeded not only because of the content of his message--that he was livelier than Chernenko--but because of the way in which the coverage was cultivated.

²⁸ CBS, February 24, 1985, Mark Phillips reporting from Moscow.

D. General Secretary Gorbachev

Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko passed away on the evening of March 10, 1985. For the third time in just over two years, the Soviets buried an aged leader and transferred the reigns of leadership. U.S. television called the death of Chernenko not just a change in the Kremlin, but a transformation in Soviet society. Even before saying good evening to the audience on the night after Chernenko died, all three U.S. anchors opened their broadcast with a powerful statement which summarized the dramatic events. "The passage of power from one man to another, from one generation to another, a new era," said NBC's Brokaw. "The old guard out, the new guard in," explained ABC's Jennings. "A new post-war Soviet generation," commented CBS's Rather. Each of these statements framed the news of Gorbachev's succession as an event of sweeping proportions.

The signal from the Kremlin which was most in need of interpretation was the unprecedented speed with which Gorbachev was named General Secretary. While previous leadership battles in the Soviet Union were replete with intrigue and infighting, Gorbachev assumed power only four hours after the announcement that Chernenko had died. All three networks showed pictures of Gorbachev performing his first official duties, leading the mourners at Chernenko's funeral bier. Gorbachev looked solemn as he led the Politburo into the hall where Chernenko lay in state, somber music creating a morose mood. Yet glimpses of Gorbachev's

personality were evident, as when he tenderly consoled Chernenko's widow, Anna.

The "straight news" stories about Gorbachev's ascent also inadvertently commented on the nature of Soviet society. In the additional footage they used, the three networks painted a society where average people were repressed and uninformed. ABC showed for instance how the soviet people had to search for signs to determine that their leader had finally passed from the scene. ABC, as they had at Ustinov's death, showed limousines rushing through the streets of Moscow, classical music programs being played on television, and flags being lowered to half mast. CBS's report was replete with symbols of Soviet authority (the Kremlin, Politburo members atop Lenin's tomb, the May Day military parade, the hammer and sickle) as well as the symbols of the repressed Soviet people (workers at a rally, a crowd with banners, faceless Russian commuters). NBC carried two simple but powerful images to juxtapose the privileged (Leonid Brezhnev with a large entourage) and the underprivileged (regular people waiting in line for as simple a thing as a newspaper). The subliminal message of the images was that Gorbachev would have his work cut out for him if his goal was truly to remake the Soviet Union.

The texts of the reports which described Gorbachev's personality varied considerably among the three networks. ABC's report by Mike Lee painted Gorbachev as a rising star who was charismatic, intelligent, and forceful. The report

had only one sentence with biographical information, focusing instead on the favorable opinions of some who had met the Soviet leader, including British Member of Parliament John Brown and Prime Minister Thatcher. NBC's lengthy segment, by John Cochran, depicted Gorbachev as a new kind of Soviet leader--"confident," "extraordinarily sensitive," and "intellectual." Yet Cochran explained that Gorbachev seemed to have two sides: a charismatic side emphasized for the West, and a cautious, bureaucratic side reserved for his homeland. The report concluded that while Gorbachev may be tough and shrewd, experts believed that he was flexible, "and that is why those same Westerners are relieved that he has won the top job." Despite this generally favorable report, anchor Brokaw referred twice to Gorbachev using the unflattering phrase "a smooth piece of work" during the broadcast. CBS's portrait was even less flattering, asserting that Gorbachev's first official speech was "old words from a new man." Bill McLaughlin's report contained a good deal of biographical information, and it used both the story of Gorbachev's rise through the bureaucracy and his harsh response to human rights questions in London to illustrate the leader's toughness. Yet McLaughlin conceded that change in the Soviet Union was inevitable, and that Gorbachev might even be able to bring about some economic reform.

Despite the differences in editorial slant, the impression conveyed of Gorbachev was in another way the same

on the three networks because they all used the same visuals to accompany their texts. Most of their footage came from Gorbachev's Britain trip, which again showed positive images of the new leader--Gorbachev posing genially with Mrs. Thatcher, Gorbachev smiling and talking with members of Parliament, Gorbachev with his attractive wife. All three reports showed Margaret Thatcher's "We can do business together" statement, which was another powerful recommendation for Gorbachev. CBS and NBC countered these positive images with film of Gorbachev making official speeches, standing at a podium with the Politburo sitting behind. This reminded the audience that Gorbachev was nevertheless a product of the Soviet system.

Gorbachev's biographies were the first time U.S. television inquired into how much English the Soviet leader understood. NBC's report implied that Gorbachev had some knowledge of English:

One thing Western intelligence agencies are not sure of is how much English he knows. Although every word is translated for him, British politicians felt he understood more English than he let on.

ABC also reported that Gorbachev seemed to speak some English. "He doesn't conduct business in English but shows signs of understanding our language, our culture, and our fashion," said correspondent Mike Lee. Even five years after Gorbachev's ascent to power, the amount of English he understands is a great mystery. Speaking at Harvard in April 1990, for example, Former Speaker of the House Thomas

p. "Tip" O'Neill stated no one believed him when O'Neill said he spoke with Gorbachev in English when the Speaker visited Moscow in April, 1985:

When I came back, I reported naturally to the President of the United States and to Shultz. I said I spoke in English. "Oh, no," everybody said, "No. You didn't speak in English." I don't speak Russian and we were together for 43 minutes, just the two of us head on head--the interpreters sat apart. It wasn't until they got to Iceland when they realized the fact that Gorbachev would be correcting his own interpreter. He'd say "nay, nay" and he'd speak to him in Russian as the interpreter was talking English. It was then obvious to them that... he understood English.²⁹

Many of the American correspondents in Moscow I interviewed believe that Gorbachev knows a little English. Bill Keller, Moscow bureau chief for The New York Times said that when one questions Gorbachev in English:

You sort of see this look in Gorbachev's eye that tells you he's getting the drift of it. Certainly every Soviet with a reasonable amount of education and with his experience will know how to say nice weather, how are you, how's your health, that sort of thing. But I've never heard of anyone actually having a substantive conversation with him in English.³⁰

Other correspondents still swear Gorbachev does not speak English. John Kohan, for example, Moscow Bureau Chief for Time Magazine says that he finds it hard to believe that Gorbachev speaks English given that he speaks Russian so

²⁹ Thomas P. O'Neill, speech at the Forum, John F. Kennedy School of Government, April 19, 1990.

³⁰ Interview with Bill Keller, November 20, 1990.

poorly, and did not take English in school.³¹ In addition, Kohan says that when interviewing Gorbachev with a group from his magazine, the Soviet President quickly oriented himself toward the two Time reporters who speak Russian and away from the English speakers.³² Many world and American leaders know foreign languages but do not speak them in public because of the added political risk of speaking in a language in which one is not absolutely fluent.³³

News reports from the day of Gorbachev's assumption of power also contained a staid reaction from the Reagan administration. Reagan said he had decided not to go to Chernenko's funeral because he "didn't see that anything could be achieved by so going." While NBC and CBS concentrated on Reagan's decision to forego the funeral, ABC concentrated its report on the official reaction to Gorbachev's coming to power. All three top foreign policy makers--the President, Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger--spoke out on the new Soviet leader, trying to lessen the meaning of the change at the Kremlin. All three stressed the nature of the Soviet

³¹ Gorbachev's biographies indicate that he studied German in secondary school and Latin at the University. Sheehy's biography indicates that Gorbachev speaks Ukrainian as well, which was spoken at home by his parents.

³² Interview with John Kohan, November 21, 1990.

³³ Use of a second language can also create a political advantage. Michael Dukakis spoke in Spanish on several occasions during the 1988 Presidential campaign, when he was the Democratic nominee, in an attempt to appeal to the many Spanish-speaking voters in the United States.

Union's collective leadership. Speaking to a group of newspaper editors at the White House, for example, Reagan down-played the idea that there would be major change:

The Soviet government, its policy is really determined by a dozen or so individuals in the Politburo. They are the ones who chose him. The government basically remains the same group of individuals.³⁴

Secretary of Shultz appeared on ABC's broadcast, though he evaded Peter Jennings' direct questions. When Jennings asked, "Are you encouraged?" for example, Shultz would concede only that, "It is an important moment." Again, though the emphases of the reports were different, they used many of the same pictures: Reagan emerging from the Soviet embassy with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, Reagan speaking at the White House, and crowds outside Lenin's mausoleum honoring their leader. Of course, the White House turned out to be completely wrong in this respect. But these sorts of statements illustrate how low expectations for Gorbachev were in the administration, or how the White House was trying to keep expectations low intentionally.

The Reagan administration had good reason to deemphasize the changeover to Gorbachev. In reality, they clearly saw the potential in Gorbachev to be a tough rival who would hold substantial appeal for international leaders. As Reagan's Chief of Staff Donald Regan described, the Soviet was clearly someone who could do well at

³⁴ ABC, March 11, 1985, Sam Donaldson reporting from Washington.

international public relations, and had reason to care about his image:

It soon became evident that the new Soviet leader had some of the qualities associated with youth. He was energetic, headstrong, and unorthodox--and he had compelling reasons for reducing the ruinously expensive Soviet nuclear arsenal.³⁵

American public opinion data confirmed that the Gorbachev had made a good first impression. A Harris Poll released April 8th, for example, would show that a majority of Americans thought Gorbachev was more energetic and alert than previous Soviet leaders, that he was more likely to improve Superpower relations than his predecessors, and that he was more likely to pursue arms control. But at the same time, only 29 percent of the 1,254 respondents thought that Gorbachev could be trusted more than other Soviet leaders. "It seems that Gorbachev made a very positive initial impression on the American people," pollster Louis Harris concluded. "But just below the surface, there remains some deep and abiding suspicions about the Soviet system and the kind of leadership it produces."³⁶ On the day of Gorbachev's appointment, Reagan began a pattern of simultaneously attacking the Soviet Union while declaring a desire for reconciliation. Although Reagan quickly said

³⁵ Regan, p. 295.

³⁶ In this survey, 79 percent of respondents agreed with statement that Gorbachev was more alert and energetic than his predecessors, 63 percent agreed that he would ease tensions with the U.S., and 58 percent agreed that Gorbachev wanted an arms control agreement.

that he would like to meet quickly with the new Soviet leader, he echoed public sentiment when he admitted, "there's a great mutual suspicion between the two countries. I think that ours is more justified than theirs."³⁷ This pattern of attack and reconciliation would continue throughout Gorbachev's "honeymoon" period, with attacks more likely after harsh Soviet rhetoric and reconciliation more likely as the end-of-year summit approached.

E. Assessing the Situation

The network reports also attempted to outline two major issues confronting the Soviet Union--arms control and economic reform--which could now be addressed by the Gorbachev. Despite Chernenko's death, the Soviets chose not to cancel the arms control talks scheduled to begin the following day in Geneva. As Condoleeza Rice, a member of the American delegation, remembered:

We showed up and we said, "You know, we'll understand [if you want to postpone], apparently, we'll understand--the General Secretary just died." And he [the Soviet Chief Negotiator] says, "Nah, give us a few days to have the funeral and then you know we'll be right back at it." It was just a very strong sense that we want to get moving here, we want to get ahead here.³⁸

The talks continued for several reasons, according to the networks, among them the Soviets' desire to stress both the

³⁷ NBC, March 11, 1985, Chris Wallace reporting from Washington.

³⁸ Interview with Condoleeza Rice, May 16, 1991.

collective nature of their government and their desire to achieve cuts in nuclear arms.³⁹ A cut in the Soviet military budget could, in turn, enable the nation to focus more attention and resources on improving its mediocre economy. CBS and NBC quoted leading Sovietologists, many of whom traditionally held conservative views about Soviet politics, and they indicated concern about Gorbachev's ability to tackle these intractable problems. "The system, bureaucracy, the nomenclature, the bureaucrats, are stronger than any leader, young or old," explained Professor Marshall Goldman of Wellseley College and the Harvard Russian Research Center.⁴⁰ William Hyland, editor of the journal Foreign Affairs and a former member of the National Security Council staff, was interviewed on NBC. Hyland worried not only about the difficulty of solving the Soviet problems, but more so about the problem of battling Gorbachev on the field of public relations:

HYLAND: Now, we may see a rather dynamic projection of the Soviet image, and also a person that is rather attractive in terms of summit meetings or selling the Soviet position. In a sense, it could be worrisome, I think, for American policymakers.

BROKAW: Why? Because he'll be able to sell us something that we'll let our guard down on?

HYLAND: In part, I think. Remember Khrushchev was rather effective. He was dynamic. He captured the imagination of the world and of the American public, and there was even a period when Brezhnev,

³⁹ See ABC, March 11, 1985, Barrie Dunsmore reporting from Geneva.

⁴⁰ CBS, March 11, 1985, Bruce Morton reporting from Washington.

when he was here in 1973, captured the American imagination, and was able to project Soviet positions a little better than otherwise.

Hyland hit on a central point--that U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union could have a major influence on Gorbachev's success at home, and that Gorbachev's public relations would affect U.S. policy making.

As early as the next day, the United States sent a "significant new signal" to the Kremlin--that much as the U.S. would like a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union, it would not let a battle for international public opinion go unfought⁴¹. NBC's Chris Wallace, for instance, framed Vice President Bush's mission to Moscow as "not only to attend Chernenko's funeral but also to launch a major diplomatic initiative." ABC concurred that, "The Reagan Administration seems determined not to get left behind in the battle for favorable world opinion that Gorbachev has begun to wage."⁴² The first shot in the U.S.'s return fire was Reagan's indication that he wanted a summit meeting with Gorbachev. Bush, the chief United States representative at Chernenko's funeral, gave Gorbachev a letter from the president inviting Gorbachev to the U.S. for a meeting. This news led all three networks' broadcasts on the day following Gorbachev's election as General

⁴¹ See NBC, March 12, 1985, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

⁴² ABC, March 11, 1985, Sam Donaldson reporting from Washington. It is not clear, however, which events the networks believed constituted Gorbachev's battle for world opinion.

Secretary. These reports implied that Gorbachev was doing something vaguely sinister in trying to use world media to affect his cause, therefore Reagan had no choice but to use public relations to fight back. This double standard--that we should use public relations but that the Soviets should not--reappears throughout the network coverage of Gorbachev.

The networks quickly focused on the idea of the summit and, as future coverage would attest, they dedicated a substantial amount of time covering the path to the summit which would eventually take place in Geneva, Switzerland in November 1985. The networks, as I will show, also gave substantial coverage to the second Reagan-Gorbachev summit, and regularly posed the question, "When will there be a summit?" in their coverage throughout 1985 and 1986. In my opinion, the repetition of the summit issue formed a kind of subtle lobbying effort by the networks--policy advocacy as Cohen would call it.⁴³ After all, the networks would benefit in several ways when a summit meeting occurred. First, a summit would create news for weeks preceding and for days after. Moreover, this news would be very dramatic: What would happen when the leaders met? Would they get along? What agreements would they sign? Would the world be safer because they had met? The meeting itself would produce several intense days of news which, though it would cost extra money to produce, would draw large numbers of

⁴³ Cohen, p. 37.

viewers.⁴⁴ This in turn would produce an overall monetary profit, because having more viewers translates into having higher advertising revenue.

The networks had other, non-economic reasons to give substantial coverage to summits. One was because summits allowed access to otherwise unavailable officials. Reporters from all nations generally had limited access to the Soviet leader. Therefore, journalists valued summits because they were one of the few times when they could count on some access to the General Secretary. Limited access was also a problem for the reporters covering President Reagan. One of the many techniques used by the Reagan administration to cultivate positive press coverage was to keep reporters away from the President.⁴⁵ "What the Regan White House does is say you can't have access to the President and his principal aides; you'll write what we want you to," explained Washington Post reporter Juan Williams.⁴⁶ Accordingly, reporters welcomed the chance for access to Reagan which a summit would provide.

⁴⁴ No interviewee would give me a precise idea of the cost of covering a summit, but they suggested that it was in the range of \$500,000- \$1 million.

⁴⁵ The issue of limited access can be illustrated by Reagan's avoidance of press conferences. In his eight years in office, for example, Reagan held only 39 press conferences, or one press conference every two months on average. Every president since Franklin Roosevelt held press conferences more frequently on average than Reagan.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Hertsgaard, p. 56

Moreover, the act of going to the summit reinforced a major advantage of television news over other sources--the idea that through their coverage, television networks effectively brought the viewer to the place where news is happening. To go "on-location" has been a goal of television news ever since technology advanced far enough to allow Edward R. Murrow to broadcast simultaneously from both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts in 1951.⁴⁷ Whenever there was a major event with international ramifications, like a meeting of the Soviet and American leaders, the networks emphasized their presence by sending a contingent of reporters and crews to cover the story. Each of the three networks routinely, for instance, sent over 100 people to cover the Reagan-Gorbachev summits.⁴⁸ The networks often sent the anchor, and had him broadcast from a location which evoked the flavor of the place being visited. All this helped convey to viewers the sense that they were witnessing news in the making.

Lastly, the emphasis on summits fits with the larger system of incentives facing television journalists. The mark of successful television reporters is that they get onto the air. That is why the White House is considered the

⁴⁷ This television landmark occurred on Murrow's show, "See It Now," November 18, 1951.

⁴⁸ Interesting, this number has dwindled as the networks have become more cost conscious. NBC, for example, sent only about 40 additional people to Moscow for the Bush-Gorbachev summit meeting of July, 1991.

most prestigious of all journalistic assignments. Although, in reality, it involves a tremendous amount of waiting and very little investigative reporting, "the White House assignment also gives reporters high visibility with the public."⁴⁹ More generally, to increase their chances of getting onto the air, reporters have an incentive to make the news they are covering seem very important, and a reason to help encourage news which would help their careers. In the case of a Soviet-American summit, many members of a news team could count on increased air time: the White House, Moscow, State Department, Pentagon, and perhaps the European correspondents. The anchors would benefit as well. Summits allow them to travel to a different locale, which makes it seem as if they are much more active in covering the news than if they remain behind in the studio. Big events like summits, simply put, help journalists' careers. It is little wonder that correspondent Frank Bourgholtzer calls summits "a prestige bazaar."⁵⁰

As the networks were sending crews to Moscow to cover Chernenko's funeral and the passage of power, other signs of Gorbachev's strength surfaced. The Geneva arms talks reopened that day, Gorbachev's second in power, when Soviet

⁴⁹ Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar, Portraying the President (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 4.

⁵⁰ Interview with Frank Bourgholtzer, November 25, 1990.

Chief Negotiator Viktor Karpov "struck an unaccustomed note for a Soviet official. He was open and smiling."⁵¹ Karpov revealed that Gorbachev was already firmly in power last week, before Chernenko's passing, and had issued the instructions to the arms negotiating team. Another sign of Gorbachev's power came from his coverage in the Soviet party newspaper, Pravda:

Gorbachev's grip on power was evident when today's Pravda hit the streets. The front page did not show a black-bordered picture of the old leader, as is usual, but was devoted entirely to the new one. Chernenko's picture was on the inside.⁵²

And the brevity of Chernenko's lying in state--a day and a half, versus three and a half days for Andropov--seemed to indicate Gorbachev's desire to get down to work as soon as possible.

Chernenko's funeral the following day too was "all that was called for and nothing more."⁵³ The images of Gorbachev meeting with world leaders and overseeing the funeral and military parade added to the impression of Gorbachev's command. The three networks were treated to a striking ritualistic display. First, Chernenko's casket was pulled into Red Square by an armored personnel carrier, accompanied by high-stepping Russian soldiers and "some of Chernenko's family and a few members of the Politburo marching slowly to

⁵¹ CBS, March 12, 1985, Tom Fenton reporting from Geneva.

⁵² CBS, March 12, 1985, Mark Phillips reporting from Moscow.

⁵³ CBS, March 13, 1985, Mark Phillips reporting from Moscow.

the strains of Chopin under lead gray skies."⁵⁴ Then Chernenko was laid to rest following an emotional goodbye from his widow, who stroked his cheek and threw herself across his open coffin. This event was included in each all three network reports because, though it had no political relevance, it was touching and therefore made for good television. Standing along with Prime Minister Tikhonov and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in their bulky coats and fur hats on top of Lenin's tomb, Gorbachev now looked the part of Soviet leader. A military parade followed, with tanks and missiles storming through Red Square to the sounds of stirring music, reasserting Soviet power. The subservience of the people to the military was conveyed by the neat lines of onlookers in Red Square, dozens of whom carried the same dour placard of Chernenko. The onlookers were shot by television cameras from such a far-away distance that they seemed anonymous, bland, and downtrodden. Lastly, Gorbachev went off to the Kremlin to head the post-funeral receiving line. The new leader looked charming and confident as he greeted a long line of guests in the ornate Grand Kremlin Palace, including Margaret Thatcher, French President Francois Mitterand and Vice President George Bush. Smiling, talking emphatically, and surrounded by cameras, Gorbachev looked more like a newly-inaugurated king than the ruler of the "Evil Empire." The day's visuals, replete with such

⁵⁴ ABC, March 13, 1985, Walter Rodgers reporting from Moscow.

powerful symbols as the address on Lenin's Tomb and the Red Square military parade, reinforced the dramatic shift in power under way in Moscow.

Gorbachev looked especially good compared to Vice President Bush. Bush and Gorbachev had a private meeting following the day's ceremonies, and Bush spoke to reporters afterward. The Vice President's performance was less than stellar; he barely finished his sentences as he briefed reporters:

If there was ever a time when--when we can move forward with progress in the last few years, I'd saw tha--that this is a good time for that and we--our aspirations for that are high.

The accompanying film was no help to Bush, either. ABC for example had one particularly unflattering shot where Bush was putting a piece of paper in his back pocket while standing at the podium. Hunched over, Bush looked graceless.⁵⁵ NBC shot him too close up in their report, so that Bush looked "washed out" by the harsh television lights. Still, Gorbachev seemed to have made a good impression on Bush and the American delegation. Shultz' briefing revealed that "Gorbachev will be good at atmospherics. Not just an empty guy but full of content."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ ABC repeated this shot again in the following night's report by Sam Donaldson.

⁵⁶ Aide's notes, quoted in Don Oberdorfer, The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), p. 110.

By contrast, Gorbachev looked statesmanlike. Only ABC showed Gorbachev speaking as he addressed the crowd from Lenin's tomb, though the other networks paraphrased his remarks. Gorbachev sent one message to the West and another to his own people in his first major speech. To the international community, he reiterated the Soviets' desire for "good neighborly relations with all countries on the principles of peaceful coexistence, equality and mutual cooperation." Gorbachev warned his own people that improving the economic and social conditions would take discipline and hard work. As NBC summarized, "he warned that swagger and irresponsibility would not be tolerated."⁵⁷ Yet Gorbachev's actual statement on this subject as reported by ABC, "We will fight all manifestations of empty words, arrogance and lack of responsibility for everything that is contrary to the socialist norms of life," sounded more like those of a Soviet bureaucrat than a new-style leader.

The news programs broadcast details of Gorbachev's meeting with Bush the following night, and again focused on the summit issue. Gorbachev at the meeting announced no decision on whether to meet with President Reagan, deferring the decision until after settling into his new position. To manage expectations, the White House accordingly tried to dampen enthusiasm among the press corps for an early summit.

⁵⁷ NBC, March 13, 1985, Tom Brokaw anchoring and reporting.

At the same time, the U.S. tried to press for the summit in order to look conciliatory to the international community:

While the President is saying he looks forward to dealing with Gorbachev, others in the White House are trying to dampen summit fever, warning that it's a long road to the top. But they don't mind at least talking about a summit here because they don't want the President to fall behind the Soviets in the public relations war.⁵⁸

This maneuver, Reagan's own brand of flexible response to Gorbachev, is consistent with Reagan's larger strategy of down-playing Gorbachev's rise to power.

F. Playing Both Sides of the Fence

So on the same day that the White House declared the public relations battle with the Soviets underway, Gorbachev began his work in earnest, the mourning for Chernenko officially over. But unlike the start of most battles, when the combatants dig into their positions, the beginning of this battle found both sides avoiding solid positions. Instead, Reagan and Gorbachev each tried to play both sides of the fence on the issues confronting the U.S.-USSR relationship. Each nation began to use harsh rhetoric toward the other, asserting that nothing had changed with Gorbachev's rise to power. At the same time, each leader tried to encourage constructive dialogue, and began to take steps toward a summit meeting. This diplomatic dance was a chance for each leader to assess and test the other, while

⁵⁸ CBS, March 14, 1985, Bill Plante reporting from Washington.

giving world public opinion a chance to solidify. At the same time, television covered who was scoring points in the public relations battle, not solely the substance of the emerging policy decisions. During this time, the networks' reading of signs for indications of Soviet political change began to abate slightly.

Like the administration, television straddled both sides of the fence, painting Gorbachev alternately in positive and negative light. Take for example ABC's coverage of the substance of Gorbachev's first day in the office, when he continued to meet with world leaders. In a one minute and fifty second story, Walter Rodgers contrasted the optimistic views of some world leaders with the pessimism of the Soviet people about the new leader. The story broke into two parts. The first part illustrated Gorbachev's day, showing still pictures released by the Soviet news agency, Tass, of Gorbachev posing with different groups of foreign dignitaries in his office. Then the report showed film of Gorbachev with West German President Helmut Kohl, French President Mitterand and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, and with American business leader Armand Hammer. These pictures framed Gorbachev as an able diplomat, capable of dealing not only with his own allies, but with NATO. The second part of Rodgers' story, however, illustrated what was going on with everyday people that day in Moscow. Two women pushed babies in strollers as Rodgers mused about how "there is more concern about how their lives

will improve under Mr. Gorbachev." This kind of image conveyed the idea that the Soviet people are just like Americans. But the next two images reminded American viewers of how many differences there are. First, three old women, grandmotherly types, cleared snow from the sidewalks by pushing the greying slush into large piles. These women in skirts and head kerchiefs were doing hard labor--very uncommon for elderly women in the States. Rodgers' narration said that these women held many of the "make work" jobs that strangle the Soviet economy. Second, the report showed workers nailing up letters on a red billboard, several stories high. The message was that work is a virtue, according to Rodgers, and that the Soviet government puts the billboards up to remind the people to work. These powerful images again reminded U.S. viewers of the massive societal problems Gorbachev would have to handle, and how he could not succeed without both an internal and external plan of action.

Over the next week, Reagan moved away from his optimistic position and, as more information about the new leader filtered into the White House, began to criticize Gorbachev. Only NBC covered these items. On March 16th, still less than a week after Chernenko's death, Tom Brokaw declared that, "The White House said today the honeymoon is over with new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev." In his report, White House reporter Emery King quoted a Washington Post report that indicated Gorbachev had compared the

soviets' presence in Afghanistan with the U.S. involvement in Nicaragua. The White House was horrified:

If the report is true, [the White House said we] find it astonishing and discouraging that the first statement from the new Soviet leader would be something as outrageous as this. An administration official went on, it is a shock and throws cold water on those whose euphoria led them to believe there would be better relations.

Although this particular story quickly died down, the President himself continued the tougher rhetoric toward the Soviet Union. Speaking during the "Shamrock Summit" meeting with Canada's Mulroney two days later, Reagan attacked the authoritarian Soviet regime, saying, "We cannot look the other way when treaties are violated, human beings persecuted, religions banned, and entire democracies crushed."⁵⁹ Still, in an interview on NBC, Mulroney said that Reagan still welcomed the chance to meet Gorbachev. This continued the dual policy of portraying the United States as a tough opponent, yet open to conciliation.

On April 2d, Gorbachev finally signalled that he was interested in meeting, sending Reagan a letter agreeing to the principle of a meeting. Although Reagan expressed hope that a date for a meeting could be worked out, he used Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger to launch a vicious attack against the Soviets over the shooting of an American army officer in East Germany. The use of other administration officials allowed the U.S. to return two

⁵⁹ NBC, March 18, 1985, Chris Wallace reporting from Quebec.

signals to Gorbachev at once. The television images accompanying the day's news would reinforce Reagan's image as a powerful leader. Chris Wallace's report on NBC, for example, showed Reagan marching around the White House portico surrounded by Marines, Reagan addressing the United Nations, and Reagan bantering with the White House press corps. Yet other images portrayed the U.S.S.R. as a tough opponent. Marines lifting the coffin of the soldier killed in East Germany represented the volatile nature of the Soviet-American relationship. A stone-faced Andrei Gromyko listening to speeches at the U.N. represented their tough foreign policy. And a graphic of Gorbachev and Reagan each superimposed over their nation's flags signified the strategic stalemate facing the two nations.

Gorbachev attacked next, and appeared to "startle" the West by ordering a freeze on the deployment of medium range nuclear weapons in Europe.⁶⁰ In fact, the Reagan administration already knew this was coming because the Soviets had proposed it in secret at the Geneva arms talks. Nevertheless, this news received significant coverage because, intentionally or not, it was broken on a Sunday, again a slow news day. Although the Reagan administration refused to call the move a public relations ploy, the networks did not. ABC called the moratorium a move "with a

⁶⁰ See CBS, April 7, 1985, Susan Spencer anchoring.

big propaganda style catch."⁶¹ CBS said Gorbachev was trying "to capture the man-of-peace mantle from Mr. Reagan."⁶² NBC asked if the White House was concerned "that the Soviet Union might reap a harvest of good public relations out of this missile freeze offer."⁶³ In fact, the moratorium started a hailstorm of warning cries of propaganda from the networks. In the following week alone, there were 16 references to "propaganda," "public relations offensives," "old Kremlin tactics," and other similar phrases in the network news reports--an average of over one phrase per Gorbachev-related report.

The freeze seemed to have little military significance. All three networks reported that the Soviets already had nearly a ten-to-one advantage over the U.S. in intermediate range weapons, but only ABC cited the exact figures: "NATO said the Soviets have deployed 414 SS-20 missiles, each with three nuclear warheads, while the U.S. so far has deployed about 150 single warhead cruise and Pershing II missiles."⁶⁴ Because NATO deployment was only scheduled to total 572 warheads by 1988, the Soviets could freeze their arsenals for several years and maintain a significant military

⁶¹ ABC, April 7, 1985, Sam Donaldson anchoring.

⁶² CBS, April 7, 1985, Gary Schuster reporting from Santa Barbara.

⁶³ NBC, April 7, 1985, John Palmer anchoring.

⁶⁴ ABC, April 7, 1985, Sheilah Kast reporting from Santa Barbara.

advantage. But the proposal was important as an indicator of what Gorbachev would bring about. "It was clear less than one month after Gorbachev took power that the Kremlin had a new star performing on the world stage, one that Washington would have to take seriously."⁶⁵

The reporting of the Soviet moratorium gave television a rather limited slate of images to use in reports, but the visuals which were used were very powerful. ABC, for example, used nearly 15 seconds of file footage of Soviet missiles being rolled on a truck back through a forest to illustrate Walter Rodgers' one minute and 50 second story on Gorbachev's announcement of the freeze. The missiles were shot using black and white film, rather than color, which indicated that the footage might have been quite old. Even if the footage was new, the black and white images were reminiscent of the years of the "missile gap," when the Soviet threat was perceived to be at its highest. ABC underscored the Soviet threat in its 35-second freeze-frame shot of Gorbachev speaking from Lenin's mausoleum, during which ABC summarized Gorbachev's remarks in that day's Pravda. The image of the Soviet leader on Lenin's tomb was oft-repeated by American television, and came to symbolize the power of the communist leader. Rodgers' report also contained footage of Soviet citizens reading Pravda at an outdoor kiosk (representing the control of the people

⁶⁵ Oberdorfer, p. 115.

through propaganda) and of German anti-nuclear demonstrators (reminding viewers of the volatility of the nuclear freeze issue). The images in the story implied that Europe would respond favorable to the Russian freeze proposal, and that any limit on Soviet fire power would be useful to the United States.

Television again turned to the image of the anti-nuclear protests the following night in a CBS story not on the freeze movement, per se, but about Mikhail Gorbachev's media mastery. The story by CBS's Mark Phillips asserted that although Gorbachev's freeze offer "is just an empty warmed-over gesture aimed primarily at affecting public opinion in Western Europe, indications are that, at least temporarily, it may be working."⁶⁶ Although the story tried to get at the heart of Gorbachev's apparent success with the Western media, Gorbachev himself appeared in only four of the report's 26 shots. Still, the shots of Gorbachev greeting members of Parliament last December and from the Supreme Soviet voting last February backed up Phillips' text perfectly:

Gorbachev has cut a dashing, youthful image in the various glimpses the world has had of him. That image seems now to be backed up by a new, more daring approach to East-West issues and on how to get that approach across.

Phillips' concluded that the West had much to fear from Gorbachev's ease with the media:

⁶⁶ CBS, April 8, 1985, Dan Rather anchoring.

In Mikhail Gorbachev, the West knew it was getting an adversary in the Kremlin very different from his predecessors. Yet in less than a month in office, Gorbachev has shown a mastery of the media and a sense of international public relations that seems to have caught even a well-prepared NATO alliance by surprise.

It is impossible, of course, to master the media in such a short time, but Phillips could see how Gorbachev's appeal to world opinion could affect policy making. Still, the majority of the Phillips' report--17 of 26 shots--focused on anti-nuclear demonstrations in England. There, protestors were demonstrating against the presence of American missiles and reacting positively to the Soviet moratorium. The emphasis on the demonstrations might be explained by the fact that several of the shots of demonstrators were very interesting visually, such as the protestors dressed as rabbits who were "hopping mad" about the missiles. This report demonstrates television's desire for good visuals, even when they are only tangentially related to the thesis of the story.

Just as the Reagan administration was giving a harsh reaction to Gorbachev's proposed moratorium, Gorbachev impressed a bi-partisan congressional delegation visiting Moscow. Led by Speaker of the House O'Neill, the delegation met with Gorbachev for nearly four hours. "The extraordinary length of the meeting prompted one participant to say he spent more time with the Soviet leader this afternoon than he had with President Reagan in four years,"

explained NBC.⁶⁷ O'Neill was particularly impressed. "I like to believe that the--that the Secretary General was speaking his mind and his heart and his feeling for world peace, and I don't want to look at it as merely propaganda," he said. O'Neill and Gorbachev's private meeting, in which O'Neill says they conversed in English, was not covered at the time.⁶⁸

The coverage of congressional meeting furthered Gorbachev's image in the United States in a way that was have been either brilliantly strategic or completely accidental. Gorbachev allowed television cameras into his office to film the entrance of the American delegation. When Gorbachev arrived early, American television was able to broadcast pictures of the General Secretary tapping his feet and checking his watch, anxious to start business.⁶⁹ This created the image of a vigorous leader. Finally, the Congressmen arrived and as ABC reported, "Gorbachev then turned on the charm, telling O'Neill, I've heard a lot about you."⁷⁰ For over half a minute of the 132 second report, ABC showed Gorbachev and O'Neill shaking hands, smiling, and

⁶⁷ NBC, April 10, 1985, Keith Miller reporting from Moscow.

⁶⁸ O'Neill, speech at the Kennedy School of Government, op cit.

⁶⁹ No one I interviewed could recall if Gorbachev arrived early with some intent. I suspect that his early arrival was unintentional; it would have been hard for anyone in his press office to reason that an early arrival would have brought Gorbachev positive press coverage.

⁷⁰ ABC, April 10, 1985, Walter Rodgers reporting from Moscow.

greeting each other warmly. This interchange appeared far more congenial than the meeting between Gorbachev and Bush at Chernenko's funeral. Thus it came as little surprise when O'Neill told a press conference about Gorbachev, "I was tremendously impressed. He appeared to be the type of a man who would be an excellent trial lawyer." The White House contributed more upbeat news that day. The Secretary of State and the Soviet Foreign Minister would meet in May to plan a superpower summit. In an effort to lower expectations, the White House suggested having a get-acquainted meeting where real progress on the issues would not be necessary.

From the middle of April through the middle of May 1985, the Soviets and Americans continued to lash out at each other. This was a variant of the search for signals--each nation tried to signal its intention to be tough through its rhetoric. First the Soviets blamed the U.S. for the lack of progress in the Geneva arms talks. "As of today, Soviet-American relations, quite frankly, remain tense," explained Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin.⁷¹ Then Defense Secretary Weinberger shot back, "The Soviets are just not a civilized nation."⁷² Gorbachev next met with the Warsaw Pact leaders, where he

⁷¹ CBS, April 13, 1985, Bill McLaughlin reporting from Atlanta.

⁷² CBS, April 23, 1985, Leslie Stahl reporting from Washington.

criticized the U.S. for its arms control stance. "If the preparation for Star Wars continues, we have no choice but to undertake countermeasures, including strengthening and perfecting our nuclear arsenals," he said.⁷³ Rumors circulated that Gorbachev would come to the opening of the United Nations in October and meet with Reagan. By the middle of May, the Soviet rhetoric intensified while the American rhetoric began to soften. Reagan and Gorbachev each made major speeches on May 8th, the 40th anniversary of the Victory in Europe Day of World War II. Reagan told the European Parliament in Strasbourg that the U.S. wants "a stable and peaceful relationship with the Soviet Union based on effective deterrence and the reductions of tensions."⁷⁴ Speaking simultaneously, Gorbachev lashed out at Reagan: "United States policy is becoming increasingly belligerent. It is becoming a negative factor in international affairs."⁷⁵ To many, it must have seemed that the two Superpowers would not move forward from their pre-Gorbachev positions.

This stalemate would be broken dramatically as the month of May continued, when Gorbachev would begin to use rhetoric and action in a way previously unknown to Soviet leaders. Gorbachev had reason to believe as the month of

⁷³ ABC, April 26, 1985, Walter Rodgers reporting from Warsaw.

⁷⁴ ABC, May 8, 1985, Sam Donaldson reporting from Lisbon.

⁷⁵ ABC, May 8, 1985, Walter Rodgers reporting from Moscow.

May began that he had succeeded in his opening round in the battle for world public opinion, and could move on to more aggressive methods for cultivating a positive image at home and abroad. Subsequently, he would build on Thatcher's observation that the West could do business with Gorbachev. The time when sign-reading predominated would soon be over.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TACTICIAN

From May 16th through the rest of 1985, Gorbachev's growing power was the dominant subject of U.S. television reporting on the Soviet leader. This emphasis is concurrent with a central tenet in the discipline of political science, which holds that the prestige of a leader is often a determinant of his success in governing. The notion of personal prestige, first defined by Richard E. Neustadt with respect to the American President, refers to the President's reputation with his public. It covers not simply personality, but the public's opinion of the leader, their expectations for his regime, and their understanding of his skills and positions. "Prestige, like reputation, is a subjective factor, a matter of judgment," wrote Neustadt.¹ What Neustadt termed "professional reputation," the President's standing with his colleagues in government, is the second determinant of presidential power. Personal prestige is critical because it encourages those other policy makers to cater to presidential wishes:

The Washingtonians who watch a President have more to think about than his professional reputation. They also have to think about his standing with the public outside Washington. They have to gauge his popular prestige. Because they think about it, public standing is a source of influence for

¹ Richard E. Neustadt, Presidential Power (New York: Free Press, 1990), p. 73.

him, another factor bearing on their willingness to give him what he wants.²

public opinion polls, man-on-the-street interviews and focus group interviews are among the techniques which provide indicators of our President's standing with the public.

Neustadt's work has been the definitive work on the nature of presidential leadership since it was written in 1960. "No one thesis, other than perhaps Richard Neustadt's on presidential power...has commanded the attention and acceptance of most presidential scholars."³ For this reason, I wondered how Neustadt's model of leadership might translate to the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. Certainly the Soviet leader needed enough of a professional reputation to get other policy makers in the apparatus to do what he wanted them to do:

The new party leader must struggle to build and exercise authority after obtaining the peak post. Many of the colleagues with whom any General

² ibid.

³ George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne, Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policymaking (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 14. Fred Greenstein says that Neustadt's model "crystallized" much of the research done through the end of the Eisenhower administration about the Presidency. See Greenstein, ed., Leadership in the Modern Presidency (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 311. Certainly, there are other models of presidential power that take issue with Neustadt. These models examine presidential power from the legal or institutional perspectives rather than from the viewpoint of power. "With its focus on relationships, it [Neustadt's model] does not naturally lend itself to investigation of questions of the president's accountability, the limitations of his legal powers, or the day-to-day operation of the institution of the presidency," write Edwards and Wayne (p. 418). But of the different approaches, Neustadt's is far more prevalent.

Secretary begins his term are not particularly beholden to him, and he presides over an unwieldy administrative machine that responds slowly to even the sternest directives.⁴

But before Gorbachev, Soviet apparatchiks were likely to base their assessment of their leader not on the public's opinion, but on such factors as machine politics. The legitimization of the Soviet leader came from the oligarchic triad of the party machine, the military and the KGB, not from the consent of the governed. The notion of measuring the standing of a Soviet leader with his own people was irrelevant before perestroika.

I believe that Neustadt is a relevant paradigm to discuss because Gorbachev made the personal prestige of the Soviet leader matter. Positive public opinion at home over time would help Gorbachev in a number of ways, most notably in helping to improve the economy through increased worker productivity. The importance of public prestige was evidenced by Gorbachev's own cultivation of positive public opinion at home. During the first few months of his reign, Gorbachev undertook specific actions to improve his standing with the Soviet public. These actions, detailed in the following chapter, were aimed at enhancing Gorbachev's image as a leader. Contrary to the erosion of leadership in the 1970s and 1980s, Gorbachev clearly wanted to restore the role of General Secretary to its past power:

⁴ Timothy Colton, The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1986), p. 100.

Gorbachev seems to want to increase the power and influence of the office of the General Secretary and to restore the image of a leader who is capable of inspiring people to work harder, perform better and achieve more substantial results.⁵

Although Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev were all powerful leaders who dominated their political systems, the power of the Soviet leader had deteriorated under Gorbachev's three predecessors. "Brezhnev, who delegated a significant part of his decision-making power to the apparatus, significantly eroded the personal power of the leader."⁶ Andropov and particularly Chernenko ruled for too short a time to establish much real leadership. But Gorbachev's trips abroad, combined with his years of political experience, seems to have convinced him that he had a personality that could win over the Soviet people. "The young, competent, dynamic and energetic Gorbachev immediately revived interest in the personality of the Soviet leader."⁷ For Gorbachev, then, the idea of personal prestige--of bettering his standing with his own people--was a logical way to rebuild the leadership and hence, govern more effectively. With the gargantuan reforms Gorbachev had in mind, the support of the people was vital.

⁵ Medvedev, p. ix.

⁶ ibid., p. vii.

⁷ ibid., p. viii.

The Soviet media helped to build Gorbachev's popular prestige in much the same way that the U.S. press helps build the prestige of American leaders. Gorbachev and his media staff were involved in the selection of what would appear in the Soviet papers and on Soviet television, trying to air that which would enhance the leader's image. Remember that at this time, foreign reporters were limited by the government in what they could cover. Access to sources was strictly controlled, with most Soviet officials turning down all requests from Western news organizations for interviews. Therefore, reporters took much of their information in this time from the Soviet news organization, Tass, and from the Soviet media. American reporters said that they read the Soviet newspapers furiously, looking between the lines for any hint of information about Kremlin politics. Television reporters, while unable to film at many locales, were however permitted to videotape Soviet television news and to use it to illustrate their reports.

Accordingly, news featuring Gorbachev prepared for the internal Soviet audience also had effects in the West. Reports prepared for Soviet newspapers, for example, were scrutinized by foreign reporters, who used the material in their articles. Events which Gorbachev aimed at influencing opinion through the coverage of the event on the Soviet evening news also ended up on the news in America and, presumably, in other Western nations whose television crews

were in the same limited position in Moscow. At this time, Gorbachev was using the media to prepare the Soviet people for an attack on the bureaucracy, according to Serge Schmemmann, Moscow correspondent for The New York Times. Gorbachev began to show himself out talking with working people as a way of harnessing the energy of the Soviet people, notably the intelligencia, said Schmemmann. These public attacks as in his first Leningrad "walkabout" were "against the bureaucracy to put them on the defensive, so when the purges began it was a little more difficult for them [corrupt bureaucrats] to fight back."⁸ Gorbachev's quest for popular support inside the Soviet Union therefore had a spillover effect in rest of the world. The same actions that built up Gorbachev's reputation with his own people simultaneously seemed to affect positively world public opinion as well. No one can know for sure until Gorbachev himself speaks whether he knew or whether he learned that the Western media was picking up the coverage meant for the domestic audience, and how much he incorporated this interaction into any media plans.

During this period in Gorbachev's development, though, he began to experiment with numerous public relations techniques. He became proactive about seeking media coverage and broadened his techniques. Gorbachev started to tell his people what he thought and--amazingly for the time

⁸ Interview with Serge Schmemmann, July 13, 1991.

--started to seek their support. From May until December 1985, following the Geneva summit, Gorbachev continually developed and honed the media style that would bring him worldwide fame and attention.

A. Walkabout

On May 16th, Gorbachev made an appearance in Leningrad which would turn out to have a remarkable effect on his standing in his country and the world. That day, for the first time, Gorbachev held an event that was aimed purely at affecting internal public relations--a "pseudo-event" as Boorstin calls them.⁹ In going to Britain, for example, Gorbachev was advancing Soviet foreign policy, even though his visit had positive effects on international public opinion. However, the "photo opportunity" Gorbachev held on May 16th indicated that the media and the Soviet people would not have to search for signs to guess what the General Secretary was thinking. The walkabout marks the second of Gorbachev's great, strategic media tactics.

For the first time that day, Gorbachev waded out into a crowd of citizens and talked with them. This sort of an appearance--known by the journalistic term "walkabout"--seemed to demonstrate Gorbachev's interest in and closeness to his people. Dan Rather of CBS found Gorbachev's actions

⁹ Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 9.

similar to the tactics of a Western politician, explaining that, "An American invention was on display in the Soviet Union today: the photo opportunity." As Rather's voiceover continued, viewers saw Gorbachev standing outdoors in a public square, speaking to a crowd of several dozen regular looking people who formed a tight circle around their leader. Gorbachev spoke emphatically, gesturing and pointing his fingers to emphasize certain points. The General Secretary urged the crowd to be disciplined and work harder in return for "continued economic growth, a higher standard of living, better quality products and new housing." The crowd appeared to hang on every word, captivated. Rather explained that this event was remarkable, albeit highly choreographed:

The Soviet people can be forgiven for being surprised at seeing their leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, standing on the street in Leningrad talking to residents just like any American politician on the stump. Soviet leaders are almost never seen talking to people like this. The streets had been cleared, the crowd was selected, and Gorbachev was surrounded by security men. His style is revolutionary for a Soviet leader, but the message, the Communist Party message, is the same.

The report illustrated the Gorbachev charm, not only through the energetic visuals but through an exchange at the end of the report. A woman in the crowd shouted, "I think you should be closer to the people." Gorbachev jovially shot back to the delight of the crowd, as Rather translated, "How can I get closer than this?" The crowd erupted in laughter.

Despite the positive image of Gorbachev that was suggested by this event, the walkabout nevertheless demonstrated Gorbachev's relative inexperience in managing the press at the time. The media coverage of the walkabout, surprisingly, came about in a somewhat accidental manner. According to Sergei Sholokhov of Russian Television, Gorbachev did not bring a television crew with him to Leningrad. Instead, the walkabout was filmed by a crew from Leningrad television, acting on their own initiative because they were intrigued by the new leader. After seeing Gorbachev in action, talking and joking with constituents, the Leningrad television crew called Soviet Central Television and passed Central T.V. their footage in an effort to help Gorbachev.¹⁰ The walkabout was subsequently broadcast on the Soviet evening news, insuring that the whole country witnessed Gorbachev's appearance. CBS was the only U.S. network to carry the story that evening, taking the footage straight from Soviet television. Like other key events of Gorbachev's tenure, this scene was replayed by all three networks several times.¹¹ This gave the walkabout a

¹⁰ Interview with Sergei Sholokhov, November 13, 1991. Sholokhov is the executive producer of the television program The Fifth Wheel. Despite this rather accidental television coverage, I still choose to term Gorbachev's walkabout a strategic decision because the very decision to talk with constituents conveyed an image of openness.

¹¹ See, for example, ABC, September 30, 1985; CBS, October 1, 1985; NBC, November 11, 1985.

far-reaching symbolic effect in the United States as well as in the Soviet Union.

On the same day, both CBS and ABC ran stories about a new Kremlin initiative to limit drinking. Drinking is a huge social problem in the Soviet Union. The losses of productivity from alcoholism, though never precisely measured, were so obvious that they were the butt of comments by Soviet commentators for years. To attack the problem, Gorbachev led the effort which raised the drinking age to 21 from 18, banned homemade spirits, and ordered cuts in vodka production. ABC reported that the Soviets were also trying to use television to discourage alcohol consumption through the use of public embarrassment.

"Soviet television recently broadcast what it said were drinkers on a collective farm agreeing under pressure from others to a life of sobriety or face fines. Taking the pledge Soviet style," explained reporter Jim Hickey.

Gorbachev's Politburo approved the measures even though revenues to the state from vodka sales would fall significantly. However, the Politburo must have expected increased productivity to compensate.

To take on alcoholism was a massive task. Not only do Soviets drink more alcoholic beverages than any other nation, but alcohol is an integral part of Russian culture.

"It is Russia's joy to drink. We cannot do without it," wrote Kiev's Saint Vladimir in the tenth century. That

observation apparently holds true in the 1980s as well."¹² This report reinforced the message of the walkabout in indicating that Gorbachev was no longer interested in business as usual. Although this story received little overall coverage by the U.S. media, Gorbachev's drive against alcoholism was important in explaining the Soviet people's slow-growing resentment of their leader.

After the day of the walkabout and alcohol measures, there began a slowdown in coverage that would last for a month and a half. The remainder of May and June featured very little coverage related to Gorbachev. CBS, in fact, did not run a story directly related to the Soviet leader again until July 1st. This was due to Gorbachev's actions-- he seemed to be keeping a low profile. The seven stories mentioning Gorbachev which did run covered a variety of subjects: a trip by Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige to Moscow to sign a trade agreement, the beginning of the second round of the Geneva arms talks, a call by Gorbachev for economic reform and, of course, the possibility of a summit meeting. The conventional wisdom during the late spring was that a Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in 1985 was "very unlikely."¹³ In mid-June, American industrialist Armand Hammer reported after a meeting with Gorbachev that the

¹² Congressional Quarterly, The Soviet Union, Second Edition (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1986), p. 163.

¹³ See CBS, May 21, 1985, Dan Rather anchoring.

Soviet leader would not come to address the United Nations General Assembly as had been rumored earlier. This roller coaster of expectations may have been the unintentional effect of a new administration, trying to concentrate on domestic issues. Or the rumors that the leaders would not meet may have been a tactic by one or both sides to lower expectations about the meeting.

The slowdown in coverage was broken dramatically by two events. First was the long-awaited news that Reagan and Gorbachev would meet in November. NBC had the summit story first, on July 1st, when anchor Roger Mudd slipped in a three sentence story to the middle of the broadcast:

Aides to President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev are working to set up a summit meeting later this year. Marvin Kalb reports it could take place in Geneva around November 19th to the 21st. Kalb says it's not being considered a full-dress summit, but, rather, a meeting for the two men to get acquainted.

It is surprising how little attention NBC gave the scoop, which appeared 14 minutes into the broadcast. When the other two networks reported the next night that, while it was still unofficial the summit would occur, they too buried the story--it occurred 8 minutes 30 seconds into the ABC program and 14 minutes 40 seconds into the CBS broadcast.

The official announcement that the summit would take place occurred simultaneously in Moscow and Washington on July 3d.

Throughout, the White House tried again to downplay the significance of the meeting. "The White House in trying to

lower expectations, saying the model for the session will be the Reagan-Gromyko meeting of last year: a chance to exchange views, get to know each other," explained CBS White House correspondent Leslie Stahl. "The announcement made in both Washington and Moscow, was deliberately low-key."¹⁴ Television, as the administration hoped, kept this development out of the top of the news. Newspapers did not play down the news. The New York Times of July 3d, for example, featured the summit announcement as its lead story.

The second event that ended the six week slowdown in reporting on Gorbachev was the leader's change in two government positions. First, Grigori Romanov, a potential Gorbachev rival, was asked to leave the Politburo. "The public has been told he resigned because of his health," explained ABC's Jennings.¹⁵ Moreover, Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet elder statesman who had served as the Soviet Foreign Minister since 1957, was "booted upstairs" into the post of President.¹⁶ By moving Gromyko into the gracefully ceremonial position, Gorbachev was able to clear the way for one of his colleagues, the party boss from the Georgian Republic named Eduard Shevardnadze, to take over the foreign ministry. American television interpreted these changes to be a reflection of Gorbachev's solidified power. NBC

¹⁴ CBS, July 2, 1985, Leslie Stahl reporting from Washington.

¹⁵ ABC, July 1, 1985.

¹⁶ NBC, July 2, 1985, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

reported, for example, that no Russian leader had ever consolidated his power so rapidly:

For Gorbachev, shunning the Presidency was a supreme act of self-assurance. It was as if to say he wields so much power, in office just four months, that he doesn't need another title-- especially that of the largely ceremonial President...Every key sector of Soviet policy-making is now in the hands of Gorbachev's men.¹⁷

The visuals accompanying Hurst's story confirmed the fact that there were winners and losers. The footage of Gorbachev made him look important and authoritative, whether the leader was addressing a session of the Soviet Parliament, joking with Prime Minister Tikhonov as the men sat on the Parliament's rostrum, or walking out of the Parliament session early, anxious to return to work, shaking Shevardnadze's hand warmly as he left. Shevardnadze appeared happy in Hurst's report, smiling sheepishly as well wishers including Gorbachev stopped to shake his hand. But Gromyko looked stonefaced and grim throughout the report, whether he was shown with Gorbachev or in flashbacks with Khrushchev or Brezhnev. Gromyko survived six Soviet leaders, Hurst said, because he "never sought supreme power in the Kremlin." This assertion made Gorbachev's quick assumption of power seem even more dramatic.

On July 3d, both nations officially announced their summit plans and agendas. The official announcement received drastically different attention on the three

¹⁷ NBC, July 2, 1985, Steve Hurst reporting from Moscow.

networks, where it was the lead story on CBS, eight minutes into NBC's broadcast, and almost 16 minutes into ABC's report. No one I interviewed could remember why such differences occurred. Both sides were cautiously optimistic about the meeting. "An opportunity to deepen our dialogue, and to lay the basis for practical steps to improve U.S.-Soviet relations," explained Secretary of State Shultz on CBS.¹⁸ More interesting than the agenda items was the early announcement of the summit--over four months in advance. "Rarely before, if ever, has a summit meeting been announced this far in advance, providing an incentive for both countries to tow the line and try to prepare agreements," explained NBC's Kalb.¹⁹ This early announcement may have come in response to the pressure that both leaders felt to renew progress in superpower relations. According to Jack H. Matlock, Jr., the National Security Council's Soviet expert who later became ambassador to Moscow, the reasoning was simple; an announcement was made as soon as the two sides agreed to have a meeting. "Once we decided, we knew that there was no point trying to keep it a secret because it would leak."²⁰ Matlock said that the Reagan administration invited Gorbachev to the United States for the first summit, and that Gorbachev declined and instead

¹⁸ CBS, July 3, 1985, Leslie Stahl reporting from Washington.

¹⁹ NBC, July 3, 1985, Marvin Kalb reporting from Washington.

²⁰ Interview with Jack H. Matlock, Jr., June 25, 1991.

invited Reagan to Moscow for the first meeting. Matlock urged Reagan to accept:

I didn't think that particularly him being Ronald Reagan that people would accuse him of going hat in hand or anything. But others felt that it would not be a good idea. I thought it would be a nice p.r. gesture.

The two sides finally agreed on the neutral site in Switzerland after Reagan declined the invitation to Moscow. But Matlock said that at that time the two sides agreed that the second meeting would take place in the United States.

B. The Horse Race

The early announcement of the summit had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the announcement created a "news peg" during the summer and fall of 1985 that allowed the networks to run many stories concerning Gorbachev and Soviet affairs. Given four months, the networks had time to prepare a series of pre-summit reports on Soviet politics and society, so that viewers would have some background going into the November meetings. On the other hand, the August announcement of the summit allowed each nation time for diplomatic maneuvering. Each country had four months for posturing, accusations, proposals and counterproposals. Television, for its part, covered Gorbachev and Reagan during these months much like two candidates vying for political office. Although the networks gave more coverage to the issues as the summit

neared, their reporting concentrated on the Reagan-Gorbachev "horse race" in the early months. Over time, the U.S. networks became increasingly preoccupied with the battle for world public opinion raged by Gorbachev and Reagan. Between July 19th and the first day of the summit, November 18th, the networks used terms that referred to propaganda and the Soviet-American public relations battle 62 different times. Among the drama-promoting terms were "propaganda duel," "smile campaign," "public relations blitz," and "charm offensive."

The first maneuver in the pre-summit battle for popular opinion was Gorbachev's. On the eve of the first meeting between Secretary of State Shultz and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, Gorbachev announced on July 29th that the Soviets would unilaterally ban all testing of nuclear weapons. The five-month ban would begin, strategically, on August 6th, the 40th anniversary of the dropping of a U.S. nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. The networks termed this offer a propaganda offensive. While it sounded dovish, the Soviet proposal included no provisions for verification, which made U.S. officials skeptical. Moreover, the U.S. argued that the Soviets had no need to test arms during the coming months. The U.S. turned down the Soviets' request to join in the moratorium, but counterattacked. "Not to be outmaneuvered in the propaganda war," as CBS said, the President invited the Soviets to observe an American nuclear

test for the first time.²¹ For their expert view on these offers, both ABC and CBS turned to William Hyland, editor of Foreign Affairs and a former national security council staff member. Hyland, who is politically conservative, decried the move, telling CBS that "we can see--we will see, a number of new Soviet moves all designed to put maximum pressure on the President when he meets with Gorbachev in Geneva." With ABC, Hyland was more blunt: "I think the propaganda advantage is now Gorbachev's."

Shultz and Shevardnadze met July 30th in the capital of Finland at a meeting to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Helsinki human rights accords. The meeting was seen as particularly important because it was Shevardnadze's first meeting with the American Secretary of State, and Shevardnadze was seen as being under Gorbachev's tight control. NBC's Frank Bourgholtzer said that it was "pretty evident that Mikhail Gorbachev, the new leader, who knows what he wants, intends to be the one calling the shots on foreign policy."²² That day, each man blasted the other in speeches to 33 other foreign ministers. Shevardnadze lambasted the U.S. for turning down the nuclear test moratorium and brushed over accusations of Soviet human rights abuses. Shultz then blasted the Soviets on human rights, going so far as to list the names of dissidents

²¹ CBS, July 29, 1985, Leslie Stahl reporting from Washington.

²² NBC, July 28, 1985.

stuck in Soviet prisons. The excerpts of Shultz and Shevardnadze speaking made each look strict and unyielding, and made the prospects of a productive meeting appear dim. Yet when the two men met alone the following day, both sides reported that their meeting was productive and useful. Suddenly, "in the U.S. view the meeting was a good one," as ABC's Jeanne Meserve reported, "the Soviets seemed to paint the meeting in bright colors." This change in atmospherics, even without a change in policy, appeared to ease the pre-summit pressures on both sides. This trend of alternating attacks and reconciliations, with the corresponding building and easing of tension, would continue as the summit neared.

With little hard news emanating from Moscow for the month following the Shultz-Shevardnadze visit, the networks had a break during which to turn to more in-depth reporting on Gorbachev. Only NBC took advantage of this opportunity, running two lengthy pieces on Gorbachev in August. Lawrence K. Grossman, President of NBC News at the time, explained that these stories reflected NBC's desire to "get underneath" the Gorbachev phenomenon:

There was a sense that the day's headlines were being covered by the local news. That we had to start moving to a more serious, analytical, probing perspective-- direction for the nightly news. Therefore there was a lot of push given by me, at least, running the place, to say this should be our style.²³

²³ Interview with Lawrence K. Grossman, October 24, 1990.

These reports also illustrate again how certain physical images had become symbols representing the Soviet Union and Gorbachev's power, and had infiltrated news reports.

Frank Bourgholtzer's 2 minute 45 second report on August 17th concentrated on Gorbachev's personal dynamism and his attempts to stimulate Soviet workers. The opening of Bourgholtzer's report fit in with the horse race-style of reporting prevalent before the summit:

He's young, he's vigorous, he's Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, and you'd think he was campaigning in a New Hampshire primary. But even if they could vote for him, which they can't, he doesn't need their votes; he's already got the job. But he asks them for their support. Strange, unprecedented behavior to the Soviet Union.

The narration was accompanied by five shots of Gorbachev speaking with Soviet citizens--three shots from Gorbachev's May walkabout and two shots of other groups of citizens. The images fit the words--here was a seemingly western politician. The image of Gorbachev "out on the stump" was the first symbolic image contained in the report, but there were others. Bourgholtzer then described Gorbachev's efforts to stem alcoholism. The pictures were of citizens waiting in line--the second symbolic icon--to buy vodka and of workers putting colleagues on trial for alcohol abuse. "Gorbachev is determined to stop the drinking," reported Bourgholtzer. The report then described Gorbachev's true-to-life admission that Soviet industry was years behind the west. Two of the shots accompanying this discussion were of

the interior of some kind of Soviet factory or a steel mill, where some process was underway. The image of hot metal being processed, with hot sparks shooting across the screen, was distinctly low-tech. This third symbol contained in Bourgholtzer's report, representing the problems of the antiquated Soviet industry, would also be repeated in future reports. The last major symbol in the report is that of Gorbachev on a rostrum, with the Politburo seated on a dais behind him and the ever-present image of Lenin behind them. Gorbachev speaking during an official function provided a reminder of the power of Gorbachev's office. The sum total of Bourgholtzer's report was to sketch a man who was both part of a system and part of a solution.

Marvin Kalb's lengthy August 23d report, lasting almost four and a half minutes, focused on the foreign policy challenges facing Gorbachev. Kalb's thesis was that despite Gorbachev's appealing personal style (illustrated by footage from Gorbachev's London trip) and regardless of the changes Gorbachev was beginning to make (illustrated by footage of Gorbachev congratulating Shevardnadze on his appointment as Foreign Minister), that Soviet policies remained the same:

Now the Kremlin is awake with a younger generation at the helm. Ever since Gorbachev came to power, there has been a new dynamism in Soviet foreign policy, which is not the same thing as saying there is a new policy.

The bulk of Kalb's report was dedicated to outlining Gorbachev's political priorities. The top priority was the

preservation of the Soviet empire, threatened by restlessness in Eastern Europe and the on-going war in Afghanistan. This threat was illustrated with some unusual footage. First, there was a videotape of an illegal street demonstration somewhere in Eastern Europe, the text suggests it is Poland. The poor quality of the footage suggests it was taken clandestinely, perhaps with a super eight camera; the angle suggests it was shot out of the window of an apartment building. This image reinforced the totalitarian nature of Soviet society. Next, Kalb's report showed viewers an older woman window shopping. The text explained that, "In Hungary, there may be economic dickering with the system, but no loosening of a central guiding authority of the Communist Party." To illustrate the military's grip of the state, the report showed a Hungarian soldier interspersed on the street with the shoppers. Kalb explained that "if there is a restiveness in Eastern Europe, the Red Army stands ready to contain it, and if necessary, crush it." This statement was backed up with four quick shots from a military parade through Red Square--another of the visual symbols which represent Soviet power. Even a quick shot of Russian artillery reminded viewers of the power of the Soviet military. Then to illustrate the problems in Afghanistan, Kalb's report used the double image of some beautiful Afghan mountains superimposed over the face of a Afghan elder. The man was calling out, and

holding his hands to his face as if in pain. These two images created the impression that the beautiful nation of Afghanistan was being pulled apart by the Soviets, causing great pain to its residents. A few shots later, the image of an Afghan mother carrying a small child again emphasized the human cost of the war. Gorbachev's second priority was competing with China, a nation on the brink of an economic revolution. The images used by Kalb's report illustrated the great disparity in modern China: one shot showed the oxen still used in places to sow rice paddies, another showed a large assembly line operation like those being built all over the nation, and still other images showed the Chinese military, which like the Soviet military still maintained the system. Thirdly, said the report, Gorbachev's priority was to improve superpower relations. And Kalb identified the key stumbling block: "As both superpowers slide uneasily toward the November summit, there is no real movement on the gut issue of arms control." The report bolstered its short discussion of Star Wars with an animation, showing a cylindrical object in the heavens shooting down approaching missiles with a laser beam. This kind of representation of SDI was useful in that it made a difficult defense concept more understandable for viewers, but somewhat misled viewers in that SDI was far from

operational.²⁴ After the scenes of Soviet and Chinese military power, it also showed that the U.S. would be able to compete militarily. The high stakes and limits on Gorbachev's options, concluded Kalb, "makes this an interesting, if uncertain time in Soviet American relations, and at this equation, what is uncertain, can also be dangerous." Kalb bolstered his conclusion with a variety of experts and officials, including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Gorbachev advisor Georgi Arbatov, and Columbia University's Seweryn Bialer. Because the report focused on policy problems and not on Gorbachev's personality, it presented a rather bleak picture of Soviet affairs.

The month of September opened with a renewed set of attacks and maneuvers by Gorbachev. The U.S. networks read this as an escalation of the propaganda war, which was in many ways a good television news story. There were good guys and bad guys--the Americans versus the Soviets--and an outstanding story line--the battle for world supremacy. The networks--particularly CBS--continued to play out this battle in the horse-race style they had been using. In a September 30th story on new Soviet arms proposals presented

²⁴ Ann Crigler, Marion Just and Russell Neuman found in a study of the effects of the audio and video channels of communication that viewers generally saw a pro Star Wars slant in the images used in reports on SDI. See their "Interpreting Visual vs. Audic Messages in Television News," Presented to the International Communications Association Annual Conference, May 1991.

at Geneva, for example, Dan Rather introduced the report by explaining that, "The public relations battle between the superpowers over arms control today went from full speed ahead to warp speed overdrive." With a lack of interesting visuals, the story had to focus temporarily on the rhetoric used.

The next major foray in this renewed pre-summit battling occurred when Gorbachev sat for an interview with the editors of Time magazine. This was his first major interview with a foreign news organization. The direct interview with foreign journalists was a new tactic for Gorbachev, and one with a strategic intent. By that, I mean that Gorbachev undoubtedly agreed to an interview to try to increase his exposure in America and around the world (Time also has an international edition), and accepted the invitation of the medium most likely to create a positive impression. This was his third key strategic move, where the medium--in addition to the message--helped further Gorbachev's goals.

On August 28th, Gorbachev met for two hours with five editors and correspondents from Time. According to Gorbachev advisor Georgi Arbatov, Time was chosen for the interview because its format was very easy to control.²⁵ Gorbachev received one set of questions from Time in advance, for which he--with the assistance of Arbatov and

²⁵ Interview with Georgi Arbatov, August 6, 1991.

Yakovlev--provided written answers, and took a second set of questions in person. Furthermore, the Time staff believed that Gorbachev probably chose their magazine over others because of Time's large readership and high prestige. Gorbachev preferred to deal with a news outlet with which the Soviets had some past history, said John Kohan, Time's current Moscow Bureau Chief:

From their point of view, Time magazine was the sort of American establishment journal, the first newsweekly. And Time has had a history of upper level contact with the leadership. We got the interview with Brezhnev as well...we were a known quantity to them. They had already dealt with us. They had not been disappointed with the results.²⁶

Time's "special report" on Gorbachev ran 18 pages, seven of which contained the interview itself. The issue of September 9th also contained a background report on Gorbachev, an article about the arms control negotiations, and a report about "how the U.S. and U.S.S.R. sell themselves to the world." The report also contained numerous photographs of Gorbachev meeting with world leaders, as well as pictures from several "walkabouts."

The lengthy interview illustrates how the different sectors of the American media interrelate; the Gorbachev interview also spurred television coverage. Although CBS dedicated just two sentences to the event, the other networks ran full-length stories on the Soviet leader's

²⁶ Interview with John Kohan, November 21, 1990. Kohan served as one of Time's kremlinologists in New York until March 1985, when he started a two-year assignment in West Germany.

comments. Gorbachev's answers to the questions submitted in advance painted a bleak portrait of U.S.-Soviet relations.

As NBC's Emory King summarized the interview:

Relations, he said, are continuing to deteriorate. The arms race is intensifying and the war threat is not subsiding. Gorbachev charged the White House with taking a hard line on the November summit, expecting the Soviets to make all the concessions...Again, he said the so-called Star Wars Space Defense Shield is an insurmountable obstacle to arms control.²⁷

The White House made its counterattack subtle this time, responding immediately to the interview by saying that progress could be made at Geneva if Gorbachev would meet Reagan halfway. Reagan was on the next to last day of a three-week vacation at his California ranch, and his absence might explain spokesman Larry Speakes' reluctance to criticize Gorbachev harshly for his remarks. The networks specifically noted that Reagan declined to criticize Gorbachev the following day, as he stopped to make a speech in Missouri on his way eastward.

It is possible to say precisely what the effect of the Time interview was on the American public; there were not opinion polls just before and after the interview which would have provided a way to measure the response. It seems likely that the interview added to the positive information concerning Gorbachev. But the Time interview had a strong effect on the impressions of the Reagan Administration. The

²⁷ NBC, September 1, 1985, Emory King reporting from California.

Reagan administration appeared concerned with Gorbachev's access to U.S. policy makers and the American public:

At a cabinet meeting, Secretary of State Shultz complained that Gorbachev is busy negotiating with Time Magazine and various Senators--everybody except the White House. The fact is, they are very, very impressed with Gorbachev as a salesman.²⁸

The first item on Reagan's agenda upon his return to Washington on September 3d was how to respond to Gorbachev. "The White House is trying to decide tonight: is Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev a master of public relations, or does he really have something new in mind for that summit?"²⁹ The meeting came on the same day that Gorbachev met with a delegation of U.S. Senators headed by Democrat Robert Byrd, who were extremely impressed with the Soviet leader. The outcome of Reagan's strategy session was to respond strongly, evidenced by the continuing use of anti-Soviet rhetoric by the President and his aides.

Reagan's rhetoric often accused the Soviets of advancing hollow propaganda, not substance. For example, a two-sentence story on NBC's September 10th broadcast said that Reagan was looking forward to his meeting with Gorbachev as a first step toward a century of peace. "But in a swipe at Moscow, the President said that won't be achieved by what he called wishful thinking or public

²⁸ ibid.

²⁹ NBC, September 3, 1990, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

relations campaigns," NBC's Brokaw concluded. While Reagan did not return to the very harsh rhetoric of his first term, when he labeled the Soviet Union "the Evil Empire," for instance, the President continued to frame Gorbachev as a sly and therefore dangerous man.

America's biggest ally, Britain, was soon dragged into the maneuvering. In the middle of September, the Soviets and British traded expulsions of alleged spies, touched off by Britain's ouster of 25 alleged Soviet spies. The expulsions had special significance because British Prime Minister Thatcher had been the first world leader to offer a positive public opinion about Gorbachev. The expulsions played in the press as a return to the dangerous Soviet tactics of old:

It was only nine months ago Britain's Prime Minister Thatcher was declaring she liked Mr. Gorbachev and thought the West could do business with him. Mr. Gorbachev has now shown her and the West how the Russians do business.³⁰

This is an interesting interpretation for two reasons.

First, the Britons were the ones who began the expulsions, yet the Soviets received the blame for the whole problem in many of the press reports. Second, Gorbachev is blamed even though he may not have been involved directly in the matter. As we will see with the Daniloff affair in 1986, the Soviets had developed standard operating procedures for numerous

³⁰ ABC, September 15, 1985, Walter Rodgers reporting from Moscow.

diplomatic problems. Therefore the party hierarchy, wrongly or rightly, was not at this point always involved in day-to-day diplomatic decision making. Still, this story was explained, as ABC put it, as "a battle of wills between the man with the iron teeth, Mr. Gorbachev, and the 'Iron Lady.'"³¹ If anyone suffered, it was probably Gorbachev, because this affair disturbed his attempt to present a good face to the world.

Tensions were still high from the expulsions when Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze arrived in the U.S. on September 24th for meetings with President Reagan, Shultz and an appearance at the United Nations. Just as the Helsinki meeting between Shevardnadze and Shultz in July stopped the harsh posturing which was going on at the time, so also there were mostly smiles for the cameras coming from all sides at this meeting. Shevardnadze brought a letter from Gorbachev which offered a 40 percent cut in offensive weapons systems and warheads in exchange for cutting off research on Star Wars. For a change, Shultz reacted positively: "It is different from what they have been saying. Combined with what we have on the table, we hope that can lead to a process of genuine negotiations. So we welcome that."³² The networks portrayed this meeting as a

³¹ ABC, September 16, 1985, Barrie Dunsmore reporting from London.

³² Quoted by ABC and NBC, September 27, 1985.

break in the propaganda war, not as any kind of breakthrough. And because of Reagan's hard-and-fast support of Star Wars, the networks probably had very little reason to believe that anything could come of this proposal.

The Shevardnadze-Reagan meeting showed in another small way that the Soviets were continuing to build their capacity to influence public relations. After the meeting, reported CBS's Leslie Stahl, the Soviets held a press conference. Stahl's report showed foreign ministry spokesman Vladimir Lomeiko answering questions through an interpreter. Lomeiko was a holdover from the Brezhnev days, when he served as the spokesman for Andrei Gromyko. Shevardnadze did not replace Lomeiko until July of the following year, when Gennadi Gerasimov took the job of spokesman. This press conference illustrates that Soviet thinking about the role of the media had been heightened even by this relatively early point in Gorbachev's leadership to the point where the Soviets wanted the chance to put their imprimatur on the issues.

ABC tried to assess the Soviet's thinking about the press in a piece done September 30, just before Gorbachev's departure for France to meet with President Francois Mitterand. This is an important report because it comments on Gorbachev's standing at home, not simply his standing abroad. As before, the visual images used to display Gorbachev's mastery of the press are quite limited. The 2 minute and 40 second report began with another repeat of

Gorbachev's Leningrad walkabout, an illustration of "a supremely confident leader, proud, energetic and a fierce defender of the Soviet cause which he sees himself embodying." Gorbachev again made his little joke about staying close to his people. Rodgers then showed pictures of the first pages of Time's interview with Gorbachev, which "demonstrates clearly a sophisticated understanding of how to use the Western media to his advantage." Old footage of Gorbachev joking with photographers during his London visit illustrated why "his visit to London last year amounted to a love feast with the British media," and Rodgers predicted the same reaction for the Gorbachevs' trip to Paris. During his endpiece, filmed outside the Kremlin walls, Rodgers turned to an important point of substance: "Gorbachev has changed the entire thrust of Soviet foreign policy, de-emphasizing relations with Washington, but ardently courting Japan and Western Europe for trade and technology." The report made another important observation for the first time on American television: things were not going well at home. As the report showed long lines of Muscovites waiting to buy alcohol, Rodgers reported the sober news that:

Among the people back home, Gorbachev's policies have not produced the same favorable image he enjoys abroad. His campaign against alcohol consumption has produced long lines at liquor stores and earned him the derisive nickname General Juice. Russian women have been heard to grumble Gorbachev's wife likes French perfume and expensive clothes. And one Russian worker complained, "He's urging us to work harder for the same old wages."

Rodgers' report was the first to suggest that the Gorbachev honeymoon at home was ending--that Gorbachev's campaign of personal prestige was not working well with his own people. In the United States, on the other hand, Gorbachev's popularity was holding steady. Little concerning Gorbachev in the Harris Survey's October 3d poll was different than their April poll. The only noticeable change was that 53 percent of respondents thought Gorbachev was more attractive than other Soviet leaders, as opposed to 63 percent who had said so in April when, perhaps, the memories of Gorbachev's predecessors were a bit fresher in respondents' minds. Gorbachev's trip to France, however, would give him another chance to influence the world.

C. A Visit to Paris

Gorbachev's trip to Paris from October 2d through 5th was his first one to the West since becoming General Secretary. His schedule included three meetings with French President Mitterand, state dinners and other official functions. He was accompanied by his wife, whose schedule also included time for shopping at Paris' famous shops. The Gorbachev visit was seen as "a warm up for Geneva"³³ and as such received an extremely high level of attention from the U.S. television networks. Over the four days of the meeting

³³ ABC, October 1, 1985, Peter Jennings anchoring and reporting.

and the preview day before, the networks showed 96 minutes of coverage. Moreover, both CBS and ABC sent their anchormen to Paris to cover the meeting.³⁴ Moving the anchor to a location is an infrequent event, saved for the most important stories in the year because it costs tens of thousands of dollars to undertake.³⁵

On the day preceding his arrival, the U.S. networks previewed Gorbachev's visit, excerpting an interview of Gorbachev by French journalists which had been aired by French television that night.³⁶ The hour-long interview, which had been taped in Moscow that morning, covered a wide array of questions, but the U.S. networks highlighted Gorbachev's opposition to Star Wars and his new overtures of friendliness to Europe in their reports. While the networks had the same editorial slant on the interview, the level of coverage varied significantly. CBS began its broadcast with the interview, which was not surprising because Rather was already in Paris. ABC had a lengthy report, but it started

³⁴ That NBC did not send its anchor may reinforce the notion that NBC is less interested in foreign news than its competitors.

³⁵ The exact cost is determined by how many people travel and for how long.

³⁶ It is logical to believe, although I have not been able to confirm this, that Gorbachev probably agreed to a television interview to see how its results differed from the magazine interview he had given to Time. I have not termed this interview a "strategic" use of the press in that Gorbachev had already pioneered the use of the direct interview with a foreign media organization.

17 minutes into the broadcast. NBC ran only a short story narrated by Brokaw 12 minutes into the news.

CBS's story was very unusual because more than half the report showed Gorbachev talking, which Rather said was "revealing as an insight into how this young Soviet leader smoothly but toughly expresses himself." The three minute story on Gorbachev's appearance was punctuated with four shots of the General Secretary speaking, either during his opening statement or in his discussions with three French journalists. These were very long sound bites by current standards--they ran respectively 15, 15, 31 and 35 seconds each. By comparison, a study of the length of sound bites by presidential candidates on network television in 1988 was a mere 9.8 seconds.³⁷ The last and longest of Gorbachev's sound bites was handled particularly uncharacteristically. Gorbachev had been asked some question about Star Wars. He began his response, and a voiceover from a translator appeared: "This is the key question we have to answer now." Then Gorbachev stopped and appeared to think hard for a moment. For more than eight seconds, Gorbachev sat there looking downward, his brows knit, biting his lip. The camera stayed on him. CBS did not edit out his quiet

³⁷ Kiku Adatto, "Sound Bite Democracy: Network Evening News Presidential Campaign Coverage, 1968 and 1988," Research Paper R-2, Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, June 1990, p. 4.

moment, nor cutaway to the journalists with Gorbachev. Then the Soviet leader began again, coming down hard:

When we say this--when we say that we have arrived at a threshold beyond which various events might start breaking out, events which might get out of control, we're not being pessimists. What this is is simple realism on the part of the Soviet state and an expression of the concern of its political leaders for the fate of the world.

Whether or not it was deliberate, the pause in Gorbachev's speech created the impression of a thoughtful, rational leader. It was rare to see a Soviet leader speak at all, but to see him speak so straightforwardly and carefully must have impressed, or perhaps frightened, many viewers. The image of power was created by the location of the interview, an ornate Kremlin chamber called the Green Room, replete with Louis XIV furniture and crystal chandeliers.

At the end of that same broadcast, CBS aired a report by Rather labeled "The Selling of Gorbachev" about the "charm offensive" that the Soviet leader had mounted. The report presented interesting but conflicting information about the Soviet leader. Some of the information suggested that Gorbachev was a slick, dangerous man. For example, Rather opened the report with an assessment of Gorbachev's attempt to sell his views to the West: "It is a public relations offensive without parallel in the history of East-West relations." The late Representative Silvio Conte (R-MA) suggested in the report that after meeting the Soviet leader, there was no reason to be caught up by his charm.

"I think it's an act. I think underneath that facade is a-- a real sharp, cold, calculating guy," he asserted. Yet Armand Hammer, the late industrialist who knew every Soviet leader, told Rather that, "I think that the Russians now really want to make a deal. I think Gorbachev wants peace." Some of the images in the report suggested compromise, like the shot of Gorbachev mixing with constituents during his first walkabout or the leader talking with workers during a factory tour. Other images suggested the intractability of the Soviet position, like the black and white shots of Nikita Khrushchev pounding the table in protest at the United Nations, or St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square which has endured through czars and revolutions since the 16th century. Adding to the confusion were several small errors in the report. A shot of Gorbachev's May photo opportunity was mislabeled as Moscow, not Leningrad. Rather pronounced Mrs. Gorbachev's name incorrectly as "Raisha."

Representative Silvio Conte called the former Soviet leader "Kerrenko." The sum total of the report was to create a wait-and-see atmosphere about the upcoming summit, which would hopefully keep viewers tuned in.

After the big build-up, the opening day of the summit was eclipsed by the death of American movie star Rock Hudson from Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Hudson's death was news worldwide because he was one of the most prominent people to contract the disease at that point. His

death was a turning point in the coverage of the AIDS epidemic, "with Hudson's illness certifying AIDS's newsworthiness."³⁸ Hudson's death lead the broadcasts that night on NBC and also ABC, even though by then Peter Jennings had joined Rather in anchoring from Paris. CBS mentioned the Hudson death briefly before turning to the Gorbachev visit and to the murder of a Soviet embassy worker in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, the first day of the Paris summit was filled with pomp and circumstance. The pictures and reports across the three networks were similar, chronicling Gorbachev and Mitterand's day. ABC's report was typical. The report by Pierre Salinger started with an airport arrival ceremony, complete with flying flags and a military band. After a Soviet pioneer girl gave Gorbachev flowers, he gave her a peck on the cheek and talked with her like a friendly uncle. But the Soviet leader wasted no time in making his first attack. During an opening statement in the airport lounge, Gorbachev said, "Constructive dialogue is very important for preventing the extension of the arms race to space and limiting the arms race on earth." There was more fanfare as Gorbachev went to the Elysee Palace, the French White House, for meetings, and later to a state

³⁸ Timothy Cook, "Notes for the Next Epidemic, Part One: Lessons from the News Coverage of AIDS," Discussion Paper D-12, Jean Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, October 1991.

dinner with his wife. Throughout the report, the Gorbachevs looked more somber than they had during their much-touted London trip, matching Mitterand's ever-present seriousness. Nevertheless, the first day, according to Salinger, "has to be labeled a success." The atmospherics, at least, looked good.

This day also provided evidence that the Soviets' organizational capacity for managing publicity was starting to grow. First, they held a press conference following the two leaders' meeting. The conference was chaired by Leonid Zamyatin, spokesman for the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee. Like Vladimir Lomeiko, the Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Zamyatin was another holdover from the Brezhnev era who was not particularly well-liked. "Mr. Zamyatin was very rude. He was disliked by the American press. He was disliked by us, too," said Melor Sturua of Izvestia. "He regarded press as his slaves."³⁹ Nevertheless, Zamyatin and Gorbachev's other press people introduced a new tool into the public relations battle: a video biography of Gorbachev. The video was handed out to reporters and also shown on French television. The videotape was quite personal, tracing Gorbachev's humble beginnings in the village of Privolnoye through his ascent to the party leadership, and contained some information about his family. The videotape

³⁹ Interview with Melor Sturua, November 1, 1990. Zamyatin now serves as the Soviet Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

was aimed at reinforcing Gorbachev's stylish, charismatic image. "Lending an ear, we are told, is a daily necessity for Mikhail Gorbachev--man of the people," explained ABC's Jennings. According to CBS, only 10 percent of France's viewing audience saw the documentary.⁴⁰ Yet clearly, this was another example of the Soviet's growing sophistication in handling the media.

If the first day was all style, then Gorbachev's second day in Paris, October 3, was all substance. In a speech to French legislators, Gorbachev made three major pronouncements. First, he detailed the arms proposals which had been made in secret in Geneva. The Soviet proposal offered a 50 percent cut in long-range missiles if the U.S. would stop research on Star Wars. Second, he announced that the Soviets had already begun to pull some medium range missiles out of Eastern Europe. Third, Gorbachev offered France and Britain the opportunity to negotiate directly with the Soviets on arms reduction, without interference from the United States. To the networks, these events were important because of the precedent they would set for the Geneva summit. "Gorbachev touched off an arms cut policy battle with Ronald Reagan, continent to continent, seven weeks before they meet face to face," as CBS explained.⁴¹ And all

⁴⁰ CBS, October 2, 1985, Dan Rather anchoring and reporting.

⁴¹ CBS, October 3, 1985, Dan Rather anchoring and reporting from Paris.

three networks also viewed the proposals with skepticism. "He's clearly embarked on a well-planned seduction of America's allies," concluded ABC's Walter Rodgers. NBC's Jim Bittermann's assessment was that Gorbachev's speech "seems something like Russian wine in a fancy French bottle." Arms cuts are a difficult concept to illustrate, so the visuals for these stories were somewhat staid. NBC, for instance, used a graphic combining missiles and flags to outline Gorbachev's proposals.

As if to continue the Gorbachev-Reagan horse race, the networks each followed the Gorbachev story with a response from the American president. NBC's story, for example, clearly demonstrated Reagan's remarkable ability to manage his press relations. Andrea Mitchell's story opened with Reagan campaigning for Republican candidates at a Cincinnati soap factory. In the two minute report, one-quarter of the time was spent showing the president "pressing the flesh" of the factory's blue collar workers. This was vintage Reagan; as he greeted the workers, smiling and slapping backs, he appeared to be friendly and warm. Reagan's sound bites were short and avuncular, and pitched to get the right line onto the nightly news. This time it worked, as all three networks carried Reagan's explanation of why Soviet cutbacks of medium range missiles, the SS-20, were meaningless for U.S. security:

The SS-20, is a mobile missile. It is transported to move from place to place. To simply drive them

up into the Ural Mountains, or some place else, and they say they're not a threat to Europe, makes no sense.

Mitchell's report ended with the inevitable conclusion that the White House saw Gorbachev's offer more as public relations than substance.

The last full day of the summit, October 4, featured the unveiling of Gorbachev's fourth strategic press tactic-- a joint news conference held with Mitterand. By appearing alongside the dour French President, Gorbachev hoped to show off his personal style and--no matter what he said--improve his image. The appearance with Mitterand also implied that the two men were equal in status and stature. This press conference also marked the first time that the Soviet leader faced a full delegation of foreign journalists and, according to Soviet journalists, the first full-fledged western style news conference ever faced by a Soviet leader.

The strategy seemed to work. The reports on the press conference showed Gorbachev and Mitterand seated at a small table in an elegant ballroom at the Elysee Palace, surrounded by reporters in headphones. Gorbachev's emphatic gestures, humor and occasional anger were made all the more exposed by Mitterand's staid, dignified responses. The questions were wide ranging, and the networks' reports focused on Gorbachev's responses to arms control and human rights questions. The reports featured long sound bites from Gorbachev, which were somewhat more interesting than

the typical "talking heads" because of Gorbachev's flamboyant manner of speaking. The reports tallied one win and one loss for the Soviet leader. On the one hand, Mitterand pledged to continue his opposition to Star Wars. On the other, he refused Gorbachev's offer to let the French negotiation unilaterally with the Soviets on arms control.

Despite the mixed outcome, Gorbachev's reviews from his television critics on his performance were outstanding. "Gorbachev gave new meaning to the phrase 'tour de force' at the news conference. He was amiable, animated and responsive when he wanted to be," explained ABC's Walter Rodgers. NBC called Gorbachev's performance "masterful,"⁴² but correspondent Jim Bittermann was blunt when he said that the substance of the meeting meant little compared with the style:

The concrete results of the summit seemed precious few. But its importance far outstripped its results. This was the West's first look at Gorbachev in his new job--a job which he, to all appearances, knows how to perform well; a job which makes him one of the two men most responsible for keeping peace on Earth.⁴³

But the reason to critique Gorbachev remained his upcoming meeting with Reagan. "The new Soviet main man and his Red charm offensive may be tough competition for the Great Communicator at the summit," said CBS's Rather. Although their assessments of the summit agreed, the differences in

⁴² NBC, October 4, 1985, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

⁴³ NBC, October 5, 1985, Jim Bittermann reporting from Paris.

coverage of the summit's final day illustrated again how the networks can respond differently to stories. On NBC, the press conference was the third story on the broadcast, nine minutes into the news. Not only did the other networks begin with the press conference, but both ABC and CBS showed their man asking a question of Gorbachev in their reports. This illustrates how the networks work to emphasize their activity in the reporting of the news.

D. Preparing for the Summit

For the month and a half following the Paris summit, the networks worked to prepare their audience for the meeting in Geneva between Gorbachev and Reagan. Although there was little hard news during this time, the networks covered what they could: Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's October 22 assertion that the Soviets were already developing missiles in violation of the ABM treaty; Gorbachev's meeting with Warsaw Pact members on October 22d and 23d, his first such meeting since becoming General Secretary; and Reagan and Shevardnadze's visits to the U.N. for its 40th anniversary celebration October 23d through 25th. The reports in this time period were more preoccupied that ever with the public relations posturing of the two sides. From mid to late October, it appeared to be Reagan who was concerned with regaining the public relations edge from Gorbachev:

A good part of this runup to Geneva has been the contest for public opinion between President Reagan and Soviet leader Gorbachev. It is well known the White House and other Western leaders were concerned the new Soviet leader was winning on points, but after much of this week at the United Nations...the president's men now are feeling much better.⁴⁴

At the U.N., the President spent three days on the diplomatic circuit, leaving "his advisors bragging that he had taken the summit spotlight away from Mikhail Gorbachev."⁴⁵ Reagan had reason to worry in that many Americans did not believe that there would be any progress at the summit.⁴⁶ An NBC Poll of October 15th, for instance, showed that 69 percent of respondents did not expect an arms control agreement to result from the Geneva talks. Reagan's desire to fight for popular opinion not only at home but in the Soviet Union led him to agree to an interview with representatives from the four major Soviet news organizations on October 31st--a counter to Gorbachev's talk with Time. It was the first time a U.S. leader had given such an interview since Kennedy.

But as the centerpiece of the pre-summit coverage, all three networks prepared a special series of reports on the Soviet Union and Soviet-American relations. The long period

⁴⁴ NBC, October 25, 1985, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

⁴⁵ NBC, October 25, 1985, Chris Wallace reporting from Washington.

⁴⁶ See CBS Poll, October 2, 1985, of 1,277 adults. CBS found that "people don't expect the talks to lead to a real arms agreement."

in between the announcement of the summit and the meeting allowed the networks the time to prepare numerous, well-researched reports, resulting in series with four parts on NBC, six parts on CBS and eleven parts on ABC. The series were aimed at identifying the major issues that would be discussed at the summit, outlining the state of Soviet domestic and foreign affairs and, of course, describing the Soviet leader. Interestingly, after months of neglecting the Soviet domestic situation, many of the segments commented on the massive problems Gorbachev was addressing at home. Exhibit IV-1 summarizes the reports.

ABC was the first to launch its series. Likening the pre-summit maneuvering to a chess match, ABC used the graphic of a chessboard to introduce its report. Only the pieces on this board changed during the report's introduction to small missiles--red ones with a gold star to represent the Soviets, blue ones with a white star to represent the Americans. As Peter Jennings opened the series on November 4, he explained that over the coming two weeks, ABC's senior correspondents would be addressing the most important aspects of Soviet-American affairs. "When we get to Geneva, we'll all understand a little better why Mr. Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev agree about some things and very much disagree about others," he said. By launching its coverage first, and presenting so much background information, ABC might have been attempting to give the

EXHIBIT IV-1

PRE-GENEVA SUMMIT SPECIAL REPORTS

ON NETWORK TELEVISION, 1985

ABC

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>
November 4	Gorbachev's Biography
November 5	World Leaders on Gorbachev
November 6	Gorbachev's Political Problems
November 7	Reagan's Political Problems
November 8	The First Ladies
November 11	Balance of Military Power
November 12	Space Weapons
November 13	Verification
November 14	The Allies
November 15	Previous Summits
November 18	The Third World

CBS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>
November 11	The Final Push
November 11	Soviet Women
November 12	Blue Collar Families
November 13	Reagan's Preparation
November 14	Reagan's Speech

NBC

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>
November 11	Space Weapons
November 12	Verification
November 13	Arms and the Man (Reagan)
November 14	The Gorbachev Challenge

impression of being the leading network for international news.

The first report was an extremely long--five minutes--biography of Gorbachev by correspondent Richard Threlkeld. The report started with a powerful image of Soviet authority--the leader on top of Lenin's tomb during the annual May Day parade--to illustrate Gorbachev's standing. To back up the images, Threlkeld then quoted several

academics and a member of Parliament to verify Gorbachev's power and gain insight into his personality. Trying to be an authoritative piece of work, the report was heavy with quotes from experts--the 12 quotations took up over 36 percent of the report. Following childhood photos and the standard biography, Threlkeld then showed some rare footage of Brezhnev's Politburo taken in 1982. Threlkeld traced Gorbachev's rise to fame by highlighting with a circle the faces of the men who helped him--Suslov, Andropov and Chernenko. Like an old yearbook photo of Gorbachev and his friends, this interesting footage reminded viewers of how much turmoil the Soviet Union had been through in the preceding three years. Having explained where Gorbachev came from, the report then turned to where he was going. The experts put domestic problems squarely at the top of Gorbachev's agenda. Threlkeld ended the report by comparing Gorbachev to former Soviet leaders, whose photographs slipped past on screen. Ever since Stalin, he said, Americans have hoped for a reasonable Soviet leader. Gorbachev may be different, Threlkeld concluded, as he showed regal footage of Gorbachev with Mitterand during the Paris summit, a military band tooting the Soviet national anthem in the background. He concluded, "They'll be ample time to discover how different. We probably won't see the last of him until well into the next century." In the last shot, Mikhail and Raisa smiled and waved goodbye to Paris

from gangway of their Aeroflot jet, the majestic music still playing. The attractive couple probably left a good impression on viewers.

ABC brought out one of its star reporters, Barbara Walters, for the next night's report on Gorbachev. Walter had not done a piece for the evening news since June 1985 because she was involved in a new ABC prime time news show called "20/20," but this story merited her attention. Her report elicited the opinions of world leaders who had already met Gorbachev. Gorbachev's role as a great communicator was illustrated by footage of the Soviet with Mitterand and Thatcher. Walters summarized the opinions of the two European leaders, Tip O'Neill and George Bush, rolling excerpts of their feelings about Gorbachev across a screen of alternating Soviet and American flags. This graphic, one of many that would appear in ABC's segments on the summit, would help the series have some feeling of unity despite its many reporters. Walters' report centered on the opinions of two men who have since passed away: industrialist Armand Hammer and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. There were lengthy sound bites from both men, complimentary of Gorbachev, which took up a full 40 percent of the report's time. Unlike most television news reports, where images convey a large percentage of the total information, the power of Walter's report was in the information in the interviews about Gorbachev. This is no

surprise in that Walters is well known for her skill as an interviewer. But Walters also sometimes gave her report the tone of gossip, using the imperial "we" and phrases such as "many have told us." On this day, Secretary of State Shultz met with Gorbachev in Moscow to put the finishing touches on the plans for the summit. Reports following the meeting were pessimistic, indicating that the countries were far apart on most major issues.

ABC's next report, by Chief European Correspondent Barrie Dunsmore, returned to the more normal style of visually rich reports. Dunsmore's goal was to catalogue Gorbachev's problems, both home and abroad. Needless to say, it was a long report--nearly five minutes--made up of 54 separate shots. Dunsmore's thesis was that despite Gorbachev's meteoric rise to fame, "he has his work cut out for him." To illustrate the overwhelming domestic problem--a technology lag--Dunsmore juxtaposed scenes from Gorbachev's tour of a modern, mechanized Peugeot factory in Paris with scenes from rundown Soviet factories. To illustrate how far the Soviets have fallen, Dunsmore added black and white footage of the first Soviet satellite launch, a reminder of the days when we raced to keep up with the Soviets. As with other reports that sought to illustrate how "low tech" Soviet industry remains, Dunsmore used a shot of a factory that was melting metal, with sparks flying across the screen. Gorbachev's desire to get

personally involved in the solution was illustrated by numerous shots of him talking with workers, not from the Leningrad walkabout but in a number of other locales. Turning to foreign problems, Dunsmore traveled to West Berlin, where he walked along the Berlin Wall to illustrate that "one of the greatest impediments to Soviet modernization is the fear of foreign influence on the Communist world." Dunsmore next showed a map of the world, the Soviet Union colored in red, as the reporter explained about Gorbachev's two major foes:

As Gorbachev looks to the West, he is in danger of being left behind by the computer revolution. As he looks to the East, China is so mixing Marxism and capitalism, he sees Communism itself under threat. As for the rest of the world, the question is increasingly basic: Who on earth wants to be like the Soviet Union?

As Dunsmore posed his question, all the countries on the map turned yellow, except for the Soviet Union, whose red color faded to grey. This shading provided a subtle answer to Dunsmore's rhetorical question: no one wanted to be like the Soviets. Dunsmore wound down his report with numerous shots of a Soviet military parade through Red Square, representing the nation's power, and with lines for consumer goods and shots from the war in Afghanistan, illustrating its vulnerabilities. Dunsmore closed his report back in Berlin to illustrate how many walls must come down for the Soviets to solve their problems.

Expert opinion is divided as to whether it is better for the West that Gorbachev succeed or

fail. But they generally agree, don't look for fundamental changes in the nature of the Soviet Union and don't look for the walls between East and West to soon come down.

Interestingly, many of the conclusions and graphics in the report bear a striking similarity to the report on Gorbachev's foreign policy done on NBC on August 23d. This suggests several things: that the networks faced the same limits in gathering images in the Soviet Union; that there was some kind of consensus on Soviet affairs by the network reporters; and that there is a language of news transmission television that all reporters learn, regardless of network affiliation.

Only the final one of NBC's four segments on the summit centered on the Soviet leader. On November 14th, Chief Foreign Correspondent Garrick Utley discussed the problems facing Gorbachev, and he too found that the primary challenges were at home. Although his report started with repeats of oft-seen images (a military parade in Red Square, Gorbachev's walkabout from Leningrad, the typical low-tech Soviet factory), Utley was able to go into a factory and talk with a small group of workers. The men were middle-aged and somewhat rowdy, but they illustrated that Gorbachev's public relations strategy was having some result at home:

UTLEY: I asked these workers what they think of their new leader.

MAN (Translated): He stops you on the street, at the gate of the plant, and he talks the way we're talking now.

SECOND MAN (Translated): He's a regular guy. He gets closer to the people.

Nevertheless, the men objected somewhat to Gorbachev's desire for stricter discipline--more work and less drinking. More new footage showed Gorbachev talking with oil workers in Siberia. When Gorbachev asked one worker what he thought of the policy of discipline, the worker responded unenthusiastically, "We support your policy on alcoholism," which included raising the drinking age and shortening the hours that liquor stores were open. Gorbachev responded with his characteristic enthusiasm: "This isn't for two or three days. It's permanent and its firm." Utley concluded that despite all the talk, Gorbachev faced a huge challenge in trying to change the Soviet system, which had for decades resisted change. The visuals, of the last May Day parade moving slowly through Red Square, reinforced the notion of the enduring power of Soviet society. Yet as illustrated by Utley's report and a November 12th report by CBS's Bruce Morton, where he too interviewed factory workers, the Soviets were also beginning to loosen the restrictions on Western television crews during this time.

Besides the increased attention to Soviet domestic problems, the coming of the summit was noteworthy because it saw the Soviets' capacity to manage public relations continue to grow. The most evident example of this occurred when Gorbachev sent a large team of experts and other "spin doctors" to Geneva a week before the summit to give

interviews to the 3,600 journalists who had gathered there. This was the fifth of Gorbachev's key strategic tactics for managing the media. Georgi Arbatov, who coordinated the team's efforts on Gorbachev's behalf, said the deployment was an attempt by Gorbachev to find new ways to work with the media. Gorbachev wanted to send a delegation which would "show that we are normal people," said Arbatov, and hence positively influence the Western media through style as well as substance.⁴⁷ For about a week before the summit began, the Soviet delegation met informally with reporters, gave formal interviews, and had meals with journalists.

The presence of the Soviet experts made it possible for them to shape expectations completely, as there were no American officials to interfere. "The Americans were caught with their pants down," asserted Arbatov.⁴⁸ The effort was a stunning success. "The mere fact that so many high ranking experts are suddenly so accessible to Western reporters is in itself a unique break in Soviet political tradition," explained ABC's Mike Lee.⁴⁹ The delegation was a boon to the networks, who found many new sources of information. But it was a bane to the Reagan administration, who had been waiting until after the summit to do complete the bulk of its efforts to influence press

⁴⁷ Interview with Georgi Arbatov, August 6, 1991.

⁴⁸ ibid.

⁴⁹ ABC, November 11, 1985, Mike Lee reporting from Geneva.

coverage. Accordingly, the Soviets "outdid the United States at that particular point," remembered Bernard Kalb, the State Department spokesman at the time.⁵⁰ Some Reagan administration officials felt that this new Soviet tactic, ironically, was copied directly from the Americans. "Everything they did [at Geneva] they learned from us," explained Lizabeth Murphy Kloak, a member of the Reagan advance team.⁵¹ On November 14, Soviet ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Dobrynin unveiled yet another Soviet tool in the public relations battle which may have been inspired by the West--Gorbachev's book, aptly titled A Time for Peace.

Yet more than anything else, the networks remained transfixed by the issue of personal style. This makes intuitive sense, in that personal style often translated into good television. For example, ABC aired a report just before the summit began, November 15, which while discussing previous summits contrasted the personal styles of Reagan and Gorbachev. "Some similarities between the two men are striking," explained Peter Jennings. "Mr. Gorbachev often appears to be Ronald Reagan Soviet-style." While Jennings interviewed five experts about the Soviet leader, the visuals of the report compared the Reagan and Gorbachev styles by showing them doing the same things. The report showed Gorbachev first in half of the eight visual

⁵⁰ Interview with Bernard Kalb, October 7, 1991.

⁵¹ Interview with Lizabeth Murphy Kloak, May 17, 1991.

comparisons--touring a factory in a hard hat, arriving for a meeting, greeting a foreign leader, and departing from a plane with this wife. Reagan was first in the other four comparisons--standing during a photo opportunity, sitting in a cowboy hat, addressing a major international gathering, and walking with his entourage. In each of the comparison shots, the editor picked a slow fade from one man to the other, accentuating their similarities. These visuals may have helped to allay fears about the summit, because the experts in the report explained that the style of this summit would be very important. "People, I think, will take their cues from the way in which the summit feels," explained Stanford University's Coit Blacker. Thus in equating their styles, ABC helped to set the stage for an eventful meeting.

E. The Geneva Summit

Summits are the ultimate television news event. They have high-stakes players and are loaded with their sumptuous visuals. The American networks gave an enormous amount of coverage to the summit, as they had to the pre-summit posturing. "Summits are television stories. They have a beginning, a middle and an end. And all those things are photographable," asserted Jeff Trimble of U.S. News. "It's a perfect electronic media event in that sense because it demands very little, it permits very little analysis really,

because it all happens and goes too quickly."⁵² The three networks dedicated virtually all of their broadcasts to the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting during the week of the summit. The amount of coverage given by television was very large in comparison to the amount in the nation's newspapers. In The New York Times, for example, the day with the most Geneva coverage was November 22, the day after the end of the summit. Only three of seven front-page articles that day concerned the meeting in Geneva, with six inside pages dedicated to the summit.

Surprisingly, reporters hate summits, even television reporters. "I like to be somewhere else when they happen," explained Frank Bourgholtzer, formerly of NBC. "It's a fake."⁵³ Jonathan Sanders of CBS sees the preoccupation with summits as a part of the network's overriding culture, with its preoccupation on spectacles. "This big-foot mentality which is pervasive at the networks is to bring the anchor in, to have a presence."⁵⁴ In fact, the networks sent their anchormen to Geneva early to be in place for the big story. CBS's Rather broadcast from Geneva beginning on Friday, November 15th; NBC's Brokaw on Saturday the 16th and ABC's Jennings on Monday the 18th.

⁵² Interview with Jeff Trimble, November 23, 1990.

⁵³ Interview with Frank Bourgholtzer, November 25, 1990.

⁵⁴ Interview with Jonathan Sanders, November 20, 1990.

The summit in Geneva lasted from November 19th through 21st. The summit actually involved four days of media coverage: a day for arrival before the official beginning of the summit, two days of meetings, and a day for a press conference and treaty signing. On the last day of the summit, both leaders went on to meet with their strategic alliances (Reagan met NATO leaders in Brussels while Gorbachev met Warsaw Pact members in Prague). Reagan continued on the same day to report to a joint session of Congress.

For Gorbachev, the summit was the closing event of his battle to establish his worldwide prestige. The Geneva meeting provided a chance for the Soviet leader to compete directly with Reagan, himself a popular and charismatic leader. By holding his own against the American leader, Gorbachev's personal credibility would no longer be of issue. The White House anticipated Gorbachev's offensive, as Reagan's Chief-of-Staff Don Regan explained:

The imagination of many U.S. media pundits had been captured by the energy and flair of Gorbachev, and the papers and airways buzzed with speculation that Reagan, the Great Communicator, might be beaten at his own game by the dynamic new Soviet leader...The media regarded Gorbachev as the odds-on favorite to dethrone the old champ. I wasn't so sure.⁵⁵

Reagan's plan was to look for opportunities for success, but to hold fast to Star Wars. "Gorbachev is adamant we must

⁵⁵ Regan, p. 303.

cave in on SDI," wrote Reagan at the time. "Well, this will be a case of an irresistible force meeting an immovable object."⁵⁶ But Gorbachev already had a solid base of support in the U.S. on which to anchor his negotiations. A Los Angeles Times poll taken just before the summit showed, for example, that 52 percent of those aware of Gorbachev held somewhat or very favorable impressions of the General Secretary. More than half of all respondents approved of the way Gorbachev handled public relations, and 39 percent thought he was more interested in peace with the West than previous Soviet leaders.⁵⁷

There are a number of remarkable things about the coverage of the Geneva summit. The first is that much of the coverage centered on the atmospherics, rather than on the substance of the talks. This is due in part to the fact that very little of substance was accomplished during the summit. Although Reagan and Gorbachev met one-on-one for almost four hours, they were unable to make any kind of progress on the arms control issues that separated them. Further, both sides agreed to a news blackout very soon after the summit began. Thus neither leaders nor aides would publicly discuss the substance or nature of the talks, nor would the leaders answer any substantive questions during their many photo opportunities. This forced the

⁵⁶ Reagan, p. 631.

⁵⁷ Los Angeles Times poll, November 1985.

networks to concentrate how things looked like they were going. The exceptional planning of the summit by Reagan's team of media specialists were picked in the knowledge that how things looked would be important. Bill Henkel, head of Reagan's advance team, explained that he even chose the location for the American's home base for the summit, the villa Fleur D'Eau, based on its appearance.

What caught Henkel's eye was a garden walkway leading to a pool house with a big fireplace--the symbolism of a warm get together.

"I knew Fleur D'Eau was the right place for the summit as soon as I saw the pool house where you have the classic roaring fire," Henkel recalled....It became the "fireside summit."⁵⁸

The schedules of the first ladies were also picked to provide spice during the times their husbands would be meeting. Mrs. Gorbachev, for instance, toured the University of Geneva, where Lenin studied while in exile, while Mrs. Reagan met with recovering drug addicts and toured a medieval village.

It is also remarkable how much attention was paid to small gaffes. The Geneva summit coverage had nine events that could be considered under the category of "gaffes" --uncomfortable or troublesome situations not central to the substance of the summit--which were mentioned by at least two of the three networks:

- o Gorbachev was shown combing his hair in between press events.

⁵⁸ Smith, The Power Game, p. 417.

- o Irina Grivnina, a Soviet emigree, disrupted a Soviet press conference, forcing spokesman Vladimir Lomeiko to walk out.
- o A Ukrainian dissident screaming "Freedom for Sakharov" disturbed Raisa Gorbachev.
- o Another heckler at the university shouted at Mrs. Gorbachev about Soviet jews.
- o Five Jewish protestors occupied the Geneva offices of Aeroflot for two hours before being arrested.
- o Avital Shcharansky, wife of the jailed dissident, tried to ask Mrs. Gorbachev to help win his freedom.
- o Residents of the medieval village of St. Prex caused a flap over being asked to stay indoors and wave from windows during Mrs. Reagan's visit.
- o Soviet Spokesman Leonid Zamyatin chastised an Israeli reporter over the situation with Arabs in his country.
- o Secretary of State Shultz was nearly hit with a roll of toilet paper thrown by a woman protesting the U.S. presence in Central America.

Adatto's study of presidential candidate coverage also found that the networks paid a great deal of attention to mistakes, even inconsequential ones, and the same is true in the summit coverage. She considered the emphasis on gaffes to be a counterattack by the networks to the overcontrol of news.⁵⁹ Given how tightly controlled the images were at the Geneva summit, this explanation can easily fit why U.S. television emphasized the summit's gaffes. Moreover, in this case, there was simply so little of substance to cover that the networks looked for anything new to report.

Also noteworthy is how similar the coverage is across the three networks. The three presented virtually the same stories, using the same pictures and same quotes. The main differences were the order in which the pictures appeared in each report and how closely the sound bites were trimmed.

⁵⁹ Adatto, p. 12.

This is again a testament to the media management skills of the Reagan team. Each networks also tried to highlight the efforts of its correspondents, as each one showed its reporters asking questions of the two leaders. This reached its zenith during Gorbachev's press conference, when ABC's Walter Rodgers started to talk to Gorbachev in Russian although according to his colleagues, Rodgers spoke only a handful of Russian words.

The summit also provided evidence of the Soviets' continuing buildup of media knowledge. Gorbachev scored a major coup by staying in Geneva after the treaty signing which ended the summit to hold a 90-minute solo press conference. There, Gorbachev was able to be the first to give his interpretation of the outcome of the meeting. The Soviets also held daily press conferences just like the Americans and sent their leader to meet with his allies just like Reagan. But the summit also showed that the Soviets still had more to learn. Lomeiko's walkout from his own news conference was ugly, with him screaming, "Who would you prefer to hear, her or me?" to the press as they surrounding dissident Irina Grivnina in the audience. Even in The New York Times, the incident merited a photo spread. Lomeiko did regain enough composure to restart the press conference in a different location, but he would be fired before the next summit meeting occurred.

On Monday, November 18th, the networks covered the ceremonies which officially welcomed Reagan and Gorbachev to Geneva. Although Reagan had been in Switzerland for two days to lessen the effect of jet lag, his official welcome was delayed until the day that Gorbachev arrived. Gorbachev "hit the ground running" as CBS explained, taking his first swipe at Star Wars while still on the chilly tarmac when he asked in a short speech, "What can we do to stop the unprecedented arms race developing in the world and spreading to new spheres?" Reagan quickly responded during a photo opportunity preceding a meeting with Swiss President Kurt Furgler. When a reporter stated that Gorbachev wanted to stop Star Wars, the president responded, "I think when that's explained to him, he'll find that that can help us in the arms race." Most of the day was dominated by the theatrics of the arrival ceremonies--military bands, flags, the leaders reviewing the Swiss guard--and the Grivnina disruption of the Soviet press conference.

The Grivnina incident is very representative of the way the Soviet Union and the Western press treated dissidents. At this point in time, dissidents were one of the very few sources to which American reporters could turn in the Soviet Union. Thus when a dissident turned up at the press conference, journalist made a beeline to him or her. The pictures from the press conference show journalists literally hurdling over chairs to get to Grivnina, a short

grey haired woman on the verge of hysteria. Lomeiko's actions mirrored those of the Soviet Union towards its dissidents--first he tried to shut her up and then tried to get the press to ignore her. When Lomeiko failed, he stormed out like a sore loser. The Soviets realized that they could not stop coverage of dissidents because the dissidents had nothing else to lose by talking to the press, unlike regular Soviet citizens. In the long run, the Soviets solved the dissident source problem by allowing a wider range of people to talk to Western reporters so that reporters were no longer dependent of dissidents. This seems to have worked at Geneva too, where journalists had dozens of other Soviets to turn to. This kept the Grivnina incident as a gaffe, not a disaster.

The first day of the summit was designed to show that the meeting would focus on personalities, not on agreements and technical issues. The efforts of Reagan's advisors helped make this true. First, the morning provided the moment for which the anxious world had waited--the first face-to-face meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev. The two men first met outside the Villa Fleur d'Eau, the site of the first day's meeting, where even the first handshake was carefully calculated for its media value. Despite the day's bitter cold, Reagan "made his first spot decision of the meeting"⁶⁰ and walked out of the chateau without a topcoat

⁶⁰ Oberdorfer, p. 143.

to greet Gorbachev as the General Secretary stepped out of his limousine, as if to demonstrate the American leader's heartiness and strength. The two men posed outside for a few minutes, then moved indoors for more photos. Gorbachev soon fired back with his strongest weapon, his keen wit. When asked by a reporter about Andrei Gromyko's assessment that the new Soviet leader had a nice smile but iron teeth, Gorbachev shot back, "As of now, I'm still using my own teeth." The two men soon disappeared for an hour long one-on-one talk, originally scheduled for just 15 minutes. Both men had prepared extensively for the meeting, with Gorbachev even going so far as to rehearse what he would say to the President the day before their talks.⁶¹ Both men saw their brief time alone as crucial to establishing their working relationship. The cameras peered in from outside the chateau, capturing pictures of Reagan's advisors, waiting nervously for the meeting to end.

After they emerged from what was later learned to be a productive first meeting, the leaders met for a plenary session with top advisors before breaking for lunch. During the break, Gorbachev found 45 minutes for an on-camera meeting with the Reverend Jesse Jackson and a delegation of American peace activists. The incident must have been embarrassing for the Reagan camp, which declined a similar meeting with the delegation. Still, most Americans

⁶¹ ibid., p. 142.

disapproved of the Jackson-Gorbachev meeting. A CBS/New York Times poll released November 21st showed that 62 percent of respondents disapproved of the meeting while only 27 percent approved.

After the afternoon plenary session on arms control, Reagan set the most important media mechanism into place. He invited Gorbachev to stroll with him to a pool house outside the chateau, where next to a roaring fire the two men discussed their vision for the world. While no television cameras were present, the White House released a still photo of the meeting, the two men smiling amiably as a cozy fire roared in the background. From this moment forward, the Geneva meeting would always be remembered as the "Fireside Summit." The day ended with a state dinner hosted by the Soviets at another villa, where the first ladies' got to meet each others' husbands for the first time. For their part, the first ladies had a busy day touring Geneva's sights and holding their first meeting over tea. The pictures were interesting: Nancy Reagan meeting with a group of recovering drug addicts and later being serenaded in a medieval Swiss village, and Raisa Gorbachev signing the city register and examining an antique timepiece in the city's famous watch museum. One of the few pieces of news from the day's events was the revelation that Mrs. Gorbachev could speak some English, although the first ladies used translators for their meetings. The two women

appeared to get along, although time would prove that assertion wrong. Although there was no official news because of the news blackout, the networks' line was that the mood and atmosphere were good.

The second day of the summit was less choreographed than the first day, probably because it was the Soviets who hosted the talks at their mission in Geneva. Reagan's advance team, who had planned everything so meticulously the day before, had to rely on the Soviets' ability to manage the media. For that reason, the atmospherics were a bit more restrained on day two--there were simple photo opportunities, without the symbolism of the fireside summit. The day featured another two plenary sessions and two one-on-one meetings where the leaders met with only their translators for nearly three hours. The news blackout continued. The lack of hard news led the networks to turn to a statement that was making headlines back at home: a sexist remark by White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan. In a Washington Post article on Nancy Reagan's role at the summit, Regan said that women are not "going to understand throw-weights or what is happening in Afghanistan or what is happening in human rights. Some women will, but most women...would rather read the human interest stuff of what happened."⁶² The networks gave prominent coverage to this remark, as both ABC and CBS mentioned it in their first

⁶² See The Washington Post, November 18, 1985.

stories (it was in NBC's third report). Gorbachev added to the Reagan administration's embarrassment about this remark when he and Reagan were asked about it by ABC's Sam Donaldson. Reagan offered an inarticulate answer: "I don't think he meant it to be interpreted in that way at all, because he was simply adding to that interest to say they also had an interest in children, the human, the human touch." Gorbachev, on the other hand, gave an articulate, sensible answer: "Both men and women in the United States and the Soviet Union, all over the world are interested in having peace for themselves and being sure that this peace would be kept stable and lasting." Donald Regan, standing near the two leaders during the photo opportunity where Donaldson asked his question, seemed uncomfortable.

Although Gorbachev seemed to be making a bit more of a good impression than Reagan out front, behind the scenes there were indications that Reagan might be winning a slight diplomatic victory. NBC put more emphasis than did the other networks on explaining the diplomatic shuffling going on behind the scenes. Reagan's advisors worked hard in the months preceding the summit to keep expectations low, explained NBC's Marvin Kalb and Steve Hurst. Simply meeting with Gorbachev was a success even if little concrete came from it, the Americans argued. The Kremlin, on the other hand, was trying hard to force Reagan to concede something in the area of arms control. Going into the summit, the

Soviets did not seem as if they would be happy if the meeting produced few concrete results. But as Hurst explained, the Kremlin was beginning to adopt the Reagan line:

The shift in position, whatever it has been, was signaled this afternoon at a briefing by Kremlin spokesman Leonid Zamyatin. He practically dropped all references to Star Wars, and began putting out the Kremlin line that just having met, the two leaders had a success.

Still, American analysts wondered if Gorbachev would get anything for changing his view, such as continued compliance with the ABM or SALT II treaties. Most were unsure of what the agreements would say, but predicted both sides would be able to go home with a successful trip.

Even during as exciting a time as a summit, the networks showed some "fluff." On the second night of the summit, both ABC and CBS ran stories that one might not call hard hitting news. ABC ran a piece about how hard it was for reporters to cope with the news blackout. CBS ran an even lighter piece about "what the well-dressed summiteer" is wearing to fend off Geneva's arctic chill. "Beneath the black fedoras and black topcoats are usually KGB agents...Beneath the parka, purple pants and blue boots is a Swiss TV reporter," explained David Browning. NBC ran a story about separated Soviet-American families for its feature that night.

November 21, the final day of the Geneva summit, finally saw the Soviet and American leaders reveal to the

world what they had discussed. When push came to shove, little of substance was accomplished. New cultural exchanges were signed, and the countries agreed to open new consulates. On the subject of arms, the nations agreed merely to "accelerate" the arms talks. But the value of the summit was for both sides symbolic, according to the networks. "Shultz and other officials made a great deal over the good personal chemistry they believe was established between the two leaders in their extensive fireside one-on-one talks," explained ABC's Donaldson. "The moment was historic for the struggling anti-Communist Mr. Reagan and an important move on the world stage for the new Soviet leader," said CBS's Bill Plante. "So both men pronounced it a success though there was no visible progress on arms control." As the Soviets had done the day before, the networks now adopted the Reagan line on how to judge the summit. What is particularly disturbing about this is that the networks did not acknowledge or fight the fact that they were reporting just what the Reagan administration wanted them to report. It is somewhat ironic that in his end-of-summit commentary, for example, NBC's John Chancellor noticed that "before the summit ended, Russian newspapers and Russian spokesman were echoing the very themes set by the White House." But nowhere did Chancellor or any other journalist outwardly acknowledge that television was by its very nature forced to tow the very same line.

The two leaders' press conferences demonstrated how much each had learned about putting their "spin" on the issues. During the brief joint Reagan-Gorbachev news conference which started the day, the American President was sure to restate the themes he wanted the world to remember:

I leave Geneva today and our fireside summit determined to pursue every opportunity to pursue a safer world of peace and freedom. General Secretary Gorbachev, we ask you to join us in getting the job done, as I'm sure you will.⁶³

Gorbachev's spin on the summit at that news conference was far more pessimistic:

The President and I have done a huge amount of work. We decided that we must help to decrease the threat of nuclear war. We must not allow the arms race to move on off into space, and we must cut it down on earth. Solving of the most important problems concerning the arms race and increasing hopes of peace we didn't succeed in reaching at this meeting.⁶⁴

Gorbachev later held a "sometimes animated, sometimes dull"⁶⁵ solo 90-minute press conference, where he was able to expound upon his views at length. Reagan would not be giving his in-depth report on the summit until that night, when he would deliver a speech to Congress and the American people. Therefore, Gorbachev was able increase his spin on the news abroad and particularly at home, where his press conference was covered live. The topic of Star Wars

⁶³ Quoted by ABC and NBC, November 21, 1985.

⁶⁴ Quoted on ABC, November 21, 1985. CBS quoted the same passage with a very different translation.

⁶⁵ CBS, November 21, 1985, Mark Phillips reporting from Geneva.

dominated the news conference, and the networks showed Gorbachev rubbing his hands together, as a gesture of greedy power, as he talked about American aggression. "Somebody's rubbing their hands in that idea," he said of the idea that Star Wars is a purely defensive weapon. The Americans want to use Star Wars, he continued, "And they--they want to achieve world supremacy and see the whole world from high above."⁶⁶ Still, even Gorbachev had to admit that the world was safer because he and Reagan had met. Given the economic problems that the Soviet leader was facing at home, anything which could free up his resources so that he could dedicate more time to domestic issues must have been useful.

With the news blackout over, the network's analysts could finally reveal what they had learned was going on behind the scenes. And all three networks quoted unnamed sources who said that the discussions had been extremely difficult at times. "There were fireworks, I guess, as well as firesides," explained NBC's Brokaw⁶⁷. NBC's Marvin Kalb explained that the summit was not as calm and friendly as the two leaders were making it out to be:

There were some very sharp exchanges between the two men on at least three issues: Human rights violations, regional crises such as Nicaragua and Afghanistan, and the President's Star Wars

⁶⁶ ibid. ABC showed the same film clip but attached a completely different quotation to it.

⁶⁷ In keeping with the spirit of following the story, Brokaw and the other two anchors followed the President and broadcast from Washington this day.

Program. I am told that for part of the summit, the two men simply talked past each other...The drafting of the communique, I'm told, was an absolute nightmare.

Worse, CBS said that the first ladies got along even worse than their husbands did. "It was understood that whenever she [Mrs. Reagan] tried to talk about personal or family matters, Mrs. Gorbachev answered with Marxist doctrine," explained Bill Plante. Unfortunately, the power of images remained stronger than the power of words, and most of the truth about the Geneva summit was lost to the powerful stream of images that the meeting produced. No network illustrated this fact better than NBC, which despite its insightful analysis ended its coverage in Geneva with a two-minute long "video scrapbook" of summit highlights.

Although the summit strengthened Gorbachev's image in the U.S. due to the large amount of coverage he received, the Soviet leader clearly lost ground in the post-summit posturing to Reagan, because the American president and his advisors were able to continue to put their spin on the summit for several days. The President painted Gorbachev as tough and at times demanding. Yet Reagan also continued to say that progress had been made, and relations would continue to improve. "Gorbachev was tough and convinced Communism was superior to capitalism, but after almost five years I'd finally met a Soviet leader I could talk to," said

Reagan.⁶⁸ To illustrate the progress made, Reagan revealed that he and Gorbachev planned to visit each other's country. Gorbachev planned to visit the U.S. in the spring of 1986, while Reagan would visit the U.S.S.R. the following year.

But Gorbachev did appear to improve his standing with the American people as a result of the Geneva summit. According to a CBS poll, for instance, 57 percent of respondents now saw Gorbachev as different from his predecessors as opposed to only 47 percent who did before the summit.⁶⁹ More participants chose Gorbachev than Reagan as the tougher negotiator. But as an NBC poll showed the following month, more than 62 percent of respondents thought that, substantively, the summit was a standoff.⁷⁰

There was little news coming out of Moscow through the rest of 1985. NBC, for example, did not have a single story on the Soviet leader during December. Each nation continued to expound upon its view of the Geneva summit. Both the Americans and Soviets even sent emissaries to their allies to report on the details of the meetings.⁷¹ Gorbachev gave another major report on the summit when he addressed the Supreme Soviet on November 27th. While Gorbachev admitted that "the general balance sheet in Geneva is positive," he

⁶⁸ Reagan, p. 641.

⁶⁹ CBS Poll, November 21, 1985, 800 respondents.

⁷⁰ NBC Poll, December 3, 1985, 1,584 respondents.

⁷¹ See ABC, November 24, 1985, Mike Lee reporting from Berlin.

still blamed Reagan's stance on Star Wars for the lack of more progress.⁷² In mid-December, Gorbachev made his first arms offer since the summit, offering to allow U.S. inspectors to tour Soviet underground test sites if the U.S. would agree to join the Soviets' ban on nuclear tests. CBS, for one, returned to its pre-summit style of reporting when it termed this offer "a little pre-Christmas propaganda."⁷³ To end the year on a high note, Gorbachev and Reagan agreed to exchange videotaped New Year's messages, to be shown in each other's country. In his statement, Gorbachev said "every effort should be made to improve understanding and trust and to bring about disarmament," explained to ABC.⁷⁴ The tradition of exchanging messages continues today.

The close of 1985 found Gorbachev with his personal prestige well-established. His general use of media management skills, as well as the five key strategic tactics he used during the year, had helped shaped the press coverage given him and, hence, the image conveyed. The Geneva summit in particular made Gorbachev as a known presence on U.S. television. After the summit, the networks no longer had to refer to Gorbachev as the "new" Soviet leader, as they did even as the summit neared. Although

⁷² See ABC, November 27, 1985, Greg Dobbs reporting from Moscow.

⁷³ CBS, December 19, 1985, Dan Rather anchoring.

⁷⁴ ABC, December 31, 1985, Richard Threlkeld anchoring.

Gorbachev did not get everything that he wanted from his meeting with Reagan, the summit did allow Gorbachev's buoyant personality the exposure it needed on U.S. television to sink into the American psyche. During 1985, Gorbachev and his advisors managed their media relations well, or at least well enough to make a good impression on the world. The following year would not be as kind.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE AGGRESSOR

By January 1986, Gorbachev was no longer the "new" Soviet leader. The Geneva summit left him established in the international community, and while not on equal footing with Reagan than closer to it. And if 1985 was the time when he was laying groundwork, then 1986 was the time that he began to move forward aggressively with his programs. In many ways, this was a difficult and challenging time. "In '86, there was no longer a celebration of the fresh wind," recalled Sergei Grigoriev, who became Gorbachev's spokesman after having served in the early Gorbachev years as a translator for at the Central Committee. "Geneva was not only a beginning for him but, in a way, it was also a cold shower" because there were so many large problems to address.¹

Soviet experts theorize that Gorbachev and his inner circle--particularly Yakovlev and Shevardnadze--reviewed Soviet policy at home and around the world step by step, looking to analyze policy and right wrongs.² In doing so, they must have learned how great the nation's economic

¹ Interview with Sergei Grigoriev, November 8, 1991.

² For discussions of the examination of economic and military power by Gorbachev and his inner circle, see Seweryn Bialer and Michael Mandelbaum, The Global Rivals (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), p. 71-91; and Condoleezza Rice, "Defense and Security," in McCauley, op. cit., p. 192-209.

problems really were. At the heart of the economic problem was the huge amount of money the nation was sending on the military. The Soviet Union was spending at least a quarter of its national budget on the military, as opposed the six percent spent by the United States. Accordingly, too little was being spent to produce food and consumer goods, and the so-called black market was not large enough to make up the difference. Gorbachev must have realized that economic reform was not possible without some diminution of the amount of money going into the military.

The only way to safely shift money away from the military was to get the U.S. to shift similarly, experts believe Gorbachev reasoned. An improvement in superpower relations, followed by an arms control agreement, would be an integral step in beginning the process of economic reform in the Soviet Union. In trying to better relations, the perceptions of Gorbachev in the West would be very important. If the West believed Gorbachev was serious and trustworthy, they would be more likely to bargain. Therefore beginning in January 1986, Gorbachev began a public relations offensive centered on arms control. Over the coming months, he would make several arms control proposals and try to force Reagan into a meeting on the subject. Gorbachev's maneuvers were calculated, bold enough to improve world public opinion but conservative enough to appear realistic. The only stumbling blocks were a nuclear

accident in the Ukraine and Reagan's continued support of the Strategic Defense Initiative. "He [Reagan] was a true believer in SDI and he was determined not to do anything to hamper it," explained Jack H. Matlock Jr., the former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union.³ The Soviets were terrified of SDI, many experts believed, not because of the space shield itself but because of the potential gains to be made from a huge, high-tech American research project.

At the same time, what is notable about the first half of 1986 is how, despite Gorbachev's need to advance his image, he let pass tremendous opportunities to manage the press in strategic ways. While Gorbachev continued to pursue public diplomacy during this time, his methods did little to heighten the impact of his message. For example, he twice let pass excellent opportunities for using the press to his advantage. First, on January 15th, he did not appear personally to announce a major Soviet proposal to eliminate nuclear weapons. Here, he passed up an opportunity to associate himself directly with this positive news. Secondly, Gorbachev maintained silence for more than two weeks following April's accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. In this, Gorbachev did not seize an opportunity to attract press coverage strategically. Had the Soviet leader gone to Chernobyl and held a press conference, for example, he would have sent a message to the

³ Interview with Jack H. Matlock, Jr., June 25, 1991.

world about his level of involvement beyond whatever words he spoke there. These two incidents, along with Gorbachev's later handling of the Daniloff-Zakharov affair, more of Gorbachev's strategic uses of the press, even though they are strategies that were more conservative than those pursued by Gorbachev in 1985.

A. A Fast Break From the Gate

The first few weeks of 1986 started with positive press coverage for Gorbachev. It started on New Year's Day, following Reagan and Gorbachev's exchange of televised messages of goodwill. January 1st is usually a slow news day, with little happening besides parades and football games, and so the exchange was covered heavily. The message exchange received three stories on ABC, where it started the broadcast, and two stories on CBS, where it started less than three minutes into the program.⁴ In taped messages, "both men spoke approvingly of the Geneva meetings and of their hopes that negotiations can lead to a reduction of nuclear weapons," ABC's Sam Donaldson explained in his report.

These reports provide more examples of how television news is subtly but clearly imbued with value judgments,

⁴ NBC ran no news broadcast that night.

conclusions and non-objective explanations.⁵ The journalist's creed, of course, dictates that stories be value free and reporters be objective.⁶ The Society of Professional Journalists (Sigma Delta Chi) and virtually every media organization has a written set of rules dictating journalistic ethics and responsibilities. They make statements such as, "Strive for impartial treatment of issues and dispassionate handing of controversial subjects."⁷ Although the idea of "objectivity" is central to journalism's credibility with the public, it difficult to define adequately. "The closest we can come to such a definition is to say that an objective press does not

⁵ Discussions of the manifestations of bias in television news include: H.D. Doll and H.E. Bradley, "A Study of the Objectivity of Television News Reporting of the 1972 Presidential Campaign," Central States Speech Journal, 25, 254-263; Edith Efron, The News Twisters, (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1971); Mark Fishman, Manufacturing the News (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); G. C. Lawrence and D. L. Grey, "Subjective Inaccuracies in Local News Reporting," Journalism Quarterly 46, 753-757; Bill Nichols, Ideology and the Image (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); Michael J. Robinson, "Just How Liberal Is the News? 1980 Revisited," Public Opinion 6(1), 55-60; F.D. Russo, "A Study of Bias in TV Coverage of the Vietnam War: 1969 and 1970," Public Opinion Quarterly 35, 539-543; P. H. Weaver, "Is Television News Biased?" The Public Interest, 26, 57-74.

⁶ The literature on the nature of objectivity is extensive, dating back to Lippmann's Public Opinion. An excellent summary of research on journalistic objectivity and bias can be found in Robert A. Hackett's "Decline of a Paradigm? Bias and Objectivity in News Media Studies," Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 1(3), 1984, p. 229-259. Michael Schudson's Discovering the News offers a historical perspective on the evolution of objectivity.

⁷ Code of Ethics of the Associated Press managing Editors (1975), quoted in Marvin Mencher, News Reporting and Writing, 3d Edition (Dubuque: William C. Brown Publishers, 1984), p. 445.

'slant' the news or otherwise manipulate it for personal or partisan or policy ends," argues Cohen.⁸ Journalists generally agree that complete objectivity is impossible to achieve because the news process by its nature involves the value-laden judgments of value-laden individuals.⁹ Journalists try to resolve this dilemma in many ways, from refraining from registration in political parties to refusing to socialize with sources. Most journalists, however, deal with the problems by striving to produce stories that maintain the appearance of fairness through balance--reflecting the opinions of all parties involved. Although all reports inherently contain conclusions and value judgments, biases are more evident in some cases than others.

The reports of January 1st, when there were some rather strong insinuations, illustrate this point. In its opening report that day, for example, ABC explained the Reagan-Gorbachev message exchange as an "unprecedented gesture," implying both that there continued to be progress on superpower relations (from the word "unprecedented") and that the movement appeared to be hollow (from the word

⁸ Cohen, p. 51. Many authors offer a definition which asserts that bias is a combination of opinion and fact.

⁹ Hofstetter, for example, distinguishes political bias, resulting from the ideology of journalists, from structural bias, resulting from the character of medium used. See C. R. Hofstetter, Bias in the News: Network Television Coverage of the 1972 Election Campaign (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 1976), p. 33-34.

"gesture"). Furthermore, ABC took the exchange to be another sign of Gorbachev's ever-growing power. "President Reagan's rare appearance on Soviet television reflects Mr. Gorbachev's own self-confidence, that he can now go head-to-head with any American leader," as ABC's Walter Rodgers explained. CBS's assessment was more upbeat. While CBS also called the exchange unprecedented, Moscow correspondent Mark Phillips theorized that "for the Soviet leadership, it seemed to be an attempt to continue the spirit of Geneva." Both networks ended their reports with speculation about the timing of the next summit meeting, again demonstrating the networks preoccupation with superpower meetings.

Gorbachev followed the message exchange with a dramatic proposal. In the first major diplomatic offensive of the year, on January 15th, Gorbachev proposed that the Superpowers eliminate all nuclear weapons by the year 2000. The three-stage proposal, would involve an initial cut in long-range nuclear weapons, followed by the elimination of medium range weapons, and then finally the destruction of other nuclear arms. The potential sticking point was that the proposal required the elimination of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, which the Soviet military was pressuring Gorbachev to slow.¹⁰ Gorbachev, not accidentally, strategically timed the proposal to precede by a day the opening of a new round of arms control talks in Geneva. But

¹⁰ See Oberdorfer, p. 157.

he missed an opportunity to act strategically with the press. For reasons I do not know, Gorbachev had the proposal announced by the anchorman during the Soviet evening news (Vremya) instead of making this proposal himself. I have identified this as Gorbachev's sixth key interaction with the media. Gorbachev could have made this announcement himself, and in a way that might have advanced his policy goals. For example, he might have made the announcement in a symbolic location, such as at the "Peace Wall" on Moscow's shopping street, the Arbat.¹¹

Still, experts said that the proposal had potential. Although the proposal "was not completely sound...it did have buried within it, though, what appeared to be a reasonable offer on intermediate nuclear forces in Europe," wrote Professor Condoleeza Rice of Stanford University.¹² Even Reagan had to admit that the proposal was more than simple propoganda. "While many elements cause us serious concern there are others that at first glance may be constructive," he said in a statement. Reagan tried to grab back the mantle of peace from Gorbachev by reminding the world that the Americans had called for the abolition of nuclear arms back in 1983.¹³ Americans apparently liked the

¹¹ On the Arbat, there is a wall made up of several hundred tiles, each painted by a different American school child, all with the theme of "peace."

¹² Rice, "Defense and Security," in McCauley, p. 201.

¹³ Reagan called this idea the "zero option."

idea of lessening the nuclear threat. A Los Angeles Times poll in November 1985, for instance, had found that 47 percent of respondents favored joining the Soviets in a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons. But 65 percent of those surveyed by a January 1986 CBS poll agreed that Gorbachev's proposal for the elimination of nuclear weapons was "propaganda."¹⁴

Gorbachev's dramatic assertion lead all the U.S. news shows that night. ABC was the least optimistic in its words, saying that Gorbachev made "what looks like a dramatic proposal" (implying that it really was not). NBC was less judgmental, calling the plan "a dramatic challenge to the United States and Moscow." CBS's report was mixed, citing positive White House reaction on one hand, and political scientist Dimitri Simes on the other who suggested that "as long as his [Gorbachev's] choice is propaganda, questions have to be raised about his seriousness and, indeed, about his sincerity." The footage which accompanied these stories, however, seem to suggest an unfavorable view of Gorbachev's proposal. Because Gorbachev was not shown making this announcement, the U.S. networks were forced to turn to other, more visually interesting footage for images to accompany the story. The images used by all the networks were replete with missiles, explosions and representations of Star Wars. These sorts of visuals implied that there

¹⁴ CBS Poll, January 23, 1986.

existed a very real Soviet military threat. The most blatant visual editorializing came in Sam Donaldson's report on ABC summarizing the White House response to Gorbachev's offer. As Donaldson explained the President's continuing support for Star Wars, viewers saw inset photographs of Reagan and Gorbachev, both looking serious. The photo of Gorbachev was one used several times in 1985 and 1986 which is particularly unflattering--it shows Gorbachev scowling and with a prominent double chin. Underneath the inset photographs, the main visuals turned to an animation of how Star Wars might work. In the first scene of animation, five satellites shot down red missiles which were flying above the earth. The missiles, because they were red, represented the Soviet threat. In the second animation scene, intricately drawn satellites swept across the screen. This scene may have represented the excellence of American technology, and the necessity of the technologically advanced SDI in maintaining American safety. The third animation scene showed a close up shot of more missiles flying across screen. This time there could be no ambiguity about what they represented. Each red rocket said "СССР" on its side--the cyrillic letters for the Soviet national acronym. The next shot was no longer animation, but a black and white shot nearly subliminal in length of a city as seen from above. If this brief shot is viewed in slow motion, one can see that the middle of the shot seems to blank out

as if the city was hit by a bomb. Donaldson quickly changed to a shot of a bomb blast, shot from a long distance in black and white. The black and white film, again, reminded the viewer of the tension at the height of the cold war. Put together, these five shots definitely told a story: Our superior American technology has led us to develop Star Wars, and we need this technology to keep us safe from the Soviet threat. Without Star Wars, the story seems to say, our nation will be bombed and destroyed by Soviet missiles. ABC's other report, by Walter Rodgers, coupled excerpts from the Soviet evening news with footage of real missiles in flight, to the same effect.

For the next several days, the Soviets and Americans busied themselves with putting their "spin" on the arms elimination proposal. Again, contrary to the style he had developed in 1985, Gorbachev did not appear personally to make a case for his proposals. Instead, his proposals were run in full by Soviet newspapers. Next, on January 18th, top Kremlin foreign policy experts held a press conference on the arms proposal. In a new tactic, teams of Soviet officials were sent elsewhere to explain and lobby for the arms reductions. CBS, for example, explained that the Soviets were having only partial success:

Even with anti-nuclear activists giving the proposal a cool reaction, the Soviets feel they need to roll out their propaganda guns in order for their proposal to fly--like this Soviet-run

press conference in Bonn, designed to pressure the German government.¹⁵

This tactic may have been inspired by the success of Soviet "spin patrols" at the Helsinki and Geneva meetings in 1985. Even though Gorbachev did not appear in person or on television to argue for this proposal, it was clearly seen by the American networks as his idea, his responsibility. NBC, for example, in its report on the press conference held by the Kremlin foreign policy experts, kept Gorbachev's picture on screen for over one-quarter of the report's running time of 1:51 in a graphic which summarized the plan's details.

Gorbachev continued to keep a low profile throughout most of the month of February. Even when he was involved in breaking news--and there were two significant stories that month--Gorbachev did not demonstrate the headline-seeking behavior he had displayed earlier. The first potentially lucrative story occurred when Gorbachev met on February 6 with Senator Edward Kennedy, assuring Kennedy that progress could be made on arms control without progress on Star Wars. As in his meeting with Jesse Jackson during the Geneva summit, Gorbachev was appealing for support to American political forces outside the Reagan administration. Still, there was no photo opportunity for U.S. television when the two met, and the bulk of the news was given by Kennedy upon

¹⁵ CBS, January 18, 1986, David Andelman reporting from Paris.

his return from Moscow two days after the meeting. A second story during which Gorbachev stayed in the background was the release of noted dissident Anatoly Shcharansky after eight years in a Soviet prison. Shcharansky was freed on February 11 in exchange for several alleged spies, and left immediately for Israel following his release in Berlin. Although Gorbachev must have approved Shcharansky's release, the U.S. networks did not give direct credit to the Soviet leader for the dissident's release. Shcharansky's release was reported as straight news, with little background on how his release came about. The only mention of Gorbachev came from Shcharansky's brother, Leonid, who thanked Reagan and Gorbachev for their help in arranging Anatoly's release.¹⁶ By this time, Gorbachev clearly seemed to know how to cultivate positive press coverage when he wanted it. Therefore, it seems logical to assume that he wanted to lessen his credit for Shcharansky's release. This makes intuitive sense. There were still many political prisoners at this time, and Gorbachev probably did not want to seem soft on internal political issues.

B. The 27th Communist Party Congress

One possible explanation for his relatively low profile during January and February 1986 was that Gorbachev was kept busy by domestic politics. In particular, he had to prepare

¹⁶ See CBS and NBC, February 11, 1986.

for the 27th Communist Party Congress, which took place from February 25 to March 6. This once-in-five-years event is a "compressed into one week a good part of a presidential election campaign, the inaugural address and the State of the Union address."¹⁷ As the first Party Congress of the Gorbachev era, it was a very important political event.

The three networks varied dramatically in the amount of coverage they gave to the Communist Party Congress. ABC not only gave the Party Congress an overwhelming amount of coverage but sent Peter Jennings to anchor from Moscow for a week. Despite other major stories going on at the time, particularly in the Philippines, ABC gave a remarkable amount of coverage to the Party Congress and to Soviet affairs.¹⁸ From the period from February 17th, when ABC began its preview of the upcoming meeting, to March 6th, when the Congress ended, ABC dedicated 98 minutes 20 seconds to Soviet coverage. Considering that the total news hole for 18 days (assuming 21 minutes per broadcast) is only 378 minutes, ABC's commitment to Soviet affairs totalled more than a quarter of its available time. ABC broadcast almost 10 times as much as NBC, which broadcast only 10 minutes 50 seconds of Soviet-related stories over those 18 days, and

¹⁷ ABC, February 25, 1986, Peter Jennings anchoring from Moscow.

¹⁸ Having spent the money to spent Jennings and his associates to Moscow, ABC had a great incentive to give the Party Congress sustained attention, despite the dramatic events in the Philippines.

almost four times as CBS on Soviet affairs, which showed 24 minutes 20 seconds during the same period. Furthermore, ABC began a series of special reports on the Soviet Union titled "Inside the Other Side" on February 17th which focused on the people and internal problems in the Soviet Union. This 13-part series focused on Soviet society rather than on the country's politics.

In its coverage, ABC seemed to provide two opposite and conflicting ways to interpret the Party Congress. On the one hand, said Jennings, the Congress "could well mark a turning point for America's principle adversary. For one thing, it is the final step in Mikhail Gorbachev's program to consolidate his control over the apparatus."¹⁹ On the other hand, Jennings implied in the very same breath that the Congress would do little but rubber stamp Gorbachev's decision. The 5,000 delegates "will listen to Mr. Gorbachev and they will heartily applaud," Jennings explained. An entire report that day by Walter Rodgers profiled some of the delegates to the Congress, ordinary workers mostly, who said they could voice no criticism at the plenum. "Here, outspokenness, even from communists in the vanguard of this country can land you in trouble," explained one plant manager.²⁰

¹⁹ ABC, February 24, 1986, Peter Jennings anchoring from Moscow.

²⁰ Tatyana Barkanova, quoted by ABC, February 24, 1986, Walter Rodgers reporting from Moscow.

In his first major appearance of the year, Gorbachev opened the Party Congress with a five and a half hour speech to the delegates on February 25. As he spoke, Gorbachev looked every bit the Soviet leader, standing before a rostrum that included such Communist luminaries as Poland's General Wojciech Jaruzelski and Cuba's Fidel Castro, all under a tremendous portrait of Lenin. Gorbachev spoke with characteristic flare, covering a wide range of topics, and had harsh words for nearly everyone. First, Gorbachev criticized Reagan. As quoted by all three networks, he accused the United States of undermining the arms control process:

It is hard to detect in the letter we have just received any serious preparedness of the United States administration to get down to solving the cardinal problems involved in eliminating the nuclear threat.

Gorbachev was equally harsh in his criticism of lackluster economic performers in his own homeland. "It is no secret that many plants sit idle at the start of the month, then rush toward the end. The result: output quality is low, a chronic disease that must be eradicated," he asserted.²¹ Moreover, harkening back to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin during the 20th Party Congress in 1956, Gorbachev criticized Brezhnev. "The inertness and stiffness of the forms and methods of administration, the decline of dynamism in our work and an escalation of the bureaucracy--all this

²¹ CBS, February 25, 1986, Wyatt Andrews reporting from Moscow.

"was doing no small damage," he said.²² The U.S. networks interpreted the aggressive criticism as a sign of Gorbachev's self-confidence and dominance in political affairs.²³ Although they all had the same images and same material with which to work, each of the three networks put its own imprimatur on the news. CBS emphasized Gorbachev's threat to delay a second summit meeting. ABC stressed the enormous challenges Gorbachev was facing, particularly at home. NBC's report by Steve Hurst seemed to create a sense of drama about Gorbachev's attempts to remake Soviet society. NBC used their material on this story more creatively than their competitors. For example, they strung together eight quick shots of small groups of delegates in Gorbachev's audience to illustrate those being criticized: "His own workers, bureaucrats, policemen, doctors, nurses, shopkeepers, they all received stern warnings: to shape up or lose their jobs." As these underperformers were scattered throughout the Party Congress delegates, so are they present throughout Soviet society, the report seems to say. Panning down from an outdoor television screen on Moscow's Kalinin Street, Hurst's report used a medium-length

²² ABC, February 24, 1986, Walter Rodgers reporting from Moscow. Although Gorbachev did not mention Brezhnev's name, the object of his criticism was quite clear.

²³ The networks themselves helped to reinforce Gorbachev's role as an established figure in world politics in that neither CBS nor NBC ran a caption identifying Gorbachev when he first appeared on screen.

shot of Muscovites shuffling down the street.²⁴ Dressed in bulky grey coats and matching fur hats, Hurst created the effect of downtrodden masses for whom Gorbachev's reforms would be most welcome. At the end of his report, Hurst characterized Gorbachev's speech as "a strong, impressive performance." But Hurst undercut this impression with images. During his narration, Hurst continued, "But by the end, even the relatively youthful Gorbachev had a frog in his throat." Hurst then cut to a close shot of Gorbachev applauding his audience while they applauded him, as European speakers are known to do. As Gorbachev then looked down at his watch, Hurst froze the shot. The image of the leader looking at the time stayed on screen as Hurst's narration explained, "He seemed glad to have all that talking behind him." By adding the freeze frame, Hurst overemphasized this minor action, making Gorbachev seem impatient and plebeian. Both CBS and ABC also undermined Gorbachev's image by showing the General Secretary playing on the Kalinin Street outdoor screen with no one watching.

In retrospect, however, they may have underplayed the story. Gorbachev's speech to the Party Congress may well have marked the beginning of what became known as

²⁴ All three network reports show this same outdoor television screen. Rather than illustrating a lack of creativity, I believe that this again illustrates how the Soviets tightly controlled images. I theorize that the Soviets granted the networks permission to film at this location, and that the image-starved Moscow correspondents seized any opportunity for new film.

perestroika. Many of the ideas for transforming Soviet society which manifested themselves over the following few years can be found in that rambling speech. "If you look back at his speech to the Party Congress in 1986, some of the ideas about the foreign policy side and arms control were there in coate form," explained Condoleeza Rice.²⁵ The speech created a good deal of excitement among the correspondents who were able to read between the lines of the speech. "If this guy meant even a third of what he was saying he wanted to do, it was going to be an incredible turnaround in the Soviet Union," recalled correspondent Frank Bourgholtzer.²⁶ But the story as played by U.S. television was that the Soviet leader gave an important speech, not that he had reached a watershed. That television missed the story was in part due to a breaking story in the Philippines, where Corazon Aquino was elected President, sending Ferdinand Marcos into exile. The Philippines was the major story of the week, relegating the Party Congress to the end of all three network's broadcasts. ABC's relative emphasis on Soviet affairs is illustrated by the placement of the Party Congress as the day's third item, beginning 15:20 into the broadcast, as opposed to 19:10 into the NBC broadcast, where it was the fifth item and at 18:00

²⁵ Interview with Condoleeza Rice, May 16, 1991.

²⁶ Interview with Frank Bourgholtzer, November 25, 1990.

minutes into the CBS broadcast, where it was eighth in the lineup.

ABC continued substantial coverage of Soviet affairs as the Party Congress progressed. The network ran 12 pieces on Soviet affairs from February 26 through March 6, including lengthy hard news reports on the Congress, analytical interviews with policy makers and commentators, and additional human interest stories as part of "Inside the Other Side." In the same time period, for comparison, CBS ran four reports and NBC only two.²⁷ With the insurrection in the Philippines happening at the same time, to which ABC was also giving lengthy coverage, ABC seemed to see the time as one in which to bolster its reputation for covering foreign affairs.

Many of ABC's numerous reports continued to offer conflicting information about Gorbachev. Walter Rodgers' report on February 26th, for instance, reported Soviet citizens' favorable response to Gorbachev's criticisms. But Walters implied that the leadership itself was immune from criticism: "It's impossible to say how far criticism will now go in a society which still has political police, the KGB." After Foreign Minister Shevardnadze gave a speech particularly critical of the U.S. on February 28th, ABC's Rodgers concluded that Gorbachev was to blame for the Soviet

²⁷ In terms of total time, ABC dedicated 44 minutes, CBS 13 minutes, and NBC 3 minutes 30 seconds from February 26th through March 6th.

hard line. "Mr. Gorbachev himself has avoided this anti-American invective, but it could not have happened without his approval," explained Rodgers. And upon ending his week of anchoring from Moscow, Jennings concluded that Gorbachev though enthusiastic faced an uphill battle:

Mikhail Gorbachev this week has formally proclaimed a fresh start. And the spirits of many Soviets we have listened to have been perceptibly lifted. But Soviet society by its very nature has long been inhospitable to change. Reform, as defined by Mikhail Gorbachev, does not mean political change.²⁸

ABC brought commentator George Will to Moscow for the first time, and paired him with Radio Moscow commentator Vladimir Pozner for two "Point of View" discussions. These conversations continued the argument about Gorbachev's intentions, with Will taking a conservative, anti-Gorbachev line and Pozner explaining the Soviet system and, to some degree, defending the Soviet leader.

Pozner's involvement in the coverage of Gorbachev is worthy of note. Born to a Soviet father and French mother in France but reared in New York City, Pozner had a unique perspective on Soviet-American relations. Because of his familiarity with Soviet politics and his fluent English, he became a source for the American television networks and was often a guest on the Sunday political talk shows. Pozner believes that he became widely quoted because there were so few Soviets willing to appear on U.S. television:

²⁸ ABC, February 28, 1986.

It was a very dangerous thing to do, because you were being watched both by the Soviets in the [Washington] Embassy and in the U.N. Mission, the diplomats, the KGB people who were out there, and so on...I wanted to do it because I had a profound interest in bridging the gap between the two countries that I am part of for better or worse.²⁹

Pozner said that the Soviet government allowed his appearances to continue because Pozner added to the Soviet media effort. He believes that it was Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin who saw that Pozner could help improve the Soviet image:

When he saw a Soviet come on who did not have this horrific Russian accent that tended to reinforce the stereotype, who looked like a normal human being--wasn't fat, jowly and all the rest of it--he saw that this was from the viewpoint of propaganda a very effective thing, he supported it.³⁰

Although he was never an official spokesman for Gorbachev, Pozner was perceived as a spokesman by many viewers in the United States. This was bolstered by the occasional on-screen misidentification by the networks of Pozner as a "Soviet spokesman."³¹

The mixed signals on Gorbachev continued through the last day of the Communist Party Congress. There were several positive signs. On that day, March 6th, Gorbachev delighted reformers when he announced the appointment of a woman to the Politburo for the first time since the

²⁹ Interview with Vladimir Pozner, November 22, 1990.

³⁰ ibid.

³¹ See for example NBC, October 13, 1986.

Khrushchev era. He also announced his recall of veteran diplomat Dobrynin from Washington to serve on the powerful Central Committee Secretariat. As Walter Rodgers' report flashed photos of Dobrynin with American Presidents from Kennedy to Reagan, viewers got the feeling that Dobrynin was another Soviet with whom the U.S. could do business. And in his closing benediction, Gorbachev chose not rhetoric, but clear-spoken humility. "Thank you for the good work and the new work to come," he said, smiling warmly. But other images from the Congress' last day were more troublesome. First, ABC opened its report with Gorbachev announcing his own reelection as General Secretary. This act might have appeared somewhat odd, even somewhat dictatorial, to American's democratically trained audience. The Congress ended with Gorbachev leading the audience in the singing of the "Internationale," the socialist hymn. Although it was visually interesting, this image could potentially have created a negative image by reminding audiences of the Communist indoctrination that Soviet citizens have to endure. Ironically, Boris Yelstin, who had recently been appointed to the Politburo, stood prominently behind Gorbachev during the singing of the Internationale. This was one of the few harmonious moments between Gorbachev and Yelstin which would be shown by U.S. television during the following five years.

c. Beginning to Open

Despite ABC's presence at the Communist Party Congress, CBS was intent on maintaining a strong presence in Soviet affairs reporting. On February 26th, CBS unveiled a series on the Soviet Union to counter the one on ABC. The first segment of "Behind Party Lines" focused on the economic problems Gorbachev was trying to address. CBS used a mixture of its own new film and Soviet television footage to illustrate the problems of some of the U.S.S.R.'s smaller cities: black marketeers, a shortage of consumer goods, and shoddy workmanship. Interestingly, CBS' Tom Fenton explained how closely guarded the CBS crew was when they were permitted to take pictures in the Russian towns of Suzdal and Vladimir. "These are the images the authorities wanted CBS News to record," Fenton explained. "Everywhere there were watchers to control what we taped." After filming a production line at a tractor factory, Fenton warned viewers that they were witnessing "a show orchestrated by this plant official, who motioned for the assembly line to slow down back to normal as we left." As tightly managed as the images might have been, Fenton was able to end his report with an image representing devastating backwardness: old women washing laundry in a half-frozen stream, the temperature reportedly ten degrees below zero. The conclusion viewers were to draw was that Soviet internal problems would take more than "a new five

year plan and grandiose statistics to change." This story also demonstrated to the CBS correspondents that Soviet authorities would take time to learn to accommodate American television. To get permission to film at the tourist towns of Vladimir and Suzdal, not far from Moscow, CBS had to implore the state-run television agency, Gosteleradio, to make the necessary arrangements. The agency, which was supposed to assist the American networks in filming stories, was unwilling to grant them permission to shoot anything, according to CBS's Wyatt Andrews. "Vladimir and Suzdal, which were accessible by bus loads of tourists, was still the absolute extent of the rope that Gosteleradio thought it had," said Andrews. At that time, "The best they could do was get me to a tourist spot."³² Gosteleradio was unwilling to give the American networks too much because the agency feared criticism from the central authorities, said Andrews.

This was not CBS's first report on Soviet internal change. A few days earlier, on February 21, CBS had run a piece by Andrews on Gorbachev's use of the Soviet press to expose corruption. Again, taking most of its footage right off Soviet television--still the Americans' best source of footage--Andrews showed lazy workers being caught, a corrupt car repair shop being exposed, and an overzealous minister being grilled. In one scene, in a public relations move worthy of Gorbachev himself, another minister pulled the

³² Interview with Wyatt Andrews, May 23, 1991.

sole of a baby shoe out of his pocket to demonstrate poor soviet workmanship. The footage had the feel of a 60 Minutes expose, with hands being held over the camera lens at times to inhibit filming. These improvements in reporting came directly from the General Secretary, said Andrews. "Mikhail Gorbachev wants the sleeping bureaucrats, the inefficient, the corrupt to wake up and the press has been unleashed to help the cause," the reporter explained. But Andrews made it clear that the press was not truly free. "The journalists, enjoying this new license, know who they have to please," Andrews explained as he panned across a Soviet television control room to the wall on which hung Gorbachev's portrait. This report, like many others during this time period, cast Gorbachev in two different lights at once: as a reformer trying to improve his system, and as a product of a totalitarian system he was trying to maintain.

A week after the Communist Party Congress ended, Gorbachev celebrated the first anniversary of his coming to power. Only ABC marked the occasion, running a two and a quarter minute story by diplomatic correspondent John McWethy. McWethy's story recaptured the high points of Gorbachev's career, showing him with Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, mourning Chernenko, talking with Soviet workers, and meeting with Reagan in Geneva. McWethy turned to experts to interpret the year's events, and again, they disagreed as to Gorbachev's effect. Amos Jordan of the

Center for Strategic and International Studies was the most optimistic in his assessment: "A new wind is blowing in Moscow and that indeed America has to be responsive if it's not going to lose its position in world opinion." Dick Cheney, then a Congressman from Wyoming, was pessimistic. When asked whether Gorbachev has altered the substance, rather than merely the style, of Soviet-American relations, Cheney replied, "I think maybe it's affected the atmospherics, maybe some of the symbols that are involved in the relationship, but substantively I don't see that anything has really changed." McWethy outlined some of the issues which were then separating the superpowers. First "arms control," illustrated with footage of a missile being fired from a ground silo. Then "hotspots"--a rather nondescript way to describe the fighting in Afghanistan and Nicaragua, illustrated by green-fatigued soldiers in battle. Finally "intrigue," summarizing numerous spying allegations, represented by a picture of the United Nations. McWethy's conclusion remained pessimistic. "So active and dramatic as Gorbachev's first year has been, all of the movement has had almost no impact on U.S. policy and probably will not in the near future."

This is a noteworthy piece because it demonstrates two phenomenon. The first is the ability of positive images to overpower negative words: Ronald Reagan's advisors were among the first to realize this fact and to use it to their

political advantage. The principal rule of politics in the modern era, they reasoned, was that "the visual wins over the verbal; the eye predominates over the ear; sight beats sound."³³ Second, the piece shows how network reporters judged Gorbachev by the standards of a Western, not a Soviet, politician. By this, I mean that the networks consistently expected quick results from Gorbachev. Yet because of the size and scope of the governmental apparatus, quick action was extremely difficult to achieve in the Soviet Union. This would prove a particularly difficult problem for Gorbachev during the disastrous events which would follow later in 1986.

Following the end of the Communist Party Congress, the Soviets and Americans returned to their battle over arms control issues. On March 13, only CBS carried Gorbachev's announcement that the Soviets would continue their ban on nuclear tests as long as the Americans did not test. All three networks carried Reagan's offer on the following day to share a new kind of technology called "Cortex" with the Soviets which could detect underground nuclear tests. "Mr. Reagan said this system could lead to U.S. acceptance of two unratified test limitation treaties," explained NBC.³⁴ Before the Soviets could respond, the U.S. tested a nuclear device in the Nevada desert which according to NBC was 10

³³ Smith, The Power Game, p. 407.

³⁴ NBC, March 14, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The story lead ABC's and NBC's broadcasts that Saturday, March 22 (CBS had no broadcast that day). Both networks emphasized Congress' virulent opposition to the test. "I don't know what kind of macho game plan we're engaged in, but I do know one thing. It is not going to lead the world closer to peace," complained Senator Mark Hatfield (R-OR).³⁵ But the administration's response seemed geared as much to Gorbachev's image as to the substance of arms control. "The Soviets have been far more active in the press rooms around the world than they have been in the negotiating room in Geneva," said Kenneth Adelman, head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.³⁶ The Soviet response to the U.S. nuclear test was delayed by a more aggressive American military action: fighting against Libya in the Gulf of Sidra. Gorbachev decried the fighting, asserting that the U.S. again was showing its "imperial bandit face."³⁷

But Gorbachev did not wait long to press the U.S. again on arms control. On March 29, he took the unusual step of taking over the first half of the Soviet evening news broadcast to speak out about the arms race and to propose a new summit meeting. "I am ready to meet President Reagan in the nearest future in London or Rome, or any other European

³⁵ NBC, March 25, 1986, Robin Lloyd reporting from Washington.

³⁶ ibid.

³⁷ See all three networks, March 26, 1986.

capital that will agree to receive us, in order to reach agreement on this question," Gorbachev said. The announcement started the ABC and NBC broadcasts that day; again, it was a Saturday and CBS did not carry news that night.

ABC's and NBC's reports varied dramatically in their style. NBC's 75 second report contained only three shots: reporter Frank Bourgholtzer opened and closed the report from NBC's Moscow offices, where he spoke seated in front of three video monitors, while the bulk of the report showed an excerpt from Gorbachev's televised speech. Gorbachev sat seated at wooden table with fancy green wallpaper behind him, speaking from notes as Bourgholtzer translated. ABC's report by Dean Reynolds was far more fancy. It used 10 shots overall, only two of which showed Gorbachev making his statement. Reynolds jazzed up the report with footage from both Soviet television and ABC's files with such images as a U.S. missile test, Soviet aircraft carriers, and the Superpower leaders meeting in Geneva. Reagan quickly rejected Gorbachev's proposal, with administration officials labeling the offer "a propaganda ploy."³⁸ Officials worried openly at the time that Gorbachev would renege on his agreement made at the Geneva meeting to come to the United States in 1986 for the next Superpower summit.

³⁸ NBC, March 29, 1986, Andrea Mitchell reporting from Santa Barbara.

Getting that second summit in the U.S. appeared to be very important to Reagan, and the administration seemed to use television as a weapon in its lobbying effort to encourage a U.S. meeting. In NBC's follow-up piece on Gorbachev's summit offer on March 31, for example, administration officials criticized Gorbachev for waffling on his offer to come see Reagan. Why Gorbachev made this new offer is "a mystery to us. If Mr. Gorbachev--I'm sure he's anxious to meet us he says--why doesn't he accept that, and let's get a date set and let's get working," said Shultz.³⁹ Reporter Chris Wallace used several graphics with a flag motif to represent the split on the summit issue, even taking a photo of Reagan and Gorbachev from Geneva and then graphically ripping it half, moving the two leaders further away from one another. Wallace, in the on-camera close to the report, repeated the administration's claim that "time is running out for the summer summit." Wallace paraphrased Press Secretary Larry Speakes, who said the Soviets should allow the superpowers "to start planning and stop posturing." A summer summit, the administration argued, would help Republican candidates in the fall elections. This pressure seemed somewhat misplaced, because summits do not necessarily require four months to plan the way the meeting in Geneva did. The eventual agreement to

³⁹ NBC, March 31, 1986, Chris Wallace reporting from Santa Barbara. Shultz' remarks were excepted from his appearance on NBC's Today Show.

meet in Reykjavik, Iceland later in 1986--arranged in under two weeks--would bear that out.

Throughout the month of April, the two sides continued to battle over arms control. Gorbachev took a series of highly publicized steps, some of which seemed to help the process while some appeared to stifle it. On April 4th, for example, Gorbachev met in Moscow with a Congressional delegation led by the head of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Dante Fascell. Given Congress' opposition to U.S. nuclear tests, Gorbachev potentially had much to gain from the meeting. Publicly, the delegates revealed only that Gorbachev said he had no preconditions for a summit meeting. On April 8th, Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin went to the White House for a farewell meeting with Reagan. Gorbachev had promoted Dobrynin during the Party Congress to a powerful post on the Central Committee. The meeting turned into a summit of its own, lasting 75 minutes. "To the great relief of the White House and after months of wavering, the Soviets said today they do want another summit this year in Washington," reported Leslie Stahl of CBS. Gorbachev himself reiterated the same message, first in an appearance at a Soviet auto plant which was shown on that nation's television and second in a speech to the nation, saying that he wanted a summit, but one where progress on arms control was possible. Serious summit planning was to

begin with a mid-May visit to the U.S. by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze.

However, progress toward the summit stalled when the U.S. attacked Libya on April 17th, and Gorbachev abruptly canceled Shevardnadze's trip in protest. The cancellation caught the administration by surprise. "The administration was focusing on terrorism, teaching Qadhafi a lesson," explained NBC's Marvin Kalb. "They were simply not focusing on summit ramifications. They simply assumed that the summit would not be affected by any action they took against Libya."⁴⁰ Gorbachev spoke out about the Libya attack three days later, speaking at the East German Communist Party Congress. Each of the three networks described Gorbachev's comments in brief, and their interpretations provide an interesting way of demonstrating the networks' differences. ABC's story was the most brief, providing a summary of the General Secretary's remarks with little interpretation. The report included Gorbachev's exact words although they were not put in quotations:

The Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev said today the American attack on Libya was a return to the laws of the jungle. Speaking at an East German communist party congress, Mr. Gorbachev warned the United States was pushing the world to the nuclear brink.

The report on NBC was longer still, with a more detailed account of Gorbachev's remarks. The longer length of the

⁴⁰ NBC, April 15, 1986, Marvin Kalb reporting from Washington.

report allowed NBC to interpret Gorbachev's comments, and the "spin" of this report was rather positive:

And Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev made his first public comments today on the American raid on Libya. U.S. officials say that they were surprised by his lack of sharp rhetoric. The Kremlin leader, speaking at the East German Party Congress said, the air strike only proved the bankruptcy of U.S. policy in that region. He added that the bombing, continued threats against Nicaragua and the U.S. atomic tests would do direct damage, in his words, to East/West relations.

Although NBC said the comments lacked sharp rhetoric, CBS implied just the opposite. By quoting Gorbachev's exact words twice (as audible to the audience and three times in the transcript), CBS emphasized the toughness of the Soviet leader's words:

At a Communist Party congress in East Germany today, Soviet leader Gorbachev was playing both sides of the public relations coin. In one part of the speech, he accused the U.S. of resorting to quote "jungle laws" in ordering air strikes against Libya and "pushing people to the nuclear brink." In the same speech, Gorbachev proposed what he called "significant cuts in all types of conventional arms and troops in Europe." That's a quote. U.S.-Soviet talks aimed at doing that have been stalemated for years. The White House response to Gorbachev, both his attack and his offer amount to posturing.

CBS's report used some value-laden words in drawing its conclusions. First, by suggesting that Gorbachev was "playing both sides of the public relations coin," CBS implied that Gorbachev was merely talking for effect. Second, by citing the White House's accusation of "posturing," CBS again insinuated that Gorbachev was

insincere in his intentions. These sorts of conclusions often appeared in CBS's reporting of the news.

As he travelled through East Germany, Gorbachev continued to decry the attack on Libya while still signaling his willingness to meet with Reagan. On April 20th, all three networks carried Gorbachev's assertion that the U.S. was "poisoning the atmosphere" for a summit but that Gorbachev was still considering such a meeting. The next day, the networks again carried Gorbachev's comment at an auto factory that both the Warsaw Pact and NATO should be abolished. CBS's Rather called this, "a stream of proposals and p.r." Gorbachev might have continued the same kind of diplomatic tap dance with Reagan on arms control issues for some time were it not for a nuclear accident which stole his attention.

D. An Accident at Chernobyl

On Saturday, April 26th, there was an accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, located about 80 miles from the Ukrainian city of Kiev. As a radioactive cloud from the accident spread over northern Europe, there was no way for the Soviets to hide the fact that something had occurred. On Monday, April 28th, the Soviets made a public statement. ABC showed in its report the low-key announcement by a Soviet newscaster, who explained:

An official announcement from the Council of Ministers. There has been an accident at the

Chernobyl atomic power station. One of the reactors was damaged. The consequences of the accident are being taken care of. Help is being given to the victims of the accident. A government commission has been set up.

The networks attributed the quick disclosure not only to the fact that the accident was detected by the West, but also to Gorbachev's leadership. "You can be sure that the decision to disclose was made at the very highest level undoubtedly by Gorbachev himself and probably it took several days for the Soviet leaders to decide how to handle it," explained Sovietologist Thane Gustafson of Stanford University.⁴¹ One of CBS's then-Soviet Affairs consultants, Jonathan Sanders, sat for an on-air interview with Dan Rather that night, and he concurred that, "I do think it [the quick admission] is in light of the Gorbachev way of doing things."⁴² This praise of Gorbachev's way of handling the accident, though, did not last.

Within three days of the confirmation of the accident, all three networks ran pieces harshly criticizing Gorbachev's handling of the Chernobyl disaster. Gorbachev had not yet spoken out about the accident, and would in fact wait more than two weeks before making his first statement about Chernobyl. Sergei Grigoriev, who later served as one of Gorbachev's spokesman, explained Gorbachev's silence by

⁴¹ ABC, April 28, 1986, Roger Peterson reporting from Washington.

⁴² CBS, April 28, 1986.

saying that, "I think he was misinformed by his own bureaucrats, first of all, about Chernobyl and second, he himself was scared like shit."⁴³ Gorbachev advisor Georgi Arbatov agreed, asserting, "I am pretty sure that not even Gorbachev was given the whole truth."⁴⁴ I suspect that Gorbachev's decision to maintain silence was in some way strategic, aimed at deflecting responsibility for Chernobyl. I term this Gorbachev's seventh key interaction with the press. Gorbachev could have used the press strategically by speaking out earlier and, as I have said, by traveling to the Ukraine to make his statement. On the other hand, the situation was extremely complicated, and Gorbachev may have been extremely wise to act conservatively and to avoid publicity until he had firm information.

No matter what the reason, his initial silence was sharply criticized. "The nuclear disaster has severely tarnished his reputation and image," concluded NBC's Marvin Kalb.⁴⁵ Gorbachev's positive image in the West "has now been blown away by Soviet silence on the scope of the radiation danger," explained CBS's Dan Rather.⁴⁶ "One casualty of the Chernobyl accident could be Mikhail Gorbachev's so-called charm offensive," said ABC's Rick

⁴³ Interview with Sergei Grigoriev, November 8, 1991.

⁴⁴ Interview with Georgi Arbatov, August 6, 1991.

⁴⁵ NBC, April 30, 1986.

⁴⁶ CBS, May 1, 1986.

Indefurth.⁴⁷ Despite the same basic thesis, the three networks' reports differed in numerous ways. Kalb's report on NBC painted two tableaux for comparison. One was a portrait of Gorbachev's first year, illustrated by footage of Gorbachev's major foreign policy accomplishments--his meeting with Reagan in Geneva--and his major domestic accomplishment--his meetings with groups of Soviet citizens and workers that won over Gorbachev's constituents. The second portrait, however, was of a world enraged by the Chernobyl accident. Kalb used a special video effect of sliding each shot visual to the side of the screen rather than breaking cleanly between shots to increase the feeling of panning the globe for reaction. His report went from Capitol Hill to a European defense ministers meeting in Venice to Downing Street in London to survey the growing anger toward Gorbachev. Kalb's final assessment was that Gorbachev was retreating from his new style, and taking a traditional, close-mouthed view in this time of crisis. "Despite his stylish manner, his actions suggest a leader intent on coping with his many problems in an old-fashioned Soviet way," Kalb explained. The notion of intractable Soviet tradition was underlined by the report's footage of low-tech Soviet industry and February's Communist Party Congress.

⁴⁷ ABC, May 1, 1986.

Rick Indefurth of ABC used the same kind of special visual effect as Kalb to recapture Gorbachev's first year-- showing the Soviet leader with Reagan, French President Mitterand, and during his Leningrad walkabout of May, 1985-- and to go around the world for reaction to the Soviet silence. Indefurth's report, unlike the others, stressed the damage to Soviet agriculture and industry, using footage of crops from Soviet television and from ABC's files for illustration. The accident threatens "to undermine Gorbachev's top priority, to modernize his sluggish Soviet economy," the reporter explained. To emphasize the weakness of the Soviet position of silence on the accident, Indefurth used an excerpt from ABC's show Nightline with Soviet official Eugene Pozdnyakov, who asserted that the initial silence was due to the fact that, "It [the accident] happened on Saturday and the governments of proper countries are usually on holiday on weekends." It was a deliberate choice to use an excerpt from one of ABC's own shows rather than footage from that day's testimony before Congress of a senior Soviet diplomat. "It was the straightforward, fairly public philosophy of Roone's [Arledge, the ABC News President] that the job of any ABC broadcast is to promote other ABC shows," explained Joan Richman, a CBS News producer.⁴⁸ Richman said that ABC was the leader in developing this kind of self-promotion. "It is only very,

⁴⁸ Interview with Joan Richman, February 21, 1989.

very recently that you've started to see this on other networks," she explained.

Bruce Morton's report on CBS was the most critical of Gorbachev, in terms of both text and visuals. "Gorbachev's image of openness is shattered now," Morton explained.⁴⁹ He too subtly plugged one of CBS's past stories--the February 21st piece on the new openness on Soviet television--when using a great deal of colloquial language he described Gorbachev's recent transformation:

Under Mikhail Gorbachev, that [fear] was supposed to change. Openness was in. The leader pressed the flesh like Western politicians. The Soviet evening news aired consumer complaints, reported on shoddy production. But when this week's fallout began to spread, new ways went out the window. The lid came down, as it did when the Soviets shot down a Korean airliner, the way it did during an earlier nuclear accident in the 1950s.

Morton used footage of crews combing the beaches of Sakhalin Island for debris from the Korean Airlines (KAL) jet shot down by the Soviets in September, 1983 to accompany this text. Even though the KAL incident occurred before Gorbachev's rise to power, it provided viewers with a reminded of how tough the Soviets could be. As another comparison, Morton included footage of the explosion of the U.S. space shuttle Challenger from January, 1986 and of the hearings that followed that disaster. "The United States, faced with a public catastrophe, stayed public--open

⁴⁹ CBS, May 1, 1986, Bruce Morton reporting from Washington.

investigations by government and news media which embarrassed the space agency, but cleared the air," Morton explained. Even the fairness-minded inclusion of Soviet diplomat Vitaly Churkin's explanation to Congress of some of the reasons for the Soviet silence could not overcome Morton's powerful visual analogies.

CBS and NBC followed the Chernobyl story rather closely in the two weeks before Gorbachev made a public statement on the matter, but there was not much news to cover. On May 3d, both networks reported that Gorbachev sent two personal envoys to Chernobyl to assess the situation. NBC's full-length report said that the two most senior officials under Gorbachev, Yegor Ligachev and Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov, were sent to oversee rescue operations. "The Kremlin rarely, if ever, reports the activities of such high-level officials," explained Steve Hurst. He implied that this trip was being announced to placate the West, because reports of Ligachev and Ryzhkov's activities "could do nothing but increase fears among the [Soviet] population they were not being told the complete story." Hurst's report marks the first appearance of Boris Yeltsin, then head of the Moscow Communist Party Committee, as a news source on the U.S. evening news.⁵⁰ In West Germany, Yelstin revealed that the

⁵⁰ As the American networks need time to agree on an anglicanization of Gorbachev's name, so did they try several spellings of Yeltsin's name, spelled EAbUUH in cyrillic. NBC spelled his name "Yelzin" in this transcript.

accident was caused by human error, and had caused residents to stay away from the area of the plant. That day, television covered President Reagan's weekly radio address, in which Reagan criticized the Soviet silence and said that they owed the world an explanation of precisely what happened at Chernobyl. On May 11th, CBS carried Soviet television's first pictures inside the damaged plant, where the danger had finally been contained. That day, both networks reported that Gorbachev himself didn't find out about the accident until two days after it happened. This time, CBS's report contained more detail: they reported that Valentin Falin, head of the Novosti News Agency, told a German magazine that the early reports which Gorbachev did receive were incomplete and incorrect. Surprisingly, ABC gave no coverage to Gorbachev in the weeks that preceded his public statement on the disaster.

Finally, after more than two weeks of silence, Gorbachev spoke out about Chernobyl on May 14, and his appearance on the Soviet news lead all three U.S. evening news broadcasts. Gorbachev revealed new information, and used the platform to press for arms control:

- o Gorbachev sharply criticized Western governments and the Western press. "What we were up against was a vast accumulation of lies, unscrupulous and malicious in the extreme," he said.
- o He extended the Soviet unilateral nuclear test ban until August 6th (the anniversary of the U.S. nuclear attack on Hiroshima, not coincidentally).
- o Gorbachev again invited Reagan to a summit meeting regarding the banning of nuclear tests in a European capital or in Hiroshima.

- o Gorbachev explained how the accident at Chernobyl happened, with a power surge causing a hydrogen bubble, which then exploded.
- o He released new casualty figures--9 dead, 299 injured.
- o He thanked the Soviet workers and American doctors who helped control the damage from the accident.

As usual, ABC's report was straightforward and relatively long at 2 minutes 45 seconds. Using more than 80 seconds of Gorbachev's translated remarks, Dean Reynold's report concentrated on relaying Gorbachev's many admissions. Reynolds relied on film from Soviet television for most of his footage, showing Gorbachev speaking at his usual wooden table before a green wallpapered wall. The report also showed the burned out reactor and smiling repair crews. But Reynolds concluded that Gorbachev waited too long to speak out. "It was a speech designed to calm Soviet fears and end Western doubts," he said, "but because it took the Kremlin leadership more than two weeks to face up to the problem, it may be a long time before those twin goals can be accomplished." CBS's Wyatt Andrews called it "Gorbachev at his public relation's best." The textual content of Andrews' report was similar to the one on ABC, but CBS relied somewhat more on graphics and less on Gorbachev's actual words. Andrews cited only 22 seconds of Gorbachev's translated remarks--about a quarter as much as ABC. To back up Gorbachev's claims about the maliciousness of the Western press, Andrews paraded the front pages of some recent New York City tabloids across the screen. The Daily News heralded: "Thousands Flee Nuke Nightmare," "It'll Burn for

Weeks," and "Nuclear Disaster." The New York Post screamed: "Mass Grave" and "Russians Play While Chernobyl Burns." showing these kind of sensational headlines, which backed up Gorbachev's complaint so well, may have given viewers more faith in the Soviet leader's statement. NBC's report by Steve Hurst asserted that Gorbachev's appearance on Soviet television was historic because it was the first one to be announced in advance. Hurst's report quoted only 36 seconds of Gorbachev's remarks--half as much as ABC--and relied more on flashy graphics than did the other network's reports. Rather than showing the visually boring head shot of the Soviet leader, Hurst used a colorful graphic to illustrate how the accident happened. In another graphic, NBC combined a picture of Gorbachev as seen on a television, a picture of the Chernobyl reactor, and a giant atom, over which the reporter summarized Gorbachev's remarks. Following Hurst's report, anchor Tom Brokaw summarized the Reagan administration's reaction to the speech. Rather than a simple head shot, NBC made the unusual switch to a full screen graphic of an American flag as Brokaw spoke.

After Gorbachev's public statement, U.S. television news coverage quickly turned away from Chernobyl and back to Superpower relations. The networks' focused their attention on Chernobyl only one more day, when each ran a follow-up story mentioning Gorbachev's meeting with the American Dr. Robert Gale, who performed bone marrow transplants on

several of those injured by the accident. There were brief mentions of Chernobyl again, but never again sustained media coverage. The crisis had ended. There were several reasons for this dramatic slowdown in coverage: little hard news was available, no one reachable by telephone knew anything, and access to the area was severely limited. As CBS correspondent Wyatt Andrews recalled:

The pressure to report was immense on me. But I not only could not confirm that [thousands had really died] but I couldn't get much information from any of the people we were able to reach. And forget about going there. Forget about going there, or even to Kiev, which we wanted to try to do.⁵¹

The next piece of hard news did not appear on U.S. television until May 28, when CBS carried Novosti's report that the injury count from the accident may have been three times the number announced. A month after the accident, CBS's Wyatt Andrews was allowed to visit the Ukraine after he complained bitterly to one of Lomeiko's aides about the lack of access to Chernobyl. Although he was not allowed to go to near the reactor, Andrews was allowed to go to Kiev which was "a city in utter turmoil. Streets were being washed every 30 minutes. There were announcements telling kids not to play in the dirt," Andrews said. "We got pictures of people hosing down kindergardeners during their

⁵¹ Interview with Wyatt Andrews, May 23, 1991.

play period."⁵² After the bad press from CBS, Kiev was closed off again for several months.

E. Stragglings Towards a Summit

As the Chernobyl incident continued to die down, Gorbachev turned his attention toward his Eastern European allies. On June 8th, he arrived in Budapest for a Warsaw Pact summit. Gorbachev must have been worried about his image in the world at the time, and probably realized that a celebratory arrival in Budapest might have been inappropriate after a national disaster. At the General Secretary's request, his arrival in Hungary was marked by "a low-key reception--no speeches, no bands."⁵³ Gorbachev, as usual, tried to capitalize on any opportunity, and while touring Budapest he spoke about the lessons of Chernobyl. "He said safety precautions are being strengthened at all Soviet plants now and he called for greater international cooperation in dealing with nuclear accidents," said CBS.⁵⁴ The Warsaw Pact summit resulted in substance as well: a proposal to reduce conventional forces in Europe by 25 percent. The U.S. networks interpreted the proposal as another of Gorbachev's maneuvers to influence world opinion. "This gives Soviet leader Gorbachev still one more arms

⁵² ibid.

⁵³ CBS, June 8, 1986, Susan Spencer anchoring.

⁵⁴ CBS, June 9, 1986, Dan Rather anchoring.

control proposal on the table reinforcing a growing notion in Europe that it's the East, not the West, which is really interested in reducing arms," explained ABC's Barrie Dunsmore.⁵⁵ To increase the pressure on the U.S., the Soviets followed the proposal with one of their newer press management techniques, the press conference abroad. As ABC's John McWethy explained, "The fight to win the arms control public relations battle escalated today. First two Soviet diplomats in Washington held a rare press conference."⁵⁶ To up the ante even more, Gorbachev then made public part of the Soviet's most recent arms control proposals, which suggested cuts in all weapons systems but would allow Star Wars testing in the lab. This three step approach brought a response from the Americans. "The Reagan administration is giving this proposal very serious consideration. There has been, you may notice, none of the usual public analysis," said ABC.⁵⁷ Moreover, Reagan sent a letter to Gorbachev again to try to move forward on the planning for a summit. "He wants a summit, and I want a summit and I believe it's gonna take place," said the President.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ ABC, June 11, 1986, Barrie Dunsmore reporting from Budapest.

⁵⁶ ABC, June 13, 1986, John McWethy reporting from Washington.

⁵⁷ ABC, June 16, 1986, Peter Jennings anchoring.

⁵⁸ CBS, June 15, 1991, Gary Schuster reporting from Washington.

Gorbachev continued to apply pressure through public diplomacy at the end of the month, when he travelled to Warsaw for the Polish Communist Party Congress. The Soviet leader's appearance at the Congress, during which "all of what he said was critical of the United States"⁵⁹, was covered by all three U.S. networks. On this occasion, the images used again carried an interesting message. NBC's 1 minute 50 second report by Brian Stewart, for example, started off with nine shots of the Party Congress meeting. These were reminiscent of the Soviet Party Congress, with Gorbachev speaking before a packed hall, receiving enthusiastic applause from the audience as he criticized his superpower opponent. These shots had the same connotation as had the visuals of the Moscow Party meeting--that Gorbachev was part of a powerful, domineering political system. Gorbachev's image was probably not served well by the shot showing him kissing Polish strongman Jaruzelski--a suspicious looking man in dark glasses--on the cheek in a gesture of support. Stewart dedicated the second half of his report to scenes from everyday life in Poland, showing soldiers on the street to keep order, pro-democracy protestors, and giant outdoor church services with democratic overtones. As he closed in on the faces of older women standing and praying, Stewart tried to explain the nation's repressive political situation, where the popular

⁵⁹ NBC, June 30, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

solidarity movement had been banned. "The Party still seems deeply unsure of itself," explained Stewart. "Poland's leaders are lost in the sad stalemate, still at odds with most Poles." Gorbachev was responsible in part for the repression in Poland, according to Stewart. "Gorbachev's visit does seem largely designed as a morale booster for a tired Polish leadership," he said. Reagan responded strongly. He began to criticize the latest Soviet proposals, making such quips as "Too much SALT isn't good for you," referring to the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty.⁶⁰ But he continued the diplomatic dialogue with Gorbachev through letters to enhance the prospects of a summit.

On July 1st, Gorbachev seemed to finally agree to a summit meeting. At least that's what CBS and NBC seemed to say in their lead stories. ABC the same night explained that there was another exchange of messages that day between the Superpower leaders and that "it is not altogether clear whether the latest exchange represents any real progress."⁶¹ The reports were spurred by a Moscow press conference in which the deputy foreign minister announced that Shultz and Shevardnadze were in the process of scheduling a meeting, a precursor to any summit meeting. As if to associate himself with this movement towards a possible summit, Gorbachev

⁶⁰ See ABC and NBC, June 30, 1986.

⁶¹ ABC, July 1, 1986, Peter Jennings anchoring.

declared at a Polish factory that he welcomed a meeting, "if Washington will negotiate seriously and responsibly on the problem of disarmament."⁶² Although all three network reports showed the Soviet leader's appearance, their reports focused on the response from Washington. NBC's report in particular, focused on a "secret" White House meeting in which proponents of Star Wars gathered to urge the President not to compromise the weapons system in his negotiations with the Soviets. Its footage, whose shaky quality emphasized the clandestine nature of the meeting, featured the President and members of his inner circle walking into the White House from a parking area. Washington's response to the news from Moscow was to deny that a Shultz-Shevardnadze meeting had been scheduled, and to accuse Gorbachev of mimicking "past Soviet efforts to gain concessions through propaganda tactics."⁶³ But of course, behind the scenes, the Americans were continuing to encourage the movement towards a summit.

As evidenced by Leslie Stahl's report, the Reagan cabinet's division on Star Wars was becoming more public. The networks often portrayed Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger as the head of the group against concessions on SDI and Secretary of State George Shultz as the head of the

⁶² CBS, July 1, 1986, Leslie Stahl reporting from Washington.

⁶³ State Department Spokesman Charles Redman, quoted on NBC, July 1, 1986, by Andrea Mitchell reporting from Washington.

group advocating flexibility. The President was seen as the deciding vote, but as a tie-breaker who could not conclude which way to vote. For example, ABC's John McWethy explained that the latest Soviet arms control offer was sufficiently favorable:

To have touched off a bitter debate between Defense Secretary Weinberger and Secretary of State Shultz about how to respond. The dispute is so deep officials say only the President can resolve this one. And they add until he does there will be no real progress on arms control and no date set for a summit.⁶⁴

NBC's John Chancellor, in his role as commentator, was able to criticize the President for failing to maintain a clear line on Star Wars and for slowing arms control progress:

Much has been going on despite Mr. Reagan's tough talk. His administration is deeply divided on arms control and it's something of a scandal that he won't make it speak with a single voice. But the hard liners at the Pentagon aren't the only players on the American team, and there is still room for a deal with Moscow.⁶⁵

This internal battle attracted the attention of the network reporters during the summer of 1986, in part because the disagreement catered to television's fundamental love of drama. Reagan took until the middle of July before he seem to finally cast his vote in favor of Star Wars. NBC was the first to report that "President Reagan has decided to reject Soyiet proposals for a ban on Star Wars deployment,"

⁶⁴ ABC, July 10, 1986, John McWethy reporting from Washington.

⁶⁵ See NBC, July 16, 1986.

although the statement was given little fanfare by the network.⁶⁶

Gorbachev returned to Moscow from Poland, and the Eastern allies having been addressed the Soviet leader switched his attention to the West. His first action was to open a major international sporting event, the Goodwill Games. Although the event included athletes from 70 nations, the games were attracting particular attention because teams from the Soviet Union and United States would meet for the first time in over 10 years, due to the back-to-back Olympic boycotts in 1980 and 1984. The reports on the first day of the games provided the American networks with some interesting visuals, because the Soviets staged an elaborate opening ceremony, complete with a huge circus and a giant placards section preaching peace. From a private box above the chaos, Gorbachev himself gave the opening address, turning the games into a "political forum"⁶⁷ for encouraging arms control. "We are expecting a serious reply from those in whom responsibility has been vested, and who should at long last listen to the protest against the arms race," the Soviet leader said, as translated by ABC.

Gorbachev was not the only one trying to make a point during the games. The event was co-sponsored by Ted Turner,

⁶⁶ NBC, July 21, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring. The statement was made 19:45 into the broadcast in the introduction to a report by Steve Hurst which I analyze later in this chapter.

⁶⁷ ABC, July 5, 1986, Walter Rodgers reporting from Moscow.

the maverick owner of the Turner Broadcasting System, in an attempt to better international relations. "What we're trying to do here is solve--trying to solve the problems between the United States and the Soviet Union," said Turner.⁶⁸ Interestingly, CBS did not mention Turner at all in its report although the other networks did. This might easily be explained by the fact that in 1985, Turner had launched a takeover bid for CBS. Although CBS successfully fought off the takeover bid, it left the network with heavy financial damage:

CBS would foil Turner by burdening itself with such a heavy debt that it would be too expensive for him to take over the company...But CBS had defeated Turner at a huge cost; it had gone deeply into debt at a time when its earnings were falling because of a soft advertising market in broadcasting and difficulties in CBS's non-broadcasting businesses...And the financial pressures were to have grave implications for hundreds of CBS employees as the company began a major cost-cutting drive.⁶⁹

Industry analysts expected Turner to lose \$20 million on the Goodwill Games, according to NBC's report on the event.

Gorbachev continued in July to focus on international relations. French President Francois Mitterand visited the Soviet leader in Moscow. In addition to addressing Franco-Soviet relations, Mitterand brought with him some kind of message from Reagan and took with him a letter from Gorbachev to the American President. Next, Shevardnadze

⁶⁸ NBC, July 5, 1986, Steve Hurst reporting from Moscow.

⁶⁹ Boyer, p. 238-239.

traveled to London for a meeting with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, where she accepted an invitation to Moscow at some future date. Following this, former President Richard Nixon during a private visit to Moscow met with Gorbachev, although the substance of their talks was not released. About this time, a secretly written report about Soviet economic troubles began to circulate in Moscow. While all three of the networks might have received the report, only NBC chose to run a piece about it. Moscow Bureau Chief Steve Hurst explained in his 2 minute 12 second report that "the debate over the future course of the Soviet Union goes much deeper than anyone thought." A report by a group calling itself the Movement for Socialist Renewal, believed to include scientists and economists intimately familiar with the Soviet economy, "paints a picture of the Soviet Union as being in a blind alley, on the brink of falling far behind the West economically, technologically, and militarily." What most interested Hurst in the document was not the enumeration of problems, but the radical measures that the authors suggested as a remedy:

The writers go back to Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state, to support their recommendations. They call for a free press, freedom of speech, an end to persecution for political and religious beliefs, a multiparty political system, a return to private enterprise in the consumer and service sectors...They [these changes] would shake the very foundations of the Soviet Union.

NBC was very astute to pick up on this story, because it was very much a harbinger of things to come. In fact, NBC

seemed to put a new emphasis on Soviet affairs beginning with this broadcast which would last throughout the rest of 1986, though no one at NBC could recall the specific reason for any new emphasis.

The notion that things might have been changing in the Kremlin was reinforced a few days later when Gorbachev announced a small pullout from Afghanistan. Speaking on a nationally televised broadcast, the General Secretary said that over 6,000 of the Soviets' 100,000 troops in Afghanistan would be returning home before the end of the year. The networks interpreted this news to be relatively positive. The move "signaled what may be a new thaw in the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan," explained NBC, for example.⁷⁰ The networks also interpreted the withdrawal as another Gorbachev tactic to help encourage a summit. "He [Gorbachev] tried to sweeten the atmosphere just a little with an announcement about Afghanistan," said ABC.⁷¹ The administration's response to the withdrawal was muted, and the State Department called for a complete Soviet pullout from Afghanistan.⁷²

All movement on arms control and the summit stalled for two weeks, until Soviet and American negotiators met for a special session in a dacha outside Moscow rather than in

⁷⁰ NBC, July 28, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

⁷¹ ABC, July 28, 1986, Peter Jennings anchoring.

⁷² ibid.

Geneva. The American networks interpreted this meeting as "a crucial session, if there is to be any progress this year on checking the nuclear arms race."⁷³ The networks were able to cover the meeting, despite a news blackout imposed over the substance of the talks, because the Soviets permitted correspondents to report from outside the dacha. Although the visuals were rather simple--the outside of the dacha, negotiators shaking hands during a photo opportunities, and the teams arriving and departing--that the networks were allowed to be present at all demonstrates that the Soviets were loosening restrictions on what the foreign media could cover. Nevertheless, the three networks' reports differed significantly in focus. ABC's report by Mike Lee was, for a change, the least analytical of the reports, focusing more on "theater criticism" than on substance. Lee, for example, was the only one of the correspondents to describe how Chief Soviet negotiator Victor Karpov got cornered by the press thanks to a locked car door and a missing driver.⁷⁴

NBC seemed to continue its newfound emphasis on reporting from the Soviet Union, opening their broadcast on two consecutive nights with reports on the Moscow meeting. NBC's reports on August 10, previewing the meeting, concentrated on explaining the ongoing division in White

⁷³ NBC, August 11, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

⁷⁴ ABC, August 11, 1986, Mike Lee reporting from Moscow.

House on arms control. NBC's reports by Phil Bremen in Moscow and Robin Lloyd in Washington, for example, explained that the administration could not even agree on which four negotiators to send to Moscow, so they sent seven delegates. "Soviet officials claim that the extras on the American side are proof that the Reagan administration is still arguing with itself and not at all ready to reach an agreement with the Kremlin," explained Bremen. NBC's reports were analytical, explaining in relative depth the key arms control issues being discussed. Lloyd's report, in particular, highlighted Reagan's differing public and private stances on Star Wars deployment. Although the public Reagan message was that the President would be deploying Star Wars as quickly as possible, in a private letter to the Soviets Reagan had discussed limiting Star Wars to the laboratory for seven years, according to Lloyd. NBC repeated a large proportion of this information in its story the next day, following the opening of the negotiation session. This was an important piece of news because it was the first time Reagan had indicated any willingness to limit deployment of SDI in any way.

CBS' report focused on Gorbachev's larger strategy for negotiating arms control, not on the on-going negotiating session. CBS's Wyatt Andrews sketched Gorbachev as a leader aggressively seeking arms control, and making a serious effort to win concessions...."Soviet foreign policy has been

on the offensive since January, when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev proposed total disarmament by the year 2000." For example, Wyatt showed Gorbachev walking off an Aeroflot plane, being greeted by a huge reception, as an illustration of the Soviet leader's continued success in winning world popular opinion. "Critics say Gorbachev's grand proposals are mostly propaganda, but few doubt the Soviets have a new, global appeal," Andrews said. The correspondent turned for a second opinion to Soviet expert Marshall Goldman, who was usually relatively critical in his comments about Gorbachev. Goldman's appeared positive in his assessment of Gorbachev's style this time, explaining that, "It's interesting how-- what Gorbachev has done. I mean he's--he comes up with a new idea almost every month. And I--you know, we're still not used to that." Andrew's analysis seemed to suggest that Gorbachev's approach could in fact pave the way for progress on arms control. Interestingly, though, that point of view was not backed up the U.S. arms negotiators leaving their meeting, who said little of substance. Yet by ending his report with images of negotiators taking a walk in the woods surrounding the dacha, Andrews left the audience with an optimistic portrait.

A week later, Gorbachev made another move aimed at influencing the arms control process when, for the third time since becoming General Secretary, he extended the unilateral Soviet nuclear test ban through 1986. Speaking

on Soviet television in what CBS termed "his latest high-publicity speech,"⁷⁵ Gorbachev again urged the U.S. to join in the test ban. The speech was well covered by ABC and NBC, where the announcement led the broadcasts, although it received little coverage on CBS.⁷⁶ What is remarkable about the network reports, however, is how they insinuated that Gorbachev's announcement as propagandistic. ABC made four different references to propaganda techniques in its report, NBC made two and CBS made one. ABC, for instance, said that the announcement was "a propaganda ploy," according to Washington and a source of "self-promotion" for Gorbachev. ABC's report was particularly critical, again quoting Soviet expert Marshall Goldman to illustrate how Gorbachev was "making propaganda." Explained Goldman:

Gorbachev recognizes, I think, that if he can continue to maintain this posture of extending the hand, talking about moratoria, talking about arms control, that will put more pressure on Reagan.⁷⁷

NBC's report by Andrea Mitchell was the most analytical of the three networks' stories. Mitchell explained, again in relative depth for television news, why the Reagan administration so criticized Gorbachev's proposal:

Spokesman Larry Speakes said that the Soviets were dealing from a position of advantage, having

⁷⁵ CBS, August 18, 1986, Dan Rather reporting.

⁷⁶ The 50 second story, read by Dan Rather, appeared 7:30 into the CBS broadcast.

⁷⁷ ABC, August 18, 1986, Sam Donaldson reporting from Santa Barbara.

already tested new weapons. Speakes said the United States still must test the D5 sea-launched missile and the Midget Man mobile missile. Strategic Defense, Star Wars, is also a stake.

The administration does not like to say it, but a test ban would block research on X-ray lasers, a critical element of Star Wars. The United States insists that a test ban cannot be monitored without on-site inspection. But critics suggest that the White House simply does not want a test ban. Period.

Mitchell's report went on to virtually compliment Gorbachev for acting so effectively to further complicate U.S. arms control discussions. "Soviet experts called Gorbachev's speech impressive, and an artful display of politics, because, they said, it plays to doubts about American arms control policy," she said in her endpiece. The administration not only rejected Gorbachev's proposal, but they tried to embarrass the Soviets by making their rejection 45 minutes before Gorbachev went on television to officially make the proposal.

John Chancellor's August 19th commentary on NBC provides a fitting summary for the this phase of Gorbachev's media strategy, which would end days later with the arrest of an American journalist. Chancellor, having just returned from Europe, said that Gorbachev's numerous tactics were having a positive effect there and around the world. "One of the things I learned last week in England, Germany and Italy is the success Mikhail Gorbachev is having with his new ways of managing Soviet diplomacy in Europe," Chancellor said. "The old Moscow techniques of big peace offensives,

huge rallies and clumsy propaganda seem to be over." A giant, multinational poll conducted by the Gallup organization had also found that international sentiment strongly favored a Soviet-American arms control agreement.⁷⁸ Chancellor said that Gorbachev's aggressive pursuit of arms control progress had put the Reagan administration on the defensive, allowing the Soviets to set the agenda for any possible summit. Moreover, the commentator said that domestic and world opinion were working with Gorbachev, in that Congress was moving towards a test ban treaty and international sentiment was in favor of limiting tests. Chancellor said that Gorbachev's style, not just his substance, was praiseworthy. "Gorbachev's latest move has limited American options and put him in a good field position for the summit, and he did it his way, without the cumbersome old machinery of the Soviet peace offensive." Chancellor's assessment illustrated that many political observers rejected the Reagan administration's position that arms control issues were deadlocked. Observers like Chancellor knew Soviet-American affairs had come a long way during Gorbachev's year and a half in office, and that Gorbachev was beginning to affect substance, not merely style. Unfortunately, Gorbachev's position was about to change.

⁷⁸ Gallup Poll, July 23, 1986. Gallup surveyed 23,000 people in 21 countries.

CHAPTER SIX: THE GAMBLER

The symbol of imperial Russia was a two-headed eagle. This symbol also makes a good metaphor for the Mikhail Gorbachev of mid- and late 1986. Gorbachev at this time seemed to be of two minds. On the one hand, he seemed to be a hard-edged negotiator, spearheading a Soviet effort to win major concessions from the U.S. on arms control. The American television networks sometimes accused Gorbachev of reverting to the old style of Soviet leadership because of the harsh criticism of the United States which was part of Gorbachev's tactics. On the other hand, Gorbachev started at this time to begin advocating reforms at home more strongly. American television painted him as the driving force behind reform, backing up his mantle as a new-style Soviet leader. Both the drive for arms control and the effort to begin reform were gambles for Gorbachev, in that he was assured of success in neither.

The second half of 1986 was a very challenging time for Gorbachev. He had first to deal with the worldwide furor over arrest of an American journalist. Then he had to undertake a meeting with President Reagan in Iceland, and later defend his actions at that summit. There were also several rounds of diplomatic expulsions between the Soviets and Americans. All of these events forced Gorbachev into a more hard line position than he had taken previously. But

there were two saving graces for Gorbachev. First, the American media began to notice that reforms were starting in the Soviet Union. Consistently, the networks portrayed Gorbachev as the driving force in favor of reform, trying to rouse a suspicious public. The second saving grace was Gorbachev's release of dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov from internal exile. This brought Gorbachev significant goodwill at home and abroad.

Early in this time period, Gorbachev strategically chose to maintain a low profile and to avoid media coverage at times as he had in the first half of 1986. During the diplomatic maneuvering that followed the arrest of American journalist Nicholas Daniloff, Gorbachev's use of the media did little to enhance the Soviet position. However, in the final part of 1986, Gorbachev began again to use the media in the strategic way he had in 1985. Gorbachev's return to strategic tactics would be particularly useful to the Soviet leader, as he had to confront directly President Reagan and his team of media advisors several times over. On those occasions when he chose to try to cultivate positive press coverage, the media continued to be a useful tool for Gorbachev as he pursued his gambles.

A. The Daniloff-Zakharov Affair

On August 23, Gennadi Zakharov, a 39 year-old Soviet physicist employed by the United Nations, was arrested and

accused of espionage.¹ Assumedly to compensate, the KGB arrested Nicholas Daniloff, the 51-year old Moscow Bureau Chief for U.S. News & World Report and accused him of espionage. The incident provoked international condemnation of the Soviets, and almost ended the U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations then underway. American journalists reacted strongly to the taking of "one of their own," and news of the incident received great attention throughout the month of September, 1986. The attention that the press gave the arrest of Daniloff, keeping it on the top of President Reagan's agenda, was critical in winning the journalist's freedom. Still, this was a difficult story for television to cover because it for the most part lacked images other than "talking heads."

What is notable about the coverage of the incident by American television is how little Gorbachev himself is mentioned during stories on the affair. Although Daniloff was arrested on August 30th, Gorbachev was not mentioned in any of the network broadcasts until September 8th, this despite the fact that the Soviet leader was as head of the government ultimately responsible for the journalist's arrest. The lack of publicity can be explained in two ways. First, at the time of Daniloff's arrest, Gorbachev was in the midst of a month-long vacation, and was making few

¹ For details of this incident, see Nicholas Daniloff, Two Lives, One Russia (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988).

appearances. When he did appear, Gorbachev refrained from mentioning the affair. This seems to me to have been a strategic choice, along the lines of the choice to remain silent following the Chernobyl accidents, as a way of lessening the press coverage. Although I have no way to verify this, Gorbachev's silence suggests that he understood that if he said nothing, he would receive less press coverage. The press would hardly make a report, after all, which said, "Gorbachev said nothing today about the Daniloff-Zakharov affair." I have therefore termed this the eighth key interaction between Gorbachev and the media. Second, the Reagan administration did not make the affair a personal matter. Instead of decrying Gorbachev personally, the Administration's response and henceforth many of the television reporters' narratives repeatedly criticized "the Soviets" and "the Kremlin." Over time, the networks began to criticize Gorbachev's silence about the Daniloff-Zakharov affair, in much the same way that they attacked his silence following the Chernobyl accident.

The first mention of Gorbachev in connection with the affair on evening network television came on September 8th, when Reagan finally spoke out to condemn Daniloff's arrest. The fact that Reagan waited nine days before speaking and that he tried to temper his remarks illustrated that the President was hoping to maintain the chance for a summit. Speaking at a campaign appearance in Denver, Reagan

denounced the Soviet action, without criticizing Gorbachev by name. "The continuing Soviet detention of an innocent American is an outrage," Reagan asserted. "Whatever the soviet motive...this action violates the standards of civilized international behavior."² Gorbachev that day was in Czechoslovakia, where he said that although he still wanted to meet with Reagan, he worried about the possibility because the two nations "have not moved one inch closer to an arms reduction agreement."³ Gorbachev again did not comment on the Daniloff-Zakharov affair.

Although Reagan tempered his remarks, some of the network coverage hinted that Gorbachev was not handling the situation well. CBS for instance quoted in its first story a Sovietologist, Seweryn Bialer of Columbia University, who was critical of Gorbachev: "It does not serve the public relations of Gorbachev well, that he wants the summit meeting as much as we want it and, in this sense, there is no interest for him in prolonging this issue."⁴ Wyatt Andrews' CBS report on the reaction in Moscow was more subtle in its criticism of the Soviets. This criticism could be read both in the reporter's text and in the images that were selected. Andrews maintained, for example, that

² Quoted by NBC (first quotation) and CBS (second quotation), September 8, 1986.

³ See ABC and CBS, September 8, 1986.

⁴ CBS, September 8, 1986, Bill Plante reporting from Denver.

the Soviet handling of this affair was reminiscent of the days before glasnost. "It's as if, for the last nine days the Americans had been trying to approach the new, and more open Soviet leadership only to find the old school, in this case, in control," the reporter said. The visuals in this report also suggested that the Soviets had reverted to poisoning their own people with propaganda. The first three of the shots in Andrews' reports showed citizens in a Moscow park reading the government-run paper Izvestia. Coupled with a citizen who asserted (in English) of Daniloff, "I think he is a spy, that's all," the visuals suggested that the Soviet people had adopted the government line on the affair. (Surprisingly, 32 percent of the American public according to one poll thought Daniloff was guilty of spying.⁵) A biting commentary that night by Bill Moyers supported Andrews' impression that Gorbachev was returning to the old Soviet style of leadership:

The arrest of our colleague Nicholas Daniloff is a blow to the hopes that Mikhail Gorbachev is very different from his predecessors, that he might change those parts of the Soviet system that offended human decency: the crushing of dissidents, the abuse of psychology to press the will of the state, the butchery of Afghanistan.

Moyers' use of the term "our colleague" demonstrated how close to this story many journalists, particularly those who served in foreign locales, felt. The journalists' involvement may help explain why the criticism of Gorbachev

⁵ Harris Poll, September 10, 1986 of 802 adults.

regarding this incident tended to be harsh. NBC reported that Gorbachev "has apparently ignored" a personal letter from Reagan with an appeal to settle the matter, a choice of words which made the Soviet leader appear callous.⁶ The next day, ABC and NBC reported that Gorbachev had finally responded to Reagan's appeal, although they knew little other than the gist of the letter: let's settle this matter quickly.

The following day, September 10, Daniloff was released from Lefortovo Prison into the custody of the American Ambassador, Arthur Hartman. Daniloff thanked President Reagan for his efforts, and also thanked Gorbachev, "who in my view had the wisdom to see that this was an event which could mushroom into something very undesirable."⁷ Gennadi Zakharov, similarly, was released to the custody of the Soviet Ambassador to the U.S., Yuri Dubinin. This move was interpreted as a victory for Gorbachev and for the Soviets, in that the Reagan administration agreed to treat Daniloff and Zakharov equally. Reagan had been reluctant to allow this because it reinforced the notion that both Zakharov and Daniloff were spies. "It's a major political and psychological victory for Mr. Gorbachev and a major defeat for the Secretary of State," asserted conservative academic

⁶ NBC, September 8, 1986, Chris Wallace reporting from Denver.

⁷ ABC and CBS, September 12, 1986.

Dimitri Simes.⁸ Bill Moyers of CBS concurred that Gorbachev had the upper hand now, but because Reagan wanted a summit more desperately than the Soviets.

In a delay reminiscent of his behavior after the accident at Chernobyl, Gorbachev waited for nearly three weeks to make his first public comment about the Daniloff-Zakharov affair. When he did begin to speak out, Gorbachev took a hard line, tantamount to approving publicly the Daniloff arrest. Although Gorbachev appeared during one of his freewheeling, election-style visits to the southern Russian city of Krasnodar--not far from his home region of Stavropol--the Soviet leader "made it clear he is the architect of the Soviet hardline."⁹ He personally accused Daniloff of espionage, labeling the reporter, "the spy who was caught red-handed." Gorbachev also accused the U.S. "of trying to use the case to spoil relations and to fan up hatred." The Soviet leader made his remarks to a meeting of the party faithful, standing at a podium under the obligatory portrait of Lenin. This scene, bolstered by the cutaway shots of the audience applauding hardily, enhanced the impression that Gorbachev was being tough and acting very much in the old Soviet style. Gorbachev's remarks led all three network news broadcasts, and all three networks

⁸ ABC, September 12, 1986, John McWethy reporting from Washington.

⁹ CBS, September 18, 1986, Wyatt Andrews reporting from Washington.

interpreted the remarks as a continuation of the staunch Soviet position.

The same day, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze arrived in Washington for talks with Secretary of State Shultz. In contrast to Gorbachev, Shevardnadze was relaxed and jovial when he arrived, even joking with reporters who tried to illicit his opinion about the Daniloff-Zakharov affair. The networks interpreted Shevardnadze's intentions in different ways. ABC, for instance, down played Shevardnadze's more serious remarks, focusing instead on Shevardnadze's humorous side:

JOHN MCWETHY (ABC): Shevardnadze arrived and immediately headed for the microphones. A new kind of Soviet diplomat full of charm and good humor, who was asked about the Daniloff case.

SHEVARDNADZE (jokingly): What do you think yourself about that?

OTHER REPORTER: Well, we're here to ask your opinion, sir.

SHEVARDNADZE (jokingly): And I would like to know your opinion.¹⁰

These images of the smiling, clever foreign minister were at odds with the Soviet hard line of the time, and Shevardnadze probably chose to joke to try to diffuse this politically charged situation. NBC, on the other hand, emphasized the minister's more serious remarks: "This is an illegal decision [the expulsion of Soviet U.N. employees] and since it is illegal, it is a bad decision."¹¹ CBS was between the

¹⁰ ABC, September 18, 1986, John McWethy reporting from Washington.

¹¹ NBC, September 18, 1986, Steve Hurst reporting from Moscow.

two, stressing Shevardnadze's desire to move the superpowers closer to a summit. "If the Soviets truly did not want a summit, Shevardnadze would not be here," concluded Wyatt Andrews. Shevardnadze received an unscheduled visit from Reagan the next day, during which the President reportedly complained that Gorbachev had not accepted Reagan's personal assurance that Daniloff was not a spy. Shevardnadze passed Reagan a personal letter from Gorbachev, but its contents were not released.

CBS gave the most attention to Gorbachev during the time preceding the conclusion of the Daniloff-Zakharov affair.¹² On September 19, Wyatt Andrews tried again to assess the Soviet goals in holding Daniloff, and concluded that the matter was an attempt by Gorbachev to gain respect:

ANDREWS: Experts are convinced the Soviet grab for Daniloff was a message from Gorbachev not to take him for granted.

JERRY HOUGH (Duke Univ.): We have assumed that this man is weak, that he must come to a summit, that we can slap him around. And it's been--it's been a horrendous mistake.

JONATHAN SANDERS (Columbia Univ./CBS Consultant): The Soviets are so insecure about how they are respected in the world. Gorbachev doesn't want to be seen as a patsy.

By this time, the classification of the affair as a Soviet action rather than a Gorbachev-led action had started to fade. For example, in a September 23 commentary Bill Moyers explained that despite having a free-thinking leader like

¹² NBC and ABC did not mention Gorbachev again in connection with the Daniloff-Zakharov affair until September 29, when the affair reached its conclusion.

Gorbachev, "animosity and ill will are inevitable between two governments that represent wholly different ideas about how to organize society."

On September 29th, the deal was announced which would both settle the Daniloff-Zakharov affair and allow the Superpower leaders to save face. As the first part of the deal, Daniloff flew that day to freedom to West Germany. The second part of the deal came the following day, when Zakharov gave a plea of "no contest" to the charges against him and was allowed to return to Moscow. The third part of the deal, also announced the following day, was the release of dissident Soviet physicist Yuri Orlov, who had been in a Soviet prison for eight years. Orlov, a leader in the human rights movement, was allowed to emigrate to the United States with his wife. The last part of the deal was a two week extension of the deadline given to the Soviets to remove 25 members of their U.N. mission who were ordered expelled.

According to the official positions of the two nations, Daniloff was not exchanged with Zakharov. Daniloff was simply released; Zakharov and Orlov were traded. The networks, on the other hand, interpreted the whole deal as a giant trade. As Reagan recalled, "Already it's plain the press is going to believe I gave in and the trade was Daniloff for Zakharov. By the end of the day the network

anchors were laying into me for having given up."¹³ The networks also tried in their analyses to ascertain what this deal said about Gorbachev. According to CBS, the deal was a sign that Gorbachev would make significant concessions to get a summit meeting. "For a variety of reasons, domestic politics, international standing, arms control talks, the Gorbachev Kremlin wants a summit at least as badly as the Reagan White House," reported State Department correspondent Bill McLaughlin.¹⁴ ABC, in examining the series of meetings between Shultz and Shevardnadze which led to the resolution of the affair, drew a broader conclusion--that Gorbachev was directly in charge of the Soviet negotiator. "American officials say it has provided a useful window on how the Gorbachev regime operates and how limited Shevardnadze's ability to make a deal is without getting exact instructions from home," reported ABC's John McWethy. Gorbachev may not have received much blame for the Daniloff-Zakharov affair, but he didn't receive the credit for its resolution, either, even though he was directing the resolution effort. NBC correspondent Marvin Kalb, for instance, did not mention the Soviet leader by name when he reported that, "Diplomats here [at the United Nations] are very pleased the U.S. and the Soviet Union have finally resolved the Daniloff matter."

¹³ Reagan, p. 674.

¹⁴ CBS, September 30, 1986, Bill McLaughlin reporting from Washington.

The American public seemed to approve of the trade and to be happy that the matter was resolved. Fifty five percent of those questioned in a CBS/New York Times Poll approved of the release of Zakharov, and 61 percent said they approved of Reagan's handling of the matter.¹⁵ With the Daniloff-Zakharov finally being settled, the networks turned to the next evident question--when would there be a summit?

B. The Reykjavik Summit--Before

The networks did not have to wait long for their answer. The following day, the Superpowers announced that there would be a meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev less than two weeks later in Reykjavik, Iceland. The networks exploded with coverage at the "surprise announcement,"¹⁶ and used various levels of hype to describe the days events. CBS was the most sensational, labeling the meeting "the Iceland stunner."¹⁷ NBC dramatically called it "a day to remember in the long and often rancorous relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union."¹⁸ ABC, for its part, called it a "stunning announcement" on "a day of

¹⁵ See Adam Clymer, "Most Approve Zakharov Trade," The New York Times, October 3, 1986. Their poll surveyed 612 people.

¹⁶ NBC, September 30, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

¹⁷ CBS, September 30, 1986, Dan Rather anchoring.

¹⁸ NBC, September 30, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

quite extraordinary activity."¹⁹ Gorbachev had proposed the meeting a week earlier in a letter delivered by Shevardnadze, and Reagan agreed to meet once Daniloff's freedom had been arranged. The networks predicted that the agenda would focus on arms control, and all three said that there was the possibility of real agreement, particularly on medium-range nuclear missiles. Not surprisingly, all three networks' reports on the announcement were illustrated by some of the highly choreographed scenes of the November, 1985 summit meeting in Geneva. Americans expressed optimism about the meeting and happiness that the Daniloff-Zakharov affair had not delayed the summit.²⁰

But the White House and Kremlin had a great deal of work to do before the summit, and not much time in which to do it. The Reagan administration, for example, tried to begin to shape expectations for the meeting from the moment it was announced. For example, President Reagan came to the White House press room personally to announce the meeting. This ensured that Reagan would be shown delivering the news, as in fact he was shown by all three nightly news broadcasts, helping him to assume credit for the meeting.

¹⁹ ABC, September 30, 1986. The first quotation is from a report by Sam Donaldson in Washington, the second from anchorman Peter Jennings.

²⁰ See the Harris Poll, October 6, 1986, of 1,255 respondents. Fifty four percent of those polled were optimistic about the summit, and 51 percent said they were pleased the Daniloff-Zakharov trade had not deterred progress on arms control.

Interestingly, the Reagan administration was insistent that the meeting was not a "summit," but rather a pre-summit planning session. All this because the two leaders had agreed at Geneva that the next summit would take place in the United States, and Reagan wanted Gorbachev to stick to this plan. All three networks chose to ignore the administration's suggestion and called the meeting a summit. Peter Jennings of ABC was the only anchor to explain his network's rationale: "We thought we'd look it [summit] up in the dictionary. Summit: diplomatic negotiations restricted to heads of government. A small point, but we'll call it a summit." The two administrations were also still trying to convince the world that there was not a swap of Daniloff for Zakharov. "There was no connection between those two releases," asserted Reagan.²¹ While the networks never accepted this explanation, polls found that a few Americans did believe the President. One New York Times/CBS Poll found, for example, that only 9 percent of respondents thought there was no connection between the releases of Daniloff and Zakharov, while 77 thought that there was a connection.²²

Again, Gorbachev chose not to seize the opportunity to associate himself personally with the good news. Unlike

²¹ ABC, September 30, 1986, Sam Donaldson reporting from Washington.

²² New York Times/CBS Poll, October 1, 1986, with 612 respondents.

Reagan, Gorbachev chose not to announce the summit date. Instead, for reasons I do not know, the announcement was carried by the Tass news wire and then read by an announcer on Soviet television. That same day, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze was preparing to leave the U.S. after meeting with the Reagan administration, and he gave a press conference in New York where he tried to shape expectations. Explaining that an accord on medium-range arms was well within reach, Shevardnadze urged the superpowers to strive toward progress on arms control. "Mutual understanding and accord between countries and nations are worth more than short-lived sensations," Shevardnadze advised.²³ Shevardnadze also tried to downplay the idea that there had been a Daniloff-Zakharov trade. "You can, of course, call it an exchange or a trade off or whatever, but the important thing is that we found a solution," he asserted.²⁴ The network reports were full of generalizations about Gorbachev's position and goals. According to CBS, Gorbachev was now ready for a meeting in the U.S. following the Reykjavik summit, but that he asked for the Iceland meeting to test the political waters. ABC explained that Gorbachev wanted real substantive progress from this meeting, unlike the smiles and handshakes of Geneva. All three networks

²³ See NBC, September 30, 1986, Steve Hurst reporting from Moscow.

²⁴ ABC, September 30, 1986, Peter Jennings anchoring.

also said Gorbachev could claim success in both the Daniloff-Zakharov deal and in Reagan's acceptance of a mini-summit.

The announcement of the summit inspired some interesting auxiliary reports. One of the more amusing pieces of reporting was ABC's report on the release of the accused Soviet spy, Gennadi Zakharov. ABC's Dennis Troute followed the media circus which surrounded Zakharov's departure. Zakharov made an appearance in a New York City court, and then was driven the 250 miles to Washington D.C. to catch his flight for Moscow. The trip turned into something of a "rolling press conference," with reporters holding microphones out on booms to Zakharov as his car rolled down the highway:

ZAKHAROV: (IN CAR) I'm feeling great. [Zakharov is screaming to a reporter in a car riding next to his].

TROUTE: At a Brooklyn stop sign, he proclaimed his innocence. [Zakharov's car is surrounded by television vans and other assorted cars, cameras and microphones extended out of their windows and sunroofs.]

ZAKHAROV: [Speaking out of his open car window] I'm not a spy. I'm a physicist. I was working for the United Nations.

TROUTE: At a rest stop on the New Jersey Turnpike, Zakharov analyzed his case. [Zakharov is seen walking from his car toward the restaurant at the rest stop, accompanied by plainclothes agents.]

ZAKHAROV: [Surrounded by reporters] I would say that it was a setup really.

Because Zakharov talked to the reporters rather than ignoring the press, it is easy to believe that he was trying to cultivate positive media coverage. Still, the television

coverage did not make Zakharov--a debonair looking man who spoke English well--look particularly good. He did not appear to be particularly dignified screaming from his car to reporters. Further, Zakharov's wooden delivery of his defense when he was able to speak outside the car did not sound very convincing. Overall, the coverage may have helped bolster the idea that the Soviets were not trustworthy.²⁵

In the same broadcast, ABC covered Daniloff's return to the United States. ABC's Pierre Salinger interviewed Daniloff on the plane ride home, and in his report presented an unusual, 48-second shot in which Daniloff was allowed to tell the story of his capture. Daniloff was engaging as he described the details of his arrest and his reactions to the events of the past month. Because he was allowed to speak for nearly a minute, viewers got to see a bit of Daniloff's personality and undoubtedly gained in their understanding of the situation. Sources are almost never allowed to talk this long on American television anymore, although in the 1960s such long sound bites were normal.²⁶

On NBC, anchorman Tom Brokaw offered a look back at the summit in Geneva and his own preview of the meeting in

²⁵ Zakharov was recently found working in the KGB's press office.

²⁶ Adatto (op cit.) found that during the 1968 campaign, that the average length of a "sound bite" by candidates Nixon and Humphrey on network evening broadcasts was 42.3 seconds, and that candidates routinely spoke for more than one minute.

Reykjavik. This hyperbole-filled report amounted to a commercial for the summit, raising the audience's level of interest so they would stay tuned in to NBC. "There is nothing quite so dramatic as a summit between the leaders of the two most powerful nations in the history of civilization," began Brokaw. "The stakes are high. The consequences of failure are grave," he continued. As Brokaw analyzed the contest of impressions during the Geneva meeting, the visuals turned to five scenes from the first summit. This reminded the audience of the drama and glamour of that highly choreographed event. At Reykjavik, Brokaw maintained, the superpowers would turn to more serious work: arms control. "We cannot know how it will turn out now. As the past few days have demonstrated once again, however, history is full of surprises," he concluded. Brokaw was implying that there would be exciting, surprising news resulting from the summit, and that viewers would do well to keep watching the nightly news.

In contrast to the four months of speeches and comments that preceded the Geneva summit, Gorbachev's publicity seeking actions during the 10 days before Reykjavik were measured. For instance, the Soviet leader did not directly comment on the summit during a Kremlin speech made the day after the summit was announced. Gorbachev's comments focused on domestic rather than international politics. He criticized the nation's conservatives, "lashing out at

unnamed opponents of his economic reforms, and, by implication, of his summit gamble with President Reagan."²⁷ Gorbachev before the summit seemed often to take the high moral ground, stressing that the meeting was at his initiative and that the Soviets were the ones pressing for arms control. The network coverage often bolstered this impression. On the day following the announcement of the summit, for example, NBC's Marvin Kalb explained how, "Twice before this year, Gorbachev had proposed an interim summit. Twice, the White House rejected him."²⁸ The images at this time also implied that the Americans were blocking progress: an on-screen graphic at this time showed Gorbachev's picture, the Soviet and American flags, and the text "Proposed Two Interim Summits." Then the word "rejected" appeared over the graphic in big red letters, as if placed there by a governmental stamp. Gorbachev finally did comment about the summit on October 3, three days after the Iceland meeting was announced. Speaking on Soviet television, he decried Star Wars, called for the U.S. to join a nuclear test ban, and stressed again that the idea of the summit was his. All three networks reported this news in brief. ABC termed it as the firing of the "opening round in what is surely going to be a lot of pre-summit maneuvering."

²⁷ ibid.

²⁸ NBC, October 1, 1986, Marvin Kalb reporting from New York.

Gorbachev's maneuvering hardly lost a beat when there was accident involving a Soviet submarine on October 4. Fire broke out on a Soviet Yankee-class submarine, nuclear-powered and carrying nuclear weapons, killing three crewmen and stranding the ship in the north Atlantic. The Soviets, thinking strategically, announced the accident quickly, and the networks gave Gorbachev the credit for the speedy disclosure. "No doubt he [Gorbachev] directed his official media to make a quick announcement of this naval tragedy," reported NBC. "The Soviet leader was undoubtedly trying to show Washington good faith on military matters as next week's summit approaches."²⁹ Gorbachev personally passed a message to Reagan to tell him of the incident under an information-sharing agreement signed after the incident at Chernobyl. This action marked the first of several strategic media tactics which Gorbachev would undertake during the course of the Reykjavik summit.

Gorbachev may have been temporarily engaged by the submarine accident but the Soviet effort to influence public opinion did not stop. The Communist Party newspaper Pravda, for example, continued to build expectations for the summit. Pravda said that "the Iceland summit is a sign that superpower relations may improve dramatically," reported NBC.³⁰ The same day, the networks reported that Raisa

²⁹ NBC, October 4, 1986, Steve Hurst reporting from Moscow.

³⁰ NBC, October 5, 1986, Chris Wallace anchoring.

Gorbachev would make the trip to Iceland with her husband even though Nancy Reagan was staying home. This was interpreted by the networks as an advantage for the Soviets. "The thought of Mrs. Gorbachev loose around Western cameras with no competition, probably will cause the White House public relations department to worry," said ABC.³¹ In fact, it probably angered the White House more than it made them worried. "White House officials did not conceal their annoyance [that Raisa Gorbachev would be coming], noting that Gorbachev invited the President to a business meeting, with few aides and no social activity."³² Such Soviet officials as foreign ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov also agreed to sit for interviews on American television, where they urged the U.S. to follow the Soviet lead on arms control. However, Soviet "spin patrol" at Reykjavik, because of the short lead time before the summit, was a much less potent force in managing the media than was the group in Geneva. By October 8, Gorbachev was back on the offensive, speaking out in favor of "concrete work to reduce arms and to lower the danger of nuclear war," according to NBC.³³ That day, the Kremlin bolstered the idea that it was

³¹ ABC, October 5, 1986, Sam Donaldson anchoring.

³² NBC, October 6, 1986, Chris Wallace reporting from Washington.

³³ NBC, October 8, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

willing to compromise by announcing a token troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The White House, however, reacted to the Iceland summit in much the same way that it reacted before Geneva--by worrying about how Reagan was doing in the battle against Gorbachev for public opinion. CBS, for example, reported that Reagan's advisors were "convinced that if they don't move quickly the Soviets could win the battle for world opinion."³⁴ The White House tried to lower expectations in many ways. First, they let it be known that many of those in the President's inner circle thought that the Reykjavik meeting was a mistake:

National Security Advisor John Poindexter and Chief of Staff Donald Regan had 'serious misgivings' about accepting Gorbachev's offer, but Secretary of State Shultz was in favor, and most important, so was Ronald Reagan.³⁵

The division among the Reagan staff was so potentially rancorous that by Sunday October 5, the White House prohibited public comment on the summit by all administration officials except the President, Regan and Shultz.³⁶ Secondly, the administration maintained its campaign to convince the world that the meeting was not a summit. "Iceland is not intended to be a signing ceremony

³⁴ CBS, October 1, 1986, Bill Plante reporting from Washington.

³⁵ ibid.

³⁶ See NBC, October 5, 1986, Robin Lloyd reporting from Washington.

or a media event, but a pre-summit planning session," Reagan maintained. "Iceland is a base camp before the summit."³⁷ The networks interpreted this campaign as an attempt to reinforce the seriousness of the meeting without promising results. Third, the administration attempted to portray Reagan, not Gorbachev, as the leader most intent on peace. "The goal of American foreign policy is not just the prevention of war, but the extension of freedom," Reagan explained.³⁸ Reagan repeatedly mentioned his intention to bring up Soviet human rights abuses and military aggression, to remind people that Gorbachev's commitment to peace was somewhat questionable.

The announcement of the summit caught the networks off guard, and the 11-day lead time did not give them time to prepare the sort of preview series they had done before Geneva. Only ABC ran any kind of pre-summit series. Beginning on October 8, ABC presented a compilation of interviews with nine of America's leading Sovietologists. For three nights, the experts from universities and think tanks examined Gorbachev and his policies. Due to the lack of production time, the series was presented simply. First, anchor Peter Jennings--already in Iceland--would pose a question. The first night, for example, the topic was

³⁷ All three networks used variations of this quote, October 6, 1986.

³⁸ See ABC, October 6, 1986, Sam Donaldson reporting from Washington.

Gorbachev's motivation for the summit and the pressure on him to have a successful meeting. The rest of the report then consisted of the experts talking in excerpts from videotaped interviews, uninterrupted the anchor. As each expert began to talk, his or her name and affiliation was flashed on screen. As is typical of television, each person spoke only one to five sentences before reports turned to the next expert. On the question of Gorbachev's goals for the summit, for example, the experts agreed that the Soviet leader's goal was to scale back the military to help reform the economy. As Robert Legvold of Columbia University explained:

Gorbachev has an overriding concern on his agenda at the moment and that is to address the economic difficulties within the Soviet Union. They are going through an extremely difficult period at this stage in Soviet history. And in order to attend to those problems he really does have to reduce the pressure of an arms competition or indeed the pressure of political, strenuous political competition with the United States.³⁹

This kind of report, with its emphasis on words over pictures, was very rare for television and, in this case, only marginally successful. ABC was able to attract some leading Sovietologists, though the brevity of their comments undermined the value of having such experts appear on the broadcast. Furthermore, the reports were choppy, and lacked the cohesion--the defined beginning, middle, and end--that most television news stories contain. Still, the careful

³⁹ ABC, October 8, 1986.

listener would have gained numerous worthwhile insights about Gorbachev and the Soviet Union from this series.

C. The Reykjavik Summit--During

It was evident even before the meeting began that the atmospherics of the meeting in Reykjavik would be far more low key than those of the Geneva summit. But it was also apparent that whenever either leader had a chance to form a good impression through the media, that he would try to seize the opportunity. Reagan was able to try to cultivate positive press coverage first because he left for Iceland one day before Gorbachev did. The administration staged a grandiose departure ceremony on the White House lawn which was reminiscent of a Hollywood musical, complete with administration officials arranged like chorus girls on the lawn surrounding the President. Reagan made a rousing speech that tried to put pressure on the Soviet leader. "If Mr. Gorbachev comes to Iceland in a truly cooperative spirit, I think we can make some progress," Reagan said.⁴⁰ The ceremony seemed aimed at conveying America's strength. At the end of the ceremony, the public was allowed to witness the usually-private goodbye between the President and First Lady. This scene too was like something out of a movie, with the Reagans hugging and whispering to each other. He kissed her on the cheek and they held each

⁴⁰ All three networks used this quotation, October 9, 1986.

other's hand until the last possible moment before he was whisked off. It is easy to believe that the Reagans were trying to convey a message with this little scene--trying to bolster Reagan's image as an American hero. Nancy Reagan seemed to symbolize the hopes of the whole nation, waiting anxiously for the results of this very important meeting. As judged by CBS's assertion that "the Iceland summit saga" had begun, the scene seemed to have the desired dramatic effect.⁴¹

CBS's coverage of the summit, in fact, often had a dramatic, somewhat glib tone. Dan Rather's October 9th preview of the summit's agenda is a good case in point. Rather likened Reagan and Gorbachev to a couple who had begun dating and carried romantic metaphors throughout his report. "The meeting at the Geneva summit was like a blind date," Rather began, and the second date in Reykjavik would be more than "pillow talk." Rather outlined four areas for discussion at Reykjavik. First, human rights, where he predicted there would be little action. This agenda item was illustrated by footage of a jubilant Anatoly Shcharansky following his release, although the dissident was not identified in the report. Second on the agenda, trade and cultural exchanges, where there might be some progress, "a little peck on the cheek if they feel like it." This agenda item was illustrated quite beautifully by a traditional

⁴¹ CBS, October 9, 1986, Dan Rather anchoring from Iceland.

Russian dance group. The third item on the agenda--world trouble spots like Afghanistan and Nicaragua--where Rather predicted both sides would say their involvement is "nobody else's business." This item was illustrated first by footage of Afghan rebels shooting artillery and marching through the dry Afghan mountains and then by film of U.S. troops marching through the lush jungles of Central America. The fourth and most important agenda item: arms control, illustrated by five shots of missiles being fired from their silos. Two of the missile firings looked particularly menacing because they were shown in slow motion, allowing the viewer to see the missiles emerge from the silo and then explode into flight. The report contained other shots of missiles flying, artillery shootings and tanks rolling through Red Square during a military parade. In fact, more than half of the report's 42 shots showed some kind of military hardware. The impression conveyed by this was that President Reagan had a date with a highly armed and therefore dangerous man. The report also contained one closeup of a finger pushing a button on an airplane control panel marked with cyrillic letters. Even though virtually no one in the viewing audience would know that this button did in fact say "fire" (poosk) in Russian, the scene looked like the firing of a Soviet missile. This sort of footage emphasized the presence of the Soviet military threat. Rather's report tried to explore Gorbachev's motivation for

wanting this "second date," explaining that arms control would be the first step toward economic reform in the Soviet Union. But there was a warning too from the hard liners. "From Gorbachev's point of view, success would be a deal of strategic arms which creates the illusion of greater stability, but which, in fact, means U.S. concessions," explained former national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. Rather ended his report with an animated representation of how Star Wars might work, which as usual showed the system shooting down what could be imagined only to be Soviet rockets. By ending with Star Wars, Rather seemed to inadvertently support SDI, implying that the system could counter the vast amount of Soviet military power. "It sounds like super-power soap opera, but just how this weekend date goes will determine not only if and when they meet again, but how the world may turn," the anchor said. In this last spoken sentence, Rather as had Brokaw before him seemed to urge the audience to stay tuned in to see the dramatic conclusion of the summit.

Gorbachev and "First Lady of the Motherland, Raisa,"⁴² arrived for the summit the following morning. Stepping onto the tarmac from his plane, Gorbachev was approached by a man with a microphone and, whether planned or not, the Soviet leader made a brief, upbeat arrival statement. This was another strategic move which advanced Gorbachev's agenda for

⁴² CBS, October 10, 1986, Dan Rather anchoring.

the meeting and again demonstrated his confidence. "We are prepared to look for solutions of the burning problems which concern people all over the world," said Gorbachev.⁴³ The way Gorbachev's translator was seen scrambling for a paper and pen as the leader began to talk suggested that Gorbachev's remarks may not have been planned in advance. The U.S. networks saw the statement as Gorbachev's attempt to upstage Reagan, who had made no remarks following his arrival. Gorbachev spoke enthusiastically, and the networks all remarked on Gorbachev's polished manner. ABC, for instance, called him "a cool confident seasoned world statesman."⁴⁴ But the networks also mentioned his protocol gaffe--he arrived while the Icelandic President and Prime Minister were at the opening of their Parliament, and therefore unable to meet the Soviet leader at the airport. The Gorbachevs maintained a fairly low profile following their arrival, their only public appearance being a photo opportunity during their courtesy call on Iceland's President. Reagan tried to stay in the limelight, also visiting Iceland's President, Mrs. Vigdis Finnbogadottir.

While the two leaders kept a light schedule, their teams of advisors were busy trying for the last time before the summit to manage expectations. The battle of

⁴³ All three networks used variations of this quotation, October 10, 1986.

⁴⁴ ABC, October 10, 1986, Walter Rodgers reporting from Reykjavik.

expectations had been building in the press, after all, since the day the summit was announced. At the heart of this battle was the networks' attempts to define what would constitute "success" and "failure" for each leader at Reykjavik. The press had agreed fairly early on that success for the leaders would be constituted by the adoption of the framework of an arms control agreement on, at the very least, nuclear missiles in Europe. NBC, for example, said that, "If the Iceland summit fails to produce an agreement limiting the number of medium-range missiles in Europe, then he [Gorbachev] will have failed to achieve one of his primary objectives."⁴⁵ And explained ABC, "For Ronald Reagan, such an agreement would yield something his presidency has lacked--tangible progress on arms reductions and all the political benefits that would flow from that."⁴⁶ But as time went on, the networks' definition of "success" changed. On ABC and NBC, the definition got more specific and more demanding. By five days before the summit, for example, the definition of success according to ABC also included a date for the next summit in Washington.⁴⁷ But at CBS, the definition of success was not as strict. The day

⁴⁵ NBC, October 1, 1986, Marvin Kalb reporting from New York.

⁴⁶ ABC, October 1, 1986, Rick Indefurth reporting from Washington.

⁴⁷ ABC, October 5, 1986, Rick Indefurth reporting from Washington. NBC said the same thing in a commentary by John Chancellor, October 9, 1986.

before the summit, for instance, CBS declared that "for Gorbachev, anything short of a walkout will be a success."⁴⁸

These changes in the press' expectations may have resulted from the work of the Soviet and American "spin doctors" who tried to influence opinion. As they had at Geneva, both sides brought a team of experts and officials to give interviews to the press. And the network reports used them. On the day preceding the summit alone, the networks quoted seven different American and three different Soviet officials, excluding the two leaders. Interestingly, as NBC's John Chancellor pointed out in one of his commentaries, American officials kept using the word "impulse" in their comments to describe what they hoped would happen in Reykjavik--that the meeting would provide the impulse to break the logjam in arms control negotiations. Who coined this oft-used word? Mikhail Gorbachev did, according to Time Magazine. "Ronald Reagan's people are using Mikhail Gorbachev's formulation for this summit, and his word impulse," concluded Chancellor. "That adds to the feeling that Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Reagan didn't come all this way just to disagree."⁴⁹ This is the exact opposite of what happened before the Geneva summit, when the

⁴⁸ CBS, October 10, 1986, Wyatt Andrews reporting from Reykjavik.

⁴⁹ NBC, October 10, 1986.

soviets began using the Americans' phrases and formulation of issues (see Chapter Four).

The Reykjavik summit began on Saturday morning, October 11 and ran through the weekend. While all three networks ran news coverage at numerous times during the weekend, only NBC ran a regular nightly news broadcast on Saturday night. None of the three ran a regular nightly broadcast on Sunday night, although the local stations were running news broadcasts both days. The Saturday network news broadcasts were pre-empted by the National League baseball playoff game on ABC and by college football on CBS.⁵⁰ NBC's Saturday night report contained many positive signs about the progress of the summit. First, NBC reported that Gorbachev and Reagan had met for four hours, and had agreed to start their Sunday session 30 minutes early. Second, the leaders left two working groups continuing to work through the night--one on arms control and the second on all other issues. "U.S. officials saw tonight's talks as a good sign that the two sides may be able to speed up arms negotiations, announcing that in a joint statement here," explained White House correspondent Chris Wallace.⁵¹ Third, the general mood was "positive". Fourth, the White House raised expectations by predicting that they would achieve

⁵⁰ My source for television listings was The New York Times. The schedules might have been different off of the east coast.

⁵¹ NBC, October 11, 1986, Chris Wallace reporting from Reykjavik.

one of their criteria for a successful meeting--a date for the next summit. "The American delegation is confident Gorbachev will give a date for a U.S. summit. The sense is growing that visit may come early next spring," said Wallace. This positive initial assessment was made even though Wallace admitted that "there was little progress on the Star Wars space defense, Gorbachev continuing to voice strong opposition." The few pictures there were to accompany Wallace's story created a mildly positive impression. Gorbachev and Reagan's first handshake almost didn't happen in front of the cameras: Reagan arrived first at Hofdi House, a small white mansion on the Icelandic coast, and was supposed to greet Gorbachev on the front steps. Gorbachev's limousine pulled in one minute ahead of schedule, and no one alerted Reagan when the Soviet leader arrived. Gorbachev was almost in the front door before Reagan rushed out of the building to meet him. This was one of the first time that the White House choreographers failed to execute their task perfectly. The other public scene was a photo opportunity before the talks began. Seated in high-backed armchairs before a bay window overlooking the sea, Reagan and Gorbachev assured reporters that they were in Iceland to do business.

With a news blackout in place and few visuals resulting from the talks, NBC turned to Raisa Gorbachev for news, whom Mikhail had strategically included in his travel plans. Ann

Garrels' two minute report followed the Soviet First Lady on her tour of Reykjavik, shaking hands with swimmers in an outdoor pool, peppering the proprietors of a museum with questions, and lecturing to high schoolers. Overall, the report offered a mixed impression. Some of Garrels' report was quite positive. The correspondent, for example, offered an upbeat assessment of the First Lady's character: "Despite the freezing rain, she smiled and chatted with reporters, saying how delighted she is to be here, describing the ship where she is staying with her husband as delightful and romantic." Mrs. Gorbachev was seen speaking simple English, which probably made her seem intelligent and learned to the American audience. Raisa was seen greeting the English-speaking Icelanders with "Good morning," and offering a little girl a present, saying, "Take it. Take it please." But Raisa offered a rather naive answer when asked whether she was sorry that Nancy Reagan had not attended the summit. "She must have had a reason," said Mrs. Gorbachev in Russian. "Perhaps she was not able to come. Perhaps she is not well." Mrs. Gorbachev must have known that Mrs. Reagan did not attend only for political reasons. There was additional coverage that night: an interview with Nicholas Daniloff, now covering the summit for U.S News; a Marvin Kalb report on the change in Reagan's rhetoric; and a report by John Cochran on the atmosphere of the summit. In all, NBC dedicated 14 minutes to the summit that night. Theirs

was the last word on the summit during regularly scheduled news programs until Monday evening--two full days later.

D. The Reykjavik Summit--After

The lack of nightly news throughout the weekend of the Reykjavik summit was a contributing factor to the meeting being considered a failure, at least initially. That is because without weekend television news, the many viewers who did not read newspapers had no interim information to indicate that progress was less than expected. Even for viewers of NBC, which had run nightly news on Saturday night, the prognosis for the summit went from very positive on Friday night to progressing well on Saturday night to disaster on Monday night after the talks ended Sunday without agreement. Furthermore, the Reagan administration, for once, managed its relations with the media following the summit very poorly. "Frankly, we mishandled it [the press]. I think, for one thing, we went out to the press too soon," recalled Jack H. Matlock, Jr., the Presidential advisor on Soviet affairs. Matlock said because the President was in a hurry to return home to the First Lady, and Shultz was in a rush to leave for Brussels, where he would be briefing NATO, there was not much time to prepare remarks for the press following the summit's collapse. "We in the party we were briefed for maybe five minutes as to what had happened, and

then they went off to a press conference."⁵² Luckily for the President, the American public blamed Gorbachev more than Reagan for the summit's collapse, and backed the president for maintaining SDI.⁵³

It was not until their Monday evening broadcasts that the networks were able to begin reporting the fascinating events of the weekend meeting in Reykjavik. The networks reported that the two leaders came to agreement in Reykjavik on an astounding package of arms limitations: the elimination of all medium range nuclear missiles in Europe, a 50 percent cut in long range nuclear weapons during the following five years with the idea of looking to eliminate these weapons entirely after that, and limits on nuclear testing which would eventually lead to a ban on nuclear tests. But then there was a deal-breaking issue: Star Wars. Gorbachev insisted that for 10 years, Star Wars tests be limited to the laboratory. When Reagan would not agree, Gorbachev said no to the other elements of the deal to which both sides had already agreed. When Gorbachev refused the deal on Sunday evening, Reagan picked up his papers and ended the summit. After the promise of real progress, the outcome was a disappointment. "It was as if a loved one,

⁵² Interview with Jack H. Matlock, Jr., June 25, 1991.

⁵³ A CBS/New York Times Poll released October 15th showed, for example, that 44 percent of 767 respondents blamed Gorbachev for the talks' collapse while only 17 percent faulted Reagan. Sixty eight percent said Reagan should not have given up Star Wars.

recovering nicely from a modest illness, suddenly turns worse and dies," as CBS commentator Bill Moyers analogized.⁵⁴

Fortunately for the two leaders, the visuals created by the summit did not match the sad story line. The pictures provided by the summit were extremely limited, but what little there was gave a mildly positive rather than a negative impression. In addition to the shots that had been shown by NBC on Saturday--the first handshake and the photo opportunity near the window overlooking the sea--there were only three basic shots from the summit to be used by television. First, there were shots of each leader with his entourage coming to and leaving the house--a neutral image. Second, there was one daytime Reagan-Gorbachev photo opportunity on the steps of Hofdi House, with both leaders smiling and looking cheerful. Lastly, there was also a shot of the two leaders leaving the mansion together taken right after the summit broke up, with Gorbachev walking Reagan to the American's limousine. Even this footage, taken at what must have been an emotionally difficult time for both leaders, did not convey what had just happened at the negotiating table. Shot from a several yards away, this footage show showed both leaders were talking normally as they walked down the street in their raincoats. There may have been more emotion and fatigue on their faces than could

⁵⁴ CBS, October 13, 1986.

be seen from such a distance but neither man seemed outwardly disturbed.⁵⁵ The White House also released three still pictures which the networks used for illustration, which no doubt were chosen to convey a positive image of the President. The first photo showed Reagan preparing for the meeting, reviewing some papers while National Security Advisor Poindexter and Chief of Staff Regan looked on.⁵⁶ The second photo showed the two leaders sitting across from each other at a small rectangular table, Gorbachev listening while Reagan talked. Their translators occupied the two other seats at the table. In the third still, Reagan and Gorbachev were standing and smiling at one another, Gorbachev's translator visible behind. Perhaps to heighten the image that Reykjavik was an interim working meeting and not a full-blown summit, in none of these images was the kind of symbol like the fireplace that the Reagan media team had chosen to represent the warmth of the Geneva summit.

While they basically agreed on the facts--and in the term "collapse"--the three networks colored the news of the summit somewhat differently. NBC was perhaps overly melodramatic, explaining the weekend as one:

In which the leaders of the two most powerful nations in the history of civilization tried and

⁵⁵ Reagan's memoirs say that, at the time, "I was very disappointed--and very angry." See Reagan, p. 679.

⁵⁶ Regan reportedly chose the still photos released by the White House during the Geneva summit, and I assume that he selected the photos for circulation at Reykjavik as well.

failed to reach some kind of an agreement on reducing their bulging arsenals of exotic and wildly lethal weapons.

At the same time, NBC's report by Chris Wallace had more detail than his competitors about what really happened at the bargaining table. Wallace was the first to report that Gorbachev opened the talks with a surprisingly broad set of proposals. This offer caught the Reagan administration off guard, but the Americans quickly responded to Gorbachev's offensive and serious negotiations began, lasting late into the night. "A U.S. official said more progress was made on arms control in those 10 hours than in the previous four years," explained Wallace. Although the two sides came to agreement on numerous issues, by morning they were still far apart on Star Wars. Three times Reagan tried to suggest a compromise, Wallace reported, and three times Gorbachev said no, after which "Reagan picked up his papers, and ended the summit." There would be several controversies during the coming week about the conduct of the summit--over, for example, who ended the meeting--so Wallace's detail-oriented report provided an excellent baseline from which to judge the attempted media manipulation.

CBS's coverage of the end of the summit also had a hint of drama. "Disappointment, anxiety and hope were among reactions today in the wake of the Iceland summit," explained anchor Dan Rather. CBS's broadcast, at the same time, was somewhat disjointed and confusing. Following

Rather's introduction, without really explaining what happened over the weekend or what specifically was being negotiated, the broadcast launched into a report from White House reporter Terence Smith. While ABC's and NBC's White House reports that night focused on the administration's response to the end of the summit, CBS's report focused on the incoming criticism. Almost half of Smith's 2 minute 22 second report was given to critics and defenders of the President's actions.⁵⁷ Only after the report by its White House correspondent did CBS air an explanation by Bob Schieffer of what happened at the bargaining table. This report focused more on explaining the deal that might have been than on describing the negotiating process itself. Schieffer speculated that Gorbachev might have been negotiating in bad faith. "We don't know if the Soviet leader deliberately set out to sandbag the President for propaganda purposes, knowing Mr. Reagan would not give in on 'Star Wars,'" Schieffer asserted.⁵⁸ Schieffer assessed the damage caused by Gorbachev's alleged trap when he ended his piece by saying, "Never in the history of arms negotiations have the superpowers come so close to so much and come away,

⁵⁷ Secretary of State Shultz and Representative Jack Kemp defended the President's actions. Those criticizing Reagan were a member of the West German Christian Democratic Party, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), Rep. Thomas Downey (D-NY) and former Republican Secretary of State Alexander Haig.

⁵⁸ George Will of ABC made a similar accusation that night during his on-air conversation with Professor Robert Legvold of Columbia University, an ABC consultant.

for the moment at least, with nothing." Although he did not outrightly say so, Schieffer added to the perception that Gorbachev was to blame for the summit's collapse.

ABC was somewhat less judgmental in its coverage of the aftermath of the summit. "At the White House this evening, the President prepares to tell the nation what he thinks went wrong or right at the Reykjavik summit," said anchor Peter Jennings when he opened the show. Although Jennings asserted that the meeting "broke up in disarray," he said that international debate had yet to decide whether the summit was "a failure or perhaps a partial success." ABC questioned Reagan's continuing support for Star Wars, reminding viewers that SDI was not yet an operational system. "The failure to reduce their [Soviet and American nuclear arsenals] number at least in Reykjavik was based on differences about a weapons system which doesn't even exist," said Jennings. Sam Donaldson pressed harder in his report from the White House, explaining how paradoxical it was that a system to counter nuclear weapons was making arms control impossible:

On the point of why such a shield would still be necessary if all strategic missiles had been eliminated, national security advisor John Poindexter said today it would still be needed as an insurance policy. "The Soviets have violated past agreements and we need insurance against their violating future ones," said Poindexter.

Donaldson accompanied this passage with a still photo of Poindexter, rather than with film, probably because he did

not have the footage of the national security advisor making this statement. But the presence of the still photo and the phrasing of the report suggested that Donaldson doubted the White House "line" on Star Wars and implicitly blamed the President for the collapse of the summit. Although ABC attacked the Star Wars issue early in its broadcasts, both other networks questioned the President's adherence to Star Wars.

Following the summit, a new battle of expectations began immediately--"propaganda over who rejected peace" as CBS termed it.⁵⁹ On the American side, the importance of molding public opinion following the Reykjavik summit can be seen in the fact that Reagan himself spearheaded the administration's efforts to put the proper "spin" on the weekend's events. The President, for his part, tried to blame Gorbachev personally for the collapse of the summit. Even before he left Reykjavik, Reagan began to criticize the General Secretary for stalling the arms control process. "We came to Iceland to advance the cause of peace, and though we put on the table the most far-reaching arms control proposal in history, the General Secretary rejected it," Reagan said at a departure ceremony before a cheering

⁵⁹ CBS, October 13, 1986, Wyatt Andrews reporting from Reykjavik.

crowd at an American Air Force base outside Reykjavik.⁶⁰ Reagan would go on national television that night--Monday October 13th--to explain what happened at Reykjavik. The networks predicted that although he would offer an unusually frank discussion of what happened in private, he would continue try to shift the blame for the summit's collapse to Gorbachev. That may have been wise, given that Reagan was already beginning to become the object of criticism from members of both parties and from America's allies.⁶¹

On the Soviet side, Gorbachev also headed the effort to mold public opinion. But unlike Reagan, Gorbachev chose not to blame the American president personally for the collapse of the summit. Instead, Gorbachev blamed the political forces surrounding the President, asserting that Reagan was blocked from arms control by the powerful generals in Washington. Sunday evening, following the end of the summit, Gorbachev held a press conference without Reagan to speak out about the summit. This strategic action mimicked Gorbachev's actions following the Geneva summit, when Gorbachev had rushed to hold a press conference before Reagan did to land the first blow in the battle for public opinion. Flanked by top Soviet officials, Gorbachev

⁶⁰ NBC, October 13, 1986, Chris Wallace reporting from Washington. The choice of locale for the President's remarks, as always, was carefully selected to enhance the message.

⁶¹ At the same time, as the networks pointed out, a number of Democrats and liberal Republicans who were up for reelection in November reserved their public criticism of Reagan.

"sounded angry and looked melancholy" as he explained how the Soviets "made historic and genuine arms control concessions that went largely unanswered by the Americans," as CBS put it.⁶² But Gorbachev stressed that the proposals made at Reykjavik would be on the table when arms talks resumed in Geneva later that week, and said he hoped that the Americans would rethink their position on Star Wars. Surprisingly, the networks did not focus their reports on this informational briefing, which because it had happened Sunday was already old news. But the press conference made a strong impression on many of the journalists present, who said in interviews that they were stunned by the intensity and sincerity of Gorbachev's disappointment.

Instead, the networks focused their reports on and drew most of their footage from fresher news--Gorbachev's return to Moscow on Monday. To illustrate their support for his actions, the whole Politburo turned out at the airport to give Gorbachev a hero's welcome. As Gorbachev descended from the airplane and started greeting the crowd on the ground, he showed no signs of fatigue or disappointment. The Politburo members in matching fedoras and dark raincoats surrounded Gorbachev and jostled to shake his hand, enhancing the image that Gorbachev had done well in Iceland. Soviet President Andrei Gromyko, himself a veteran of many

⁶² CBS, October 16, 1986. First quotation from Bill Moyers commentary, second from Wyatt Andrews' report from Reykjavik.

U.S.-USSR negotiating sessions, reportedly tried to console Gorbachev, telling him on the tarmac, "So many times we've tried, well it doesn't matter, next time perhaps."⁶³

Gorbachev got another boost from the government-run press, which underscored the idea that Gorbachev had stepped toward peace and that the Americans had blocked his progress.

The battle for public opinion quickly spread beyond the Soviet and American borders. Both nations sent delegations to America's chief allies to try to explain what happened in Reykjavik. Secretary of State Shultz led the American effort, briefing the NATO allies in Brussels Monday. His assessment was upbeat: "Reykjavik was a success. It would have been a failure not to try and would be a failure not to follow-up on the many achievements at Reykjavik."⁶⁴ The Soviets too tried to court public opinion not only among their Warsaw Pact allies but in NATO as well. ABC's Walter Rodgers showed Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze being whisked into a meeting as Rodgers explained that:

Mr. Gorbachev's advisors have now been assigned to enlist the support of America's NATO allies to persuade President Reagan to confine Star Wars research to the laboratory. The Soviets have begun touring Europe to drum up support for Soviet disarmament proposals.

⁶³ See ABC, October 16, 1986, Walter Rodgers reporting, location not given.

⁶⁴ See ABC, October 13, 1986, Pierre Salinger reporting from Paris.

Gorbachev made a special effort to influence opinion in Europe because there was significant sentiment in favor of arms control among European citizens. Moreover, several European leaders--including Thatcher of Great Britain and Mitterand of France--had voiced opposition to an arms race in space. Thatcher was in particular a target of Gorbachev's efforts because she had both established a good working relationship with Gorbachev and was close to Reagan. Gorbachev sent the chief Soviet arms negotiator, Victor Karpov, to London to brief Thatcher.

E. Selling the Summit

This battle for public opinion was waged intensely by both the Americans and the Soviets in the week following the end of the Reykjavik summit. The American networks said this effort marked the White House's "most intensive public relations blitz," quite a claim given the Reagan administration's normal preoccupation with public opinion.⁶⁵ Yet the same statement could have been made of the Soviets as well, who worked hard to counter the Reagan administration's message. For both sides, television was the battle's primary weapon. Both leaders went on the air upon returning home to try to explain their story to their people and the world. Reagan went first, addressing the

⁶⁵ See CBS, October 14, 1986, Bill Plante reporting from Washington.

nation from the Oval Office on Monday night, October 13. He tried to stress the positive. "Believe me, the significance of that meeting at Reykjavik isn't that we didn't sign agreements in the end. The significance is that we got as close as we did," the President said.⁶⁶ To add to the image of success, the White House took a multi-pronged approach--sending administration officials on dozens of talk shows and news broadcasts, inviting top reporters and columnists to the White House for a special briefing by the President, and announcing that Shultz and Shevardnadze would meet the following month during an international conference in Austria. The American public seemed to accept the administration's analysis. "Public opinion may have settled down to a generally but not overwhelmingly favorable view of the President's role there [Reykjavik]," explained the poll. Forty one percent of the respondents to an October 30th CBS/New York Times poll said that they considered the summit a success while 32 percent said it was a failure. Three to one they agreed with Reagan's refusal to limit SDI.

Gorbachev for his part made an hour-long speech on Soviet television which ran in place of the evening news on Tuesday, October 14th. Sitting in his usual place for televised speeches--a small wooden table in front of a wall of fancy green wallpaper--he criticized Reagan as having come to Iceland unwilling to make compromises. "The

⁶⁶ See ABC and NBC, October 14, 1986.

Americans came to Reykjavik having nothing in their hearts," Gorbachev said.⁶⁷ Later in the speech, his rhetoric about Reagan got even harsher: "You're less than honest, you want to harm the Soviet Union."⁶⁸ The Soviet leader was tough, warning that the Soviets would try to build a space defense system if the U.S. insisted on creating one. But Gorbachev also urged the President to reconsider his position on Star Wars. "The stumbling block is SDI. Remove this stumbling block and any agreement is possible," he said.⁶⁹ The sum effect was to keep Reagan in a defensive position. The Soviets too took a multiple-step approach to managing public opinion, continuing to send officials abroad and making scientists and other officials available to Western journalists.

As the Reagan administration continued to try to control public opinion, administration officials began to change their stories. As Jack Matlock remembered, the administration began to weave its story on the ride home from Reykjavik:

And it was later, I remember flying on the plane back, I got out a yellow pad and I started putting down what we had achieved and what we didn't achieve. And I finally walked up to Poindexter and Regan and I said, "Why are you in the dumps?"

⁶⁷ See NBC, October 14, 1986, Phil Bremen reporting from Moscow.

⁶⁸ See ABC, October 14, 1986, Walter Rodgers reporting, located not indicated.

⁶⁹ ibid.

Look at what we've achieved." And they sort of went down it and Regan said, "My God, John get back there are start talking to the press. This is a triumph, and you know, it's not a failure."⁷⁰

In fact, the administration line toward the Soviets changed nearly 180 degrees in the two days following the end of the Reykjavik meeting. On Sunday, immediately following the break-up of the summit, the Reagan administration called the summit as something of a failure, and harshly criticized the Soviets for forestalling progress. But as early as on the plane back to the United States, Reagan officials began to alter their positions, taking a more positive position. By the following day, the Americans were upbeat, saying that much was done in Reykjavik and that work with the Soviets could continue.

For once, network television did something it rarely does--it challenged the Reagan administration. Taking advantage of television's power to remember, the networks began to juxtapose clips of administration officials over the two days to illustrate how they were changing their stories. In some cases, different members of the administration were saying contradictory things. CBS, for example, juxtaposed the Chief of Staff and the President speaking 36 hours apart:

BILL PLANTE: What a difference two days made.
DONALD REGAN (White House Chief of Staff, Sunday):
No, there will not be another summit in--in the

⁷⁰ Interview with Jack H. Matlock, Jr., June 25, 1991.

near future that I can see at this time. The Soviets are the ones that refuse to make the deal. PRESIDENT REAGAN: This week, I want to report to you that I believe there exists the opportunity to plant a permanent flag of peace at that summit.

ABC's coverage was even more devastating because they used film of the same officials telling two different stories two days apart:

SAM DONALDSON: Administration officials fanned out all over town and all over television to argue to point and, in some cases, correct the downbeat assessment they had originally delivered Sunday night. Secretary Shultz then and now.

GEORGE SHULTZ (Sunday): We are deeply disappointed at this outcome.

SHULTZ (Tuesday): Our assessment is very positive and apparently that is the assessment on the Soviet side as well.

DONALDSON: White House Chief of Staff Regan, then and now.

DONALD REGAN (Sunday): The Soviets are the ones that refused to make the deal. It shows them up for what they are. The Soviets finally showed their hands, they're not really interested in getting away with these things.

REGAN (Tuesday): Once you get a good night's sleep and you reflect on it, I think your mood changes and I think we are upbeat now and we realize we did do quite a bit in Iceland and we've got a lot to be proud of.

These stories, although they tried to discredit the Reagan administration, seemed to have little effect on public opinion in the long run. Opinion polls taken after the summit showed that most Americans supported Reagan's handling of the summit. An October 15th New York Times/CBS poll found that 72 percent of respondents approved of Reagan's handling of Soviet-American relations and 57 percent thought the Reykjavik meeting would lead to progress on arms control in the future. Gorbachev, like Reagan, also

updated his view of the summit in the days that followed. Meeting with Argentina's President Alfonsine on October 13th, for example, Gorbachev "spoke positively about the Iceland summit. We stand by our proposals, said Gorbachev. It is possible to achieve major agreements."⁷¹

Over the next few days, the Reagan administration attempted to mold public opinion in a rather unusual way--by calling some of the basic facts of the summit into question. The White House was so zealous about making the record reflect positively on Reagan that some officials even began to lie about what happened during the negotiations. This ill-conceived policy quickly created problems, and caused the Soviets to protect themselves. "The flaw in the American spin control [after Reykjavik] was that there had been somebody else there--the Russians," explained Serge Schmemann of The New York Times.⁷² The Soviets for their part responded strongly to the American lies to ensure that the whole truth was known to the world. "The Russians started defensively and selectively leaking," explained Schmemann. The television networks followed these manipulations of the facts closely, understanding that "before arms control negotiators can build on the Iceland

⁷¹ NBC, October 15, 1986, Marvin Kalb reporting from New York.

⁷² Interview with Serge Schmemann, July 13, 1991.

summit, they must first reconstruct what really happened there."⁷³

The first fact to come into question was over who ended the summit. Although the first reports indicated that Reagan picked up his papers and left, Press Secretary Larry Speakes asserted on Tuesday October 14th that Gorbachev ended the meeting. When the Soviets protested, the White House soon admitted that Reagan had been the first to pick up his briefcase. A larger question soon developed over what was on the negotiating table. Almost a week after the summit began, a controversy started over what precisely the U.S. was offering in terms of long range nuclear weapons cuts. Was it the elimination in 10 years of just ballistic missiles as the Reagan administration claimed, or of all missiles as the Soviets asserted? There is a big difference. The elimination of land and submarine launched ballistic missiles would still allow the slower-flying nuclear bombers and cruise missiles to be deployed. The dispute was first mentioned by ABC in a story on Friday, October 17th, and received attention from the three networks for nearly two more weeks. As they had altered their overall "spin" on the nature of the Iceland summit, so too did the Reagan administration change its explanation of what was on the table. And as television had been particularly

⁷³ CBS, October 23, 1986, David Martin reporting from Washington.

effective in illustrating the double speak of the American officials, so too were the networks effective at tracing the changing U.S. line on what was being offered at Reykjavik. Directly after the summit, for instance, it appeared as if the Soviets were correct and that Reagan had suggested eliminating all nuclear arms. Television showed, for example, Chief of Staff Regan explaining after the summit broke up that, "We said to the Soviets we will do away with all nuclear weapons, nuclear bombs, nuclear shells, or field artillery, things of, everything was on the table."⁷⁴ Congressional leaders confirmed that Reagan told them he had put on the table a proposal calling for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. It was nearly two weeks later before the White House admitted that Gorbachev was right about what NBC termed this "increasingly rancorous feud."⁷⁵ To force the American's hand, the Soviets released several documents to deliver concrete proof that Reagan was lying about what he had offered at Reykjavik:

The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister took the unprecedented step of revealing what he said were Soviet notes from the private meeting, quoting the President as telling Gorbachev: If we agree that by the end of the ten-year period all nuclear arms are to be eliminated, we can refer this to our delegations in Geneva to prepare an agreement

⁷⁴ Quoted by ABC, October 17, 1986, Sam Donaldson reporting from Washington.

⁷⁵ NBC, October 27, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

which you could sign during your visit to the United States.⁷⁶

This sophisticated release by the Soviets settled the debate over what Reagan had proposed. Yet still, the issue lingered on. As CBS reported, during several campaign appearances following the Soviet leak, Reagan whether intentionally or not continued to urge the Superpowers to strive toward elimination of all nuclear weapons.⁷⁷

In the midst of the dispute over what happened in Reykjavik, the Soviets and Americans began a new round of diplomatic expulsions. The Soviets expelled five U.S. diplomats from the Soviet Union on October 27th. The Sunday announcement received substantial coverage, starting the broadcast on the two networks broadcasting that night.⁷⁸ This was seen by the networks as a reprisal for the expulsion by the U.S. of 25 Soviet diplomats the previous month. Moreover, because the Soviets expelled only five people, the reprisal was interpreted by the networks as rather mild. But that there were expulsions at all was seen by U.S. television as a sign by Gorbachev that he was still "tough."⁷⁹ The Americans responded quickly and firmly,

⁷⁶ NBC, October 27, 1986, Andrea Mitchell reporting from Washington.

⁷⁷ See CBS, October 30 and October 31, 1986.

⁷⁸ See NBC and ABC, October 19, 1986.

⁷⁹ See NBC, October 19, 1986, Phil Bremen reporting from Moscow.

expelling 55 more Soviets from the United States two days later. The networks again made this their lead story, and saw the expulsions as the White House's attempt to counter Gorbachev's toughness. The "diplomatic ping pong match"⁸⁰ continued as the following day, the Soviets expelled another five diplomats and, moreover, withdrew more than 250 Soviet citizens who worked in support jobs in the Moscow embassy and Leningrad consulate--such as cooks, drivers and construction workers. Until the Americans could bring over new staff, the withdrawal would have a terrible effect on life for the American diplomats. To this day, those support positions remain filled by Americans. Gorbachev went on television in the evening of the day when the second Soviet retaliations were announced, but he barely mentioned the expulsions. Instead, Gorbachev tried to focus on arms control. "Gorbachev was able to take the high road... alternately cajoling and chastising the Reagan Administration for what he called its efforts to derail the process of detente."⁸¹ On the one hand, Gorbachev criticized Star Wars and accused the U.S. of poisoning the atmosphere for peace. "In the last few days actions have been taken which from a normal person's standpoint seem just crazy," Gorbachev explained.⁸² Yet on the other hand,

⁸⁰ NBC, October 22, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

⁸¹ CBS, October 22, 1986, David Andelman reporting from Moscow.

⁸² ABC, October 22, 1986, Walter Rodgers reporting from Moscow.

Gorbachev "did give a glowing assessment of his personal meeting with Reagan."⁸³ Gorbachev confirmed that the initiatives from Iceland were still on the table and encouraged Reagan to give up Star Wars in exchange for arms control. According to NBC, Gorbachev impressed the Reagan administration with his restraint and his continued talk about the need for arms control.⁸⁴ The White House did not retaliate for the last round of Soviet expulsions.

F. Finale

Gorbachev remained somewhat above this fray, and did very little to cultivate publicity until November 7th, the anniversary of the Communist Revolution of 1917.⁸⁵ After reviewing the annual parade through Red Square--the pictures of which would cycle through television news reports for the 12 months to come--Gorbachev made the traditional address from atop Lenin's mausoleum. The Soviet leader explained that there could be no turning back from the progress towards peace made at Reykjavik and called for an end to war forever. To back up these thoughts, Soviet arms negotiators in Geneva again put on the table a proposal to eliminate all nuclear weapons. These proposals came one day after an

⁸³ NBC, October 22, 1986, Steve Hurst reporting from Moscow.

⁸⁴ NBC, October 22, 1986, Chris Wallace reporting from Washington.

⁸⁵ Due to a change to the Georgian calendar, the anniversary of the October Revolution now falls in the month of November.

unproductive meeting between Shultz and Shevardnadze in Vienna.

ABC seized the opportunity on Revolution Day as they had on the first anniversary of Gorbachev's coming to power to offer an analysis of the Soviet leader's performance. Moscow Bureau Chief Walter Rodgers' lengthy report, running three and one-quarter minutes, focused on the economic and social problems Gorbachev was encountering in trying to promote glasnost. The report opened by showing Gorbachev during one of his famous walkabouts, holding a giant loaf of bread which a woman had just presented to him. Although ABC did not identify the location, it appeared to be footage from Gorbachev's trip to the southern Russian city of Krasnodar in September. "He dashes around the Soviet Union like a politician who really wants to know what his people are thinking," explained Rodgers during the scenes of Gorbachev talking to people in the crowd. Rodgers' report painted the Soviet people, not Gorbachev, as the stumbling block to economic progress. After all, Rodgers argued, the Soviet people live a heavily subsidized existence, with virtually no rent and low cost food. Rodgers peppered his report with shots of Soviet bread stores, typical Soviet apartment blocks, and commuters on Moscow's inexpensive trolley bus system. "But the problem with reform is that everybody here wants it to come out of someone else's pocket," said Rodgers. "From the man on the street all the

way up to the party bureaucrats there's resistance somewhere to about everything Mr. Gorbachev is trying." Gorbachev's answer: glasnost. Although this term is now familiar, ABC's official transcript of Rodgers' story confirms how unfamiliar the concept of glasnost was at the time: although Rodgers explained that Gorbachev's prescription for the Soviet problems "is a healthy dose of discipline and glasnost or openness," the transcripts reads "(RUSSIAN WORD)" where glasnost was uttered. Rodgers enumerated some examples of where glasnost was already being instituted--in the press, for example, where "the Soviet news media has been reporting stories that would have been unthinkable before Gorbachev. Discussions of the country's drug problems, prostitution in Moscow, scandals in orphanages." The text and pictures in Rodgers' report reflected favorably on Gorbachev, but Rodgers closed on a more pessimistic note: "He has yet to take the bold political steps or make any major changes in the system that are probably required to reverse this country's economic slide." Rodgers' competitors at NBC and CBS were noticing the same changes, and ABC's report was the first in a flurry of reports on glasnost at the end of 1986.

There was little press coverage given to Gorbachev during the rest of November, but what little there was was inspired by Gorbachev's undertakings in foreign affairs. On November 13th, CBS reported that Gorbachev had sent a

personal letter to British Prime Minister Thatcher outlining his latest thoughts on arms control. "The Soviets appear to be concerned by Mrs. Thatcher's opposition to the sweeping cuts in nuclear weapons that the superpowers are considering."⁸⁶ The letter was sent on the eve of Thatcher's visit to the United States. Then on November 24, Gorbachev arrived in India for a four-day visit. Gorbachev was hailed upon his arrival as "a crusader for peace,"⁸⁷ and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi joined Gorbachev in criticizing Star Wars. Gorbachev attacked Star Wars several times during his visit, telling the Indian Parliament for example that deploying SDI would be "not disarmament, but fraud."⁸⁸ Ironically, during the final day of the visit, the U.S. made a deployment which put American nuclear strength above the limits under the unratified SALT II agreement of 1979. At a joint news conference with Gandhi, Gorbachev criticized the deployment, asserting that, "We regard this is a major mistake which will make it more difficult to search for disarmament."⁸⁹ The image that Gorbachev was truly interested in peace was highlighted by footage from the Soviet leader's tour of India. "He cloaked

⁸⁶ CBS, November 13, 1986, Tom Fenton reporting from London.

⁸⁷ NBC, November 25, 1986, Tom Brokaw anchoring.

⁸⁸ ABC, November 27, 1986, Tom Jarriel anchoring.

⁸⁹ See ABC, November 28, 1986, Walter Rodgers reporting from New Delhi.

himself in the mantle of peace and non-violence, here paying homage at the site where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated."⁹⁰ At the same time, Gorbachev refused to answer reporters questions about the war in Afghanistan.

Gorbachev again remained quiet during the first half of December 1986, receiving virtually no publicity on American television news. The only stories before the 19th of December mentioning the Soviet leader were on ABC, demonstrating again that network's strong commitment to foreign news. ABC followed several small but important stories. On December 11th, for example, corespondent Bob Zelnick reported that Gorbachev had recently told party officials that Afghanistan was as ABC put it "a no win situation from which the Russians must withdraw." The next day, Gorbachev again indicated that he was beginning to think about a pullout. This withdrawal finally occurred, but was not completed until February, 1989. At the time of this report, however, Soviet popular sentiment against the Afghan war was just starting to be shown publicly. Next, on December 18th, the Soviets announced that after a year and a half long moratorium on nuclear testing, they had decided that they would begin testing again after the next American test blast. ABC theorized that the end of the moratorium was not Gorbachev's choice, but that the leader was forced

⁹⁰ ibid.

into it by the Soviet military.⁹¹ In that same broadcast, ABC reported in brief that there was a riot going on in the Soviet republic of Kazakhstan over the replacement of Kazakhstan's Communist Party leader with a non-Kazakh. ABC probably put this story on the air because it marked "the first time that we can remember" that the Soviet news agency told the world about an internal disturbance. Although the network had did have a story on the riots, ABC missed a chance here to explore Gorbachev's leadership style and the coming of glasnost. Rioting occurred when Gorbachev removed the very corrupt head of the party in Kazakhstan, Dinmukhamed Kunaev, and replaced him with Gennady Kolbin, a Gorbachev man who was a member of the Chuvash ethnic minority.⁹² Kunaev's cronies in the capital city of Alma-Ata, seeing their boss removed in favor of an outsider, stirred up a rampage that sent 200,000 people into the streets. This incident illustrated how strong the old system of Party patronage remained, and what Gorbachev would have to counter to bring about openness and reform.

Gorbachev next came into the spotlight because of some remarkable news. Dissident physicist and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov and wife Elena Bonner would be released after nearly seven years of internal exile in the

⁹¹ ABC, December 18, 1986, Rick Indefurth reporting from Washington.

⁹² I have drawn my account from Doder and Branson, p.177-79.

Russian city of Gorky. The news was announced not by Gorbachev, but by one of his spokesmen during a Kremlin news conference. A few days before, Gorbachev had called Sakharov to tell the physicist he would be freed. As the Nobel Prize winner explained in the first volume of his memoirs, his release was arranged by Gorbachev personally. Sakharov wrote that the KGB installed a phone in his Gorky apartment out of the blue, explaining that he would receive an important call the next day. The next afternoon, sure enough, Gorbachev called Sakharov. As the physicist recalled, the General Secretary said:

"I received your letter. We've reviewed it and discussed it...(I don't remember his exact words about the other participants in the decision process, but he didn't mention names or positions.) You can return to Moscow. The Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet will be rescinded. A decision has also been made about Elena Bonnaire."

I broke in sharply. "That's my wife!"... Gorbachev continued. "You can return to Moscow together. You have an apartment there. Marchuk [president of the Academy of Sciences] is coming to see you. Go back to your patriotic work."⁹³

Sakharov thanked Gorbachev, but undaunted, he then began to complain to the General Secretary about the treatment of political prisoners in the Soviet Union. When Sakharov said that all prisoners of conscience should be freed, Gorbachev reportedly replied curtly, "I don't agree with you." This exchange helps demonstrate why Sakharov, the father of the

⁹³ Andrei Sakharov, Memoirs (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 615.

Soviet hydrogen bomb, was regarded with almost saint-like status by the Soviet people for his continued fight for human rights. His release had great psychological significance. "In one fell swoop, Gorbachev had disarmed his foreign critics and signaled to the Soviet intelligentsia his commitment to liberalization."⁹⁴ Yet again, Gorbachev chose to pass up an opportunity to capitalize on positive press coverage. He did not cultivate publicity which would have enhanced the message of Sakharov's release--by, for example, appearing jointly with Sakharov. On the other hand, with thousands of political prisoners still held in Soviet jails, Gorbachev had reason not to make the Sakharov release a cause celebre. I term this tenth key interaction between Gorbachev and the press.

The American networks nevertheless gave credit to Gorbachev for this good news. "I think it's a merit of the new leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev," explained one Soviet human rights activist on NBC.⁹⁵ Yet the networks also interpreted the release of Sakharov as an attempt by Gorbachev to better the Soviet image rather than as a complete turnabout on human rights. "Gorbachev is determined to improve his country's image abroad and is willing to make some significant gestures to do it," said

⁹⁴ Doder and Branson, p. 172.

⁹⁵ NBC, December 19, 1986, Sandy Gilmour reporting from Moscow.

CBS.⁹⁶ Yet the networks agreed that the release would deflect some of the criticism of the Soviet stand on human rights. "The release of the couple is seen here as an effort by Mikhail Gorbachev to convince skeptics the Soviet Union is softening on human rights."⁹⁷ For American television, the Sakharov release was not the lead story of the day; it appeared 8 minutes into the ABC broadcast, 10 minutes into the NBC program and 12 minutes into the CBS news. But in the Soviet Union, it was one of the most important stories of the year. Sakharov would continue to have great political influence in the Soviet Union until his death in 1990.

Although ABC had developed a reputation for covering foreign affairs, it was NBC and CBS which covered the Sakharov story most closely in the following days. The day after the announcement of Sakharov's release, CBS reported that Sakharov and Bonner had talked with family members in the United States. The dissidents confirmed that Gorbachev had personally called Sakharov to announce the end of the internal exile.⁹⁸ On the 21st, NBC reported that Sakharov "intends to continue speaking his mind" following his release. As proof, NBC's Sandy Gilmour reported some of Sakharov's telephone exchange with Gorbachev, in which

⁹⁶ CBS, December 19, 1986, Bert Quint reporting from Moscow.

⁹⁷ NBC, December 19, 1986, Sandy Gilmour reporting from Moscow.

⁹⁸ CBS, December 20, 1986, Bruce Morton anchoring.

Sakharov pled for the release of other Soviet political prisoners. Gilmour's report contained mixed conclusions on Gorbachev's progress on human rights. On the one hand, Gilmour explained that "Gorbachev is trying to improve the Soviet human-rights image" by having released several well-known dissidents during 1986. Yet at the same time, the correspondent noted that "human-rights advocates in the West say that the appearance of progress is deceiving, that Gorbachev is simply ignoring thousands of cases less publicized than Sakharov's." CBS noted the same night that Sakharov was finally on route to Moscow.

On December 26th, CBS and NBC both ran interviews with Sakharov. CBS, however, put more emphasis on the interview. Touting the talk with Sakharov as "live and uncensored"⁹⁹, CBS led the broadcast with a segment on Sakharov and ran a second segment later in the program. Although this interview may not have looked good--not only was there a "talking head" but Sakharov had to use a translator--but the content was fascinating. Sakharov was outspoken as he answered substitute anchor Charles Kuralt's questions about Gorbachev, glasnost and human rights. Sakharov admitted that Gorbachev had made some progress on openness. "Gorbachev has done, and is attempting to do many positive things, which are difficult to do in this country. Still, I would like to see him and those around him do even more,"

⁹⁹ CBS, December 26, 1986, Charles Kuralt anchoring.

said the physicist. Sakharov spoke with NBC the same night, although the interview began more than 11 minutes into the broadcast. Sakharov added to his comments on Gorbachev, saying that he planned to talk with Gorbachev again about human rights problems.

NBC used the example of Sakharov to illustrate a policy "previously alien to the Kremlin"--glasnost.¹⁰⁰ Again, Gorbachev was portrayed as the driving force behind the new policy of openness. "For the twenty months he's been in power, [Gorbachev] has been on kind of a crusade, trying to wheedle and browbeat party bureaucrats into modernizing the economy and reshaping society," said correspondent Sandy Gilmour. The report illustrated the advent of glasnost with many examples drawn from literature and the arts. He told of previously outlawed books like Boris Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago which would soon be published. Gilmour then used some images to illustrate glasnost in the film industry which would have been prohibited in the days before Gorbachev. The correspondent went onto a Soviet movie set, where what looked like a spaghetti western was being filmed, to show that producers were now "able to turn out a film that will not have to end with a victorious Socialist hero." Gilmour also showed a few scenes of nuclear blasts from a Soviet film called "Letters of a Dead Man," which was unusual because of its harsh anti-war stance. Further,

¹⁰⁰ NBC, December 22, 1986, Sandy Gilmour reporting from Moscow.

Gilmour noted the improvement in reporting in the Soviet press. These are substantive changes, said the report, for which Gorbachev should be credited personally. "It's a serious effort by Gorbachev and by the Soviet government to give to the Soviet population a signal that there is a substantial change," explained Soviet defector and author Arkady Shevchenko. Gorbachev undoubtedly hoped for positive publicity following the release of Sakharov, and this report was partial proof that Gorbachev received it.

Interestingly, on the same evening, CBS also aired a report centering on the affect of glasnost on the arts. Correspondent Wyatt Andrews visited Moscow's Bitsa Park, where on the weekends an art show by "unofficial" artists had sprung up. Not only were officials letting all artists display their works, even when they depicted anti-communist themes, but they were letting the artists charge for their works whatever the market would bear. Yet again, the report suggested that the people, not Gorbachev, were resisting the change. As Andrews' cameras spanned the many types of drawings and paintings on display in the Moscow cold, he explained that some of the avant garde artists in Bitsa Park were having their works trampled not by police, but by members of the public. "The resistance comes not from any formal opposition but from a conservative people, afraid of any unfamiliar vision," Andrews explained. The resistance

"shows what Mr. Gorbachev faces" in trying to institute reform, concluded the report.

Nineteen eighty six ended on some rather downbeat notes for Gorbachev. First was the seventh anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan on December 27th. The war had developed into something of a quagmire, and although Gorbachev had voiced an intention to pull out Soviet troops, only token troop withdrawals had as yet happened. CBS gave the most coverage to the story, sending anchorman Rather to Afghanistan to travel with some Afghan soldiers. Moreover, on December 30th, the Soviets turned down the American request to exchange televised new year's wishes the way the nations had done a year earlier. This announcement led all three network broadcasts during the traditionally slow time between Christmas and New Year's Day. Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gerasimov delivered the bad news, explaining in English, "Why should we create any illusions about our relations? We have no basis for the exchange of such New Year's messages."¹⁰¹ Only CBS credited this act to Gorbachev personally, yet all three networks interpreted the refusal as a Soviet attempt to portray relations with the U.S. as strained. In the end, Reagan talked to the Soviet people over the Voice of America, while Gorbachev made a written statement to the American people. But Gorbachev addressed his own people on television, telling them as ABC

¹⁰¹ All three networks used all or part of this quotation.

said, "The door to negotiations is still open, but everybody must know our goodwill and our desire for peace has nothing to do with weakness."¹⁰² CBS reported that there was in fact more flexibility on the Soviet side than they would admit publicly, and that perhaps a deal on medium range nuclear weapons would be possible without limits on Star Wars.¹⁰³ Like the network's reporting on glasnost, this too was a harbinger of things soon to come.

Thus 1986 ended, with Gorbachev in the midst of a number of gambles. Gorbachev gambled in Reykjavik, trying to entice Reagan into an arms control deal. Though the Soviet leader lost the first few hands of this game, he eventually won when the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was signed in December 1987. Gorbachev gambled with the release of Sakharov. This gamble clearly paid off quickly, with Gorbachev achieving a major public relations victory both at home and abroad. Lastly, Gorbachev was gambling in trying to reform the hulking Soviet economy. This is an effort that is still going on, and there is a mixed response as to whether the gamble has paid off.

In all of Gorbachev's future endeavors, the media continued to play an important role. Gorbachev in the years since 1986 has continued to experiment with new media

¹⁰² ABC, december 31, 1986, Sheilah Kast reporting from Palm Springs.

¹⁰³ CBS, December 31, 1986, Bill Plante reporting from Palm Springs.

management techniques, and developed continually increased sophistication. He remains a favorite source of news for American television, and accordingly an object of fascination by the American public. Although fate has yet to determine how Mikhail Gorbachev will be remembered, it is clear that he is an important figure not just in the field of press and politics, but in world history.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

Mikhail Gorbachev undoubtedly tried to fashion his image in the world and at home during his first two years as Soviet leader through the cultivation of positive media coverage. While his overall public relations program may have lacked the evenness and cohesion of a preplanned, long-term, western-style strategy, Gorbachev and his advisors continually learned how to work more effectively with the media. Gorbachev continued to unveil new tactics throughout the two years from his trip to Great Britain in December, 1984 to the release of dissident Andrei Sakharov in December, 1986. Gorbachev showed steady success in building his image in the United States, becoming slowly more popular with the American people during 1985 and 1986. While he got neither the majority of Americans nor their government to abandon their fundamental distrust of the Soviet political system, Gorbachev made Americans feel more optimistic about Soviet-American relations.¹ Almost paradoxically, Americans seemed to like Gorbachev but distrust "the Soviets."²

¹ To this day, some Americans retain a fundamental distrust of the Soviet Union. The Gallup Poll Monthly Report of May, 1990 shows, for example, that about 9 percent of Americans have a "very unfavorable" view of the Soviet Union and another 25 percent retain a "mostly unfavorable" attitude toward that country.

² These kinds of inconsistencies between attitude and behavior have frequently been noted in diverse areas. For example, although 64 percent of respondents to a 1990 Gallup Poll said they disapproved of the way Congress is handling its job and only half

Gorbachev's success clearly provides lessons for other world leaders on how to and why to cultivate positive media coverage. Yet it would be rather difficult for a world leader today to recreate the Gorbachev phenomenon easily. To a great extent, I believe that Gorbachev was a unique case--a one-time only deal. The reasons for this are many. One reason is that Soviet Union, as the other "superpower", held a unique place in the minds of Americans. If Gorbachev had the same personality but been head of any country other than the Soviet Union, the coverage he attracted would have been smaller. Second, Gorbachev followed a string of elderly, decrepit predecessors. As numerous journalists covering Gorbachev have said (see Chapter One), Gorbachev in part looked so good because Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko looked so bad. While Gorbachev would undoubtedly have created a sensation had he followed Brezhnev directly, the coverage given Gorbachev was probably even larger having

said that they approved of their Congressman's performance, more than 98 percent of Congressional incumbents are routinely returned to office. An interesting treatment of this issue can be found in the book Dimensions of Tolerance by Herbert McClosley and Alida Brill (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983), which points out many inconsistencies in the attitudes of both elites and the public towards issues of civil liberty following several national surveys.

Why do such inconsistencies persist? Public opinion researchers believe that one set of social pressures may act on respondents to a questionnaire but that another, more complicated set act on respondents when they are faced with the choice of action in the real world. "The assumption that feelings are directly translated into action has not been demonstrated," explained Alan Wicker in "Attitudes vs. Actions: The Relationship of Verbal and Overt Behavioral Responses to Attitude Object," Journal of Social Issues 25 (4), 1969, p. 75.

followed three elderly leaders. Third, another unique factor was the stifling of the American correspondents working in the Soviet Union before Gorbachev. The correspondents were so limited in what and how they could report before 1985 that they reacted with favor when Gorbachev came to power. Moreover, the reporters became freer to report during Gorbachev's first two years, which also helped create positive feelings. But all in all, the Gorbachev case presents numerous insights into the effect of the press in the policy making process.

A. Assessing the Two-Part Strategy

Although Gorbachev was continually introducing new tactics during the time period of this study, not everything that he did was "strategic" in nature--that is to say, not everything Gorbachev did to cultivate press coverage created an effect or impression above and beyond the content of his message.³ As this examination of the coverage of Gorbachev has revealed, his strategy seemed to go through two main phases. In 1984 and 1985, Gorbachev's cultivation of media coverage was highly strategic. For example, Gorbachev began in 1985 to go on "walkabouts" where he would mix with regular Soviet citizens. This created an impression beyond Gorbachev's verbal claim that he wanted to be "close to the

³ An excellent discussion of the nature of "strategic political communication" can be found in Manheim's All of the People, All of the Time, particularly p. 3-24.

people." In 1986, however, Gorbachev was far more conservative in his cultivation of press coverage. In fact, he rarely chose to take advantage of opportunities where he might have used the media to enhance his message, such as during the crisis following the Chernobyl nuclear accident. On the other hand, strategic use of the media might have backfired during the crises of 1986, and Gorbachev may have been demonstrating extreme good sense in trying to avoid publicity at many of those times.

In the last four chapters, I have identified 10 key press-politics interactions during 1985 and 1986 which are instructive as to how Gorbachev both used and failed to use the press strategically. Taken together, these 10 events suggest that Gorbachev used the media to create different effects at different times. The key events seem to indicate that Gorbachev was particularly interested in using the media to establish his image during 1985. This image being fully established after the Geneva summit of November 1985, Gorbachev seemed to concentrate less on how he was transmitting his message and more on the substance of the policies being advocated. Gorbachev's success with the media in 1985 implies that the change seen in 1986 was a conscious choice of conservatism--a deliberate change in tactics:

1. Supreme Soviet Elections, February 24, 1985.

This was the first time Gorbachev cultivated media coverage in a way that conveyed a message in and of itself. On this day, Gorbachev appeared without prior notice in Chernenko's place at the mandatory national voting for the Supreme Soviet. Bringing his wife and family to the polls, and acting with the style of a Western politician, Gorbachev presented a strong contrast to the old, frail Chernenko. This thereby created a surprising, positive image.

2. Leningrad "Walkabout," May 16, 1985.

For the first time, Gorbachev went out and talked with what was reported to be members of the general public. Although American reporters knew that this group had actually consisted of specially selected Party elites, the image of a Soviet leader out meeting with his people still created a strong, positive impression both in the West and at home. Gorbachev followed with dozens of such appearances with groups of workers. Although these photo opportunities began to have diminishing effects, they nevertheless hinted that the Soviet leader's interest in meeting with constituents was sustained.

3. Time Magazine Interview, September 1, 1985.

Gorbachev chose for his first major foreign interview an American newsmagazine with a large international readership. His advisors said that Gorbachev consulted with them to find a medium that would be easy to control. This interview created a positive image not only among the masses, but also among elites. Because Gorbachev received such positive exposure in an American publication, the Reagan administration felt somewhat threatened by the Time interview. Consequently, Reagan stepped up his campaign to wrestle positive public opinion away from Gorbachev.

4. Press Conference with Francois Mitterand, October 4, 1985.

In his first full-scale press conference with the Western media, Gorbachev chose to appear jointly with French President Mitterand, whom Gorbachev visited in Paris. Mitterand, while a well-respected world leader, seemed dour and staid personally when compared to the charming, outspoken Gorbachev. Simply by appearing with Mitterand, Gorbachev both gained respectability and enhanced his personal image. This was of particular importance at the time because the Paris meeting was seen as a rehearsal for the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Geneva.

5. Soviet Experts at Geneva, Early November, 1985.

Gorbachev sent a team of Soviet experts to Geneva for the week preceding the first Reagan-Gorbachev summit. No

such experts from the U.S. delegation were present at the time, so the Soviets were able to meet without American interference with dozens of foreign journalists. The Soviet efforts were instrumental not only in spreading information but in conveying the impression of openness.

6. Nuclear Arms Control Proposal, January 15, 1986.

This event was important not for the strategic way in which Gorbachev cultivated media coverage, but for the opportunity allowed to pass. Gorbachev did little while promoting a dramatic arms control proposal which enhanced his message. He did not, for example, even announce the arms proposal personally--it was read by an announcer on the Soviet evening news. This was the first of several events in 1986 where Gorbachev failed to capitalize on an opportunity to use the media in a strategic sense.

7. Chernobyl Nuclear Accident, April, 1986.

The Chernobyl accident was a national disaster, and Gorbachev may have been extremely wise to delay making his first official statement for more than two weeks after the accident. Sources I interviewed suggested that Gorbachev had a great deal of trouble getting reliable information in the days following the accident; the situation was quite frightening. But at the same time, Gorbachev could have cultivated media coverage which demonstrated his personal concern about the effect of the accident on the Soviet people. To my mind, if Gorbachev had traveled not even to

Chernobyl but just to the Ukraine to assess the situation, he would have created a positive impression. By remaining in Moscow and maintaining his silence, he undermined the image of openness and dynamism which he had been trying to convey in 1985.

8. Daniloff-Zakharov Affair, September, 1986.

This was the third major event of 1986 where Gorbachev chose not to cultivate coverage in any strategic fashion. As he had following the Chernobyl accident, Gorbachev maintained silence for nearly three weeks following the beginning of the Daniloff-Zakharov spying scandal. And when he did speak out, Gorbachev presented an old-style message which conflicted with the more progressive image he had presented in 1985. There were a few ways in which Gorbachev might have tried to influence the coverage positively. A Gorbachev-Daniloff meeting, for example, might have demonstrated to the West Gorbachev's sincerity to move past the scandal towards progress in international relations.

9. Reykjavik Summit, October, 1986.

Gorbachev returned to his strategic use of the press to some degree during the Reykjavik summit meeting with Reagan. I have identified four ways in which Gorbachev enhanced his message through press coverage before, during, and after the two-day summit. First, Gorbachev spoke out quickly about an accident on a Soviet nuclear-powered submarine one week before the summit. Gorbachev's fast, candid response

implied that he had reformed his secretive ways after the Chernobyl and Daniloff-Zakharov problems. Second, Gorbachev brought his wife Raisa even though Reagan did not bring his spouse. Mrs. Gorbachev received positive press coverage during the trip because there was little else to cover during the time of the talks (when a news blackout was in place). Third, Gorbachev made a statement during his arrival ceremony at Reykjavik's airport, which Reagan had not done. This put Gorbachev's agenda for the meeting on the world's minds. Fourth, Gorbachev held a solo news conference following the end of the summit in which he decided to show the intense emotions he was feeling at the time--anger, exhaustion and frustration. Gorbachev's emotional performance enhanced his claim that he was disappointed that agreement had not been reached. That press conference, said some I interviewed, had a large effect on the press covering Gorbachev, who were truly struck by Gorbachev's sincerity.

10. Sakharov Release, December, 1986.

Although he showed signs of using the press strategically during the Reykjavik summit, Gorbachev reverted to the less strategic style he exhibited through most of 1986 during the release of dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov. Sakharov, a leading human rights advocate, was released from seven years of internal exile by Gorbachev's personal order. At the same time, Gorbachev did

not make the announcement of Sakharov's freedom personally, nor do anything specifically to cultivate press coverage related to Sakharov. Considering that the release of Sakharov was praised throughout the world, Gorbachev might have tried to associate himself more closely with the action. Of course, there were reasons why Gorbachev probably reasoned against a more visible role in the release of Sakharov. There were at that time thousands of political prisoners, and Gorbachev probably did not want to appear "soft" on the issue of political dissent.

I found it surprising, if not shocking given Gorbachev's reputation for being a master manipulator of the press, to see how conservative his use of the media actually was during 1986. Yet American television reporters never suggested in that year that Gorbachev was any less adept in handling the media than he had been a year earlier. This omission suggests that the media's power to frame is indeed strong--that once Gorbachev had created that first impression as being someone able to manage the press, that the image endured, obscuring his actual change in tactics.

Even after interviewing some of the members of Gorbachev's inner circle, I have been able to confirm very little about Gorbachev's thinking about his media strategy or why he shifted emphasis during 1986. Even close aides like Georgi Arbatov--Gorbachev's chief Americanist--and Gennadi Gerasimov and Sergei Grigoriev--two of Gorbachev's

spokesmen--say that they can merely suppose what the Soviet leader was trying to accomplish through his use of the media. This lack of information is related to a larger problem faced by Gorbachev's biographers--that the information available about the Soviet leader is sketchy in many areas, and gives little insight into how Gorbachev's mind really works. Further, Gorbachev has refused all biographers' requests for interviews. It seems then that until Gorbachev is ready to share more of himself with the public, our understanding of his intent will only be suppositional.

There are dozens of questions we could ask Gorbachev someday to learn precisely how he perceived the role of the press. It would be instructive to know, for example, how much of the basic workings of the press he understood before coming into office, what he had learned from working with the local media in Stavropol, what he knew about the power the media wield in the West, and what information Soviet intelligence sources had to offer him about the power of the press. Until such time as these sorts of questions are answered, we can only infer that Gorbachev had some kind of idea about what he was doing in cultivating media coverage, and was able to learn how to refine his techniques as the media responded to him.

Still, Gorbachev was only one player in the image-building process. The American media were a willing

catalyst for Gorbachev's attempts to create an image. When Gorbachev created the opportunity for the American networks to increase their level of coverage of the Soviet Union, the American television networks seized the chance. Without a doubt, Gorbachev's own actions affected the coverage given him by the American networks.

Gorbachev succeeded in cultivating coverage because he provided the American networks with so many of the items which are critical for what they consider to be "good television." First, Gorbachev provided the networks with a strong, interesting personality. This encouraged coverage because, as CBS producer Mark Katkov explained, "American news coverage, not just television, tends to be personality driven."⁴ As Michael Parks, Moscow Bureau Chief of the Los Angeles Times added, Gorbachev was particularly newsworthy because he stood at the center of the Soviet reform process:

In the way that the media presents the news, Gorbachev was a great vehicle. Gorbachev does this, Gorbachev does that. Gorbachev is threatened. Gorbachev is challenged. The conservatives are trying to do that. So, news tends to center on Gorbachev.⁵

Moreover, Gorbachev appealed to television because he created a dramatic, important story. The plot was simple-- changes are happening in the Soviet Union--and the story line was constantly moving forward. This played directly to

⁴ Interview with Mark Katkov, June 20, 1991.

⁵ Interview with Michael Parks, June 21, 1991.

television's need for the new, novel, and noteworthy. This also appealed to the media's preference for conflict. Further, Gorbachev allowed his wife to share the spotlight, as had never been done before by Soviet leaders. While this created ill-feelings in the Soviet Union (and with Nancy Reagan), Raisa Gorbachev was generally well received by American television as well as by the American people. In addition, Gorbachev provided a counterbalance to the predominant character in the news, Ronald Reagan. The American networks often compared and contrasted Gorbachev and Reagan during the coverage of superpower relations, both outrightly and subtly. The relationship between the Soviet and American leaders, like a microcosm of Soviet-American affairs, remains an important subject for reporting. Mikhail Gorbachev, in all, catered to television's every basic need but one; Gorbachev would have been even better for television had he been able (or willing) to speak English.

B. Media Effects: Cohen Revisited

This investigation has also shown that Gorbachev's emphasis on image and his attraction of positive press coverage affected the conduct of Soviet-American relations. As Condoleeza Rice, the Stanford University professor who is a former member of the National Security Council Staff put

it, "It [the media] has an effect on policy."⁶ Several Reagan Administration officials said they believed that the American press was overly kind to the new Soviet leader during Gorbachev's first years in office. "They [the press] were showing a very favorable Gorbachev," asserted former Assistant Secretary of State Rozanne Ridgway.⁷ This forced the Reagan administration to formulate and, moreover, defend its policies toward Gorbachev most carefully. President Reagan often seemed threatened by the positive image Gorbachev was gaining in the Western world, and sought to match Gorbachev's momentum in what the networks termed "the battle for world public opinion." But Reagan also responded with policy actions, such as the Daniloff-Zakharov trade and the renewed effort in arms control negotiations which later led to a treaty on intermediate range nuclear weapons.

Administration officials said that the media influenced policy most directly through their interpretation of Soviet and American actions. "I think what the press did then and continues to do is force administrations to explain themselves," said Rozanne Ridgway. She said that although the press probably didn't stop the administration from undertaking a policy that the President really wanted to pursue, that the press had great power to advocate and evaluate certain policies:

⁶ Interview with Condoleezza Rice, May 18, 1991.

⁷ Interview with Rozanne Ridgway, November 6, 1991.

The press decides if the Geneva summit is, speaking with Gorbachev is or is not a good thing. The press decides whether what conversation you had with him was or was not successful. And so you have to--if they say it wasn't and you think it was--you have to go out and counter that view. But that's all part of the process of how we conduct policy.⁸

She said that the media's commentaries and conclusions put pressure on the administration to make progress in U.S.-Soviet relations. At the same time, the media provided the conduit through which administration sold its policies towards the Soviet Union to the American people.

When Bernard Cohen investigated the relationship between the press and the foreign policy making process nearly 30 years ago, he too found that there was significant interaction between the media and governmental actors. To reiterate, he identified seven different ways in which press can affect policy making: by informing, by interpreting information, by acting as instrument for the governors, by indicating public opinion, by criticizing government's actions, by advocating particular policies, and by acting as a policy maker in and of itself. My examination of the television coverage of Mikhail Gorbachev 1984-86 and of the American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union at that time indicates that the U.S. media still affect foreign policy making in all of the seven ways that Cohen outlined. In the text of Chapters Three through Six, I have noted the ways in

⁸ ibid.

which the press manifested these effects in the network television coverage concerning Gorbachev.

Yet the press and its power have evolved since the Kennedy era, when Cohen's book was written. The largest and most important change since the 1960s has been the rise in importance of television news. "It would be hard to argue that television has not profoundly altered our politics," argued media scholar Michael J. Robinson.⁹ Cohen had theorized that it was the print medium, not television, which had the largest effect on foreign policy making.¹⁰ One reason for this, he said, was that high ranking officials in the realm of foreign policy making paid more attention to the print press than to television. But this is not true anymore. While the foreign policy establishment still pays a great deal of attention to the print press, particularly to agenda-setting newspapers like The New York Times and The Washington Post, our nation's chief foreign policy maker--the President--dedicates a great deal of his attention to television coverage, illustrating its importance. Another of Cohen's reasons for the importance of print was that newspapers provided a greater proportion of foreign news than television. Today, that may no longer be the case. The amount of coverage given foreign news

⁹ Michael J. Robinson, "Television and American Politics, 1956-76," in Janowitz and Hirsch, p. 116.

¹⁰ See Cohen, p. 5 ff.

varies considerably across newspapers and television networks. Local newspapers and such national papers as USA Today dedicate relatively little space to foreign news, while CNN--because it has become a global network--dedicates a significant portion of its time to international news, particularly during crises. Cohen also argued that busy, intelligent people preferred newspapers because the print medium fit their lifestyles better than news broadcasts. The proliferation of news programs on network television (including the development of noon, evening and late night news presentations, and network newsmagazines) and the introduction of such cable channels as CNN, C-SPAN, CNBC (which specializes in business news) and the Monitor Channel (which emphasizes news and documentaries) means that television can now cater to the needs of the busy viewer far better than it could 30 years ago.

And while Cohen did not speculate on the frequency of each kind of effect, it seems logical to believe that the mix of media effects is also somewhat different than it was three decades years ago. A few of the press' effects are undoubtedly more pronounced now than they were when Cohen was writing. The press' role as an instrument of the governors, for example, is undoubtedly more important than it was earlier in that policy makers are taking more care than ever before to use the media strategically. Furthermore, the role of the press as a "fourth branch of

government" has been heightened in the past few decades.

Other roles are less prominent than in Cohen's time. The press acts less often as a critic of governmental action now than it did in the 1960s, for example. One can verify this assertion by looking at the press coverage given Presidents Reagan and Bush--which was often just what the White House wanted--or by comparing the jingoistic coverage of the Persian Gulf War with the more critical coverage given Vietnam. "The U.S. press displayed more often than it cared to admit a remarkable tendency to accept the basic truth of what its government told it" during the Reagan years, explained Mark Hertsgaard.¹¹ The press' role as an indicator of public opinion, while still important, has also diminished during the last decade, supplanted to a great extent by the rise of public opinion polls. Policy makers now have the means to measure public opinion themselves, so they are less dependent on the media.

The informative role of the press was and remains strong, in that the press still provides the channel through which the governors most often pass information to the governed. Yet in a way, the press' role as informant in this day and age may be different from Cohen's time. My discussions with journalists lead me to believe that the role of internal politics in the selection of news has a larger role now than it did 30 years ago. Dozens of books

¹¹ Hertsgaard, p. 209.

have been written about the processes of news gathering in the United States.¹² These books, many of which were the result of observational studies of America's preeminent journalistic organizations, describe in detail how journalists in the United States conceive and execute their work. Some works suggest that news is selected through a very logical, well-organized process.¹³ I believe that this model of news choice was probably the prevalent one 30 years ago. Sigal, however, first suggested and others later agreed that news selection is a political process whereby numerous actors with diverse goals interact with one another.¹⁴ My interviews with television journalists and producers confirm that personality and personal history play an important role in the bargaining between journalists and editors. Tuchman suggested this kind of model for the news selection process when she likened newsworthiness to a "negotiation:"

¹² See for example: Herbert J. Gans, Deciding What's News (New York: Vintage, 1980); Edward J. Epstein, News From Nowhere (New York: Random House, 1973); Todd Gitlin, The Whole World is Watching; Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, "News as Purposive Behavior" American Sociological Review 39:101-112, 1974; Leon Sigal, Reporters and Officials, (Lexington, D.C. Heath, 1973); and Tuchman, op. cit.

¹³ See Epstein, Gans.

¹⁴ Sigal, p. 6. For other proponents of this view see Molotch and Lester, Tuchman, and Martin Mayer, Making News (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987), p. 34. Sigal credits Graham Allison's Essence of Decision (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971) for influencing his thinking in this area. Allison's work has certainly increased my understanding of the news selection process.

As the coordinator and the person responsible for the news product, the managing editor heads negotiations about which items are truly important news...Newsworthiness is constituted by mutual agreements accomplished by editors working to maintain this interpersonal balance.¹⁵

Others falling under this paradigm include Molotch and Lester, who liken the news process to "a battlefield of actors struggling to generate public experience" and Mayer, who declares that, "A very high fraction of the unfairness in news derives from personal likes and dislikes."¹⁶

Opening any memoir by an American journalists will also provide evidence as to the political nature of the newsroom. In this respect, I believe that the role of the press as an informer has become more politicized since Cohen's time.

Other roles of the media have probably not changed very much. The interpretive role of the media has probably not changed dramatically; the press continues to wield power through the way it interprets political events. In addition, I believe that the role of the press in advocating certain policies has changed very little because our conception of "objectivity" not been fundamentally altered in the past three decades. Although the mix of media effects has changed over time, then, the press still has a strong effect on the conduct of policy making.

¹⁵ Tuchman, p. 32-34.

¹⁶ See Molotch and Lester, p. 235; and Mayer, p. 34.

C. The Role of the Media In The Political Process

This study of Gorbachev's relations with the media raises larger questions about the role of the press in the process of governing. Gorbachev's cultivation of press coverage, after all, was not an isolated case, but was inspired by the management of the media undertaken by politicians in the West. Manipulation of the press for political gain, of course, is no new phenomenon. Politicians have always seized every media tool at their disposal to spread their messages, whether the medium was the telegraph, the penny press, or the fireside chat broadcast over radio.

Numerous books have been written about the question of whether politicians' strategic use of the media enhances or undermines the political process.¹⁷ While the range of opinion is rather wide, most of these books offer at best a mixed reaction, at worst a pessimistic answer. Many of these critics argue that "public diplomacy" damages the governmental system in the long term by dictating rather than measuring public opinion, leading to what Robert Entman

¹⁷ See, among others, Jeffrey B. Abramson, Christopher Arterton, and Gary R. Orren, The Electronic Commonwealth (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Christopher Arterton, Teledemocracy: Can Technology Protect Democracy? (Newbury Park: Sage, 1987); Robert M. Entman, Democracy Without Citizens (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Kathleen Jamieson, Packaging the Presidency (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Manheim, op. cit.; David C. Paletz and Robert M. Entman, Media Power Politics (New York: Free Press, 1981); Larry Sabato, Feeding Frenzy (New York: Free Press, 1991); and Ann Saldich, Electronic Democracy: Television's Impact of the American Political Process (New York: Praeger, 1979).

called "Democracy Without Citizens."¹⁸ My own view is that there are both positive and negative effects of public diplomacy. With televisions in more than 98 percent of American homes and CNN in more than 60 percent of households, there is more of a chance than ever before for citizens to receive news about their government's domestic and international actions.¹⁹ But when the news focuses on style and appearances rather than on substance because of the policy makers choices, it reinforces the opinion that government doesn't do anything. This then encourages citizens to opt out of the governmental process, as millions have done over the past few decades.²⁰ The press can, however, be used to create positive effects which words alone cannot bring about. When Gorbachev began to go out and meet with Soviet citizens during 1985, for instance, he created an appearance of engagement that excited the Soviet people for perhaps the first time since the "thaw" under Khrushchev.

In this vein, it is instructive to compare Gorbachev's management of the media to that undertaken by his American counterpart, Ronald Reagan. I have already written about

¹⁸ See Entman.

¹⁹ Quoted in Stanley and Niemi.

²⁰ Turnout in U.S. Presidential and Congressional elections has been falling since 1968. Now, less than 60 percent of eligible voters turn out for Presidential elections, and less than half for Congressional elections on average. See Stanley and Niemi, p. 78 and 80-81.

the ways in which Reagan and his staff cultivated media coverage and designed their public relations strategy.²¹ Under Reagan, manipulation of the media played a more central role in governing than perhaps every before. Little in his White House was done without thought to the way in which it would be presented to the world. The administration's emphasis on style over substance was exactly the kind of public diplomacy that debases and ultimately weakens the political process. As Hertsgaard put it:

The political effect of most news coverage [in the Reagan era] was to fill people's heads with officially sanctioned truth and thus to encourage among them a sense of isolation, confusion and apathy bordering on despair.²²

This is not to say that there were not substantive Reagan policies, for indeed there were. But often the policies were hidden behind their advertising. Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, for example, was sold to the American people as a "space shield," while the MX missile system was marketed as the "peacekeeper."

To my mind, Gorbachev provides a slightly more responsible example of how to conduct public diplomacy than

²¹ For more information, see the book by Mark Hertsgaard, op. cit. or Smith's The Power Game. Reagan's strategy was an outgrowth of Richard Nixon's method of keeping the press at arm's length, which was documented in such books as Timothy Crouse's The Boys on The Bus (New York: Ballantine, 1973) and Joe McGinniss, The Selling of the President 1968 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969).

²² Hertsgaard, p. 347.

did Reagan (or President Bush, who is following in Reagan's footsteps). Gorbachev, like Reagan, certainly did his best to manipulate press coverage to establish his image. Yet following the establishment of his image on the international circuit, Gorbachev turned to substance. His media strategy in 1986 was one that primarily spread, not disguised, his ideas and intentions.

I find the increasing incidences of manipulation of the media by politicians troubling. I find it worrisome not because there is anything inherently wrong with politicians wanting to create a positive image, but because it is hurtful to democracy to concentrate on image and not on substance. Politicians and their advisors seem to believe that positive press coverage can camouflage flaws in substance and gaps in policy. As media power turns more toward television, the chance of obfuscation becomes higher and higher. This is because American network television news allows only for a brief discussion of most issues. "Most of the time, television by its nature cannot do a thorough job for anything that goes beyond the skeletal facts and statistics of the news."²³ Modern politicians across the world have come to understand the opportunity given to them by the predominance of television, and have incorporated its use into their daily routines.

²³ Edwin Diamond, Good News, Bad News, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1980), p. 90.

The misplacement of objectives has created a vicious circle between politicians and the press. On the one hand, politicians cannot succeed in today's world unless they take advantage of every resource available to them, including the media. Therefore, they have every incentive to manage the press in a way that portrays them in the best light and hides their weak spots rather than explains their policies. Bernard Kalb, former State Department Spokesman, argues that the press provides a way for politicians to market their policies, not to explain them:

Explain means to share--honestly, expansively--as though we had a common destiny. But that is not politics. In politics, we're not explaining. In politics, we're informing you what we think is best for our policy.²⁴

For their part, journalists are part of an ever more competitive business. Surprisingly, rather than becoming more aggressive in their reporting to bring in more readers and viewers, the U.S. press has become somewhat more conservative, trying to avoid mistakes which might drive away customers. "The dominant media have less and less concern with reaching the dispossessed and addressing weaknesses in the social order," argues Ben Bagdikian.²⁵ Therefore, the press covers major political players even when the politicians are presenting little more than, as

²⁴ Interview with Bernard Kalb, October 7, 1991.

²⁵ Ben H. Bagdikian, The Media Monopoly (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 229.

Boorstin called them, "pseudo-events."²⁶ The vicious circle, then, occurs when politicians emphasize style over substance and the press gives the policy maker sympathetic coverage, which encourages the politician to present another hollow event. The public is the ultimate loser of this alarming circular process.

Politicians won't change. I am too cynical to expect anyone involved in the big money and high stakes of modern politics to give up a powerful tool which is readily available. In fact, public policy would probably not be well served if all policy makers stopped using the press for political uses completely, since the media can truly aide the policy process in many positive ways--spreading information, offering analysis, or giving critiques of governmental action. Instead, policy makers must be encouraged to use the media more ethically and substantively--in a way which feeds the public's formation of opinion rather than chokes it. And the press needs once again to explain, not simply to present.

This will only happen if the media and the people demand more from politicians and from themselves. The media, in particular, has been given a special kind of trust by the people. In return for freedom of the airways and access to patrons, the press has inherently agreed to act as a watchdog over the government. Even President Reagan

²⁶ Boorstin, p. 9.

admitted that, "A probing, responsible press not only keeps the public informed about what's going on in government, it can keep a watchful eye out to uncover corruption, waste or mismanagement."²⁷ The press must remember this responsibility and, earnings aside, rededicate itself to fair but probing coverage of governmental action. The people, for their part, must learn to be more discriminating viewers and readers. By discriminating, I mean that news consumers should be more critical of the coverage they see. They should routinely ask themselves, as I have posed in my analysis of Gorbachev's media relations, such questions as how was a particular story generated, whose interests did it serve, and did it enhance or obfuscate any public policies? This kind of "media literacy" can be learned simply by paying attention and thinking hard about media coverage. I hope that in the next decade, media literacy will become the focus of more attention in American schools. The combination of better investigative reporting about the government and the public's enhanced understanding of the role of the press might in turn encourage people to participate in the political process once again by voting. People must vote against candidates with obfuscating media strategies to demonstrate their disdain for the emphasis of style over substance. The joint actions of the people and

²⁷ Reagan, p. 393.

press, then, form the only way in which the misuse of media strategies will be slowed.

Gorbachev, of course, was success in his early years in power not only because of his press relations but due to the substance that lay behind them. "It's not just the image of Gorbachev, it's the reality of Gorbachev in the international system that's made him popular," as Condoleeza Rice explained.²⁸ Politicians who wish to learn from Gorbachev must understand that a media strategy is best used to highlight, not to replace, sound public policies. No matter what the future may bring for Gorbachev, after all, his relations with the media remain instructive in this respect.

²⁸ Interview with Condoleeza Rice, May 16, 1991.

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