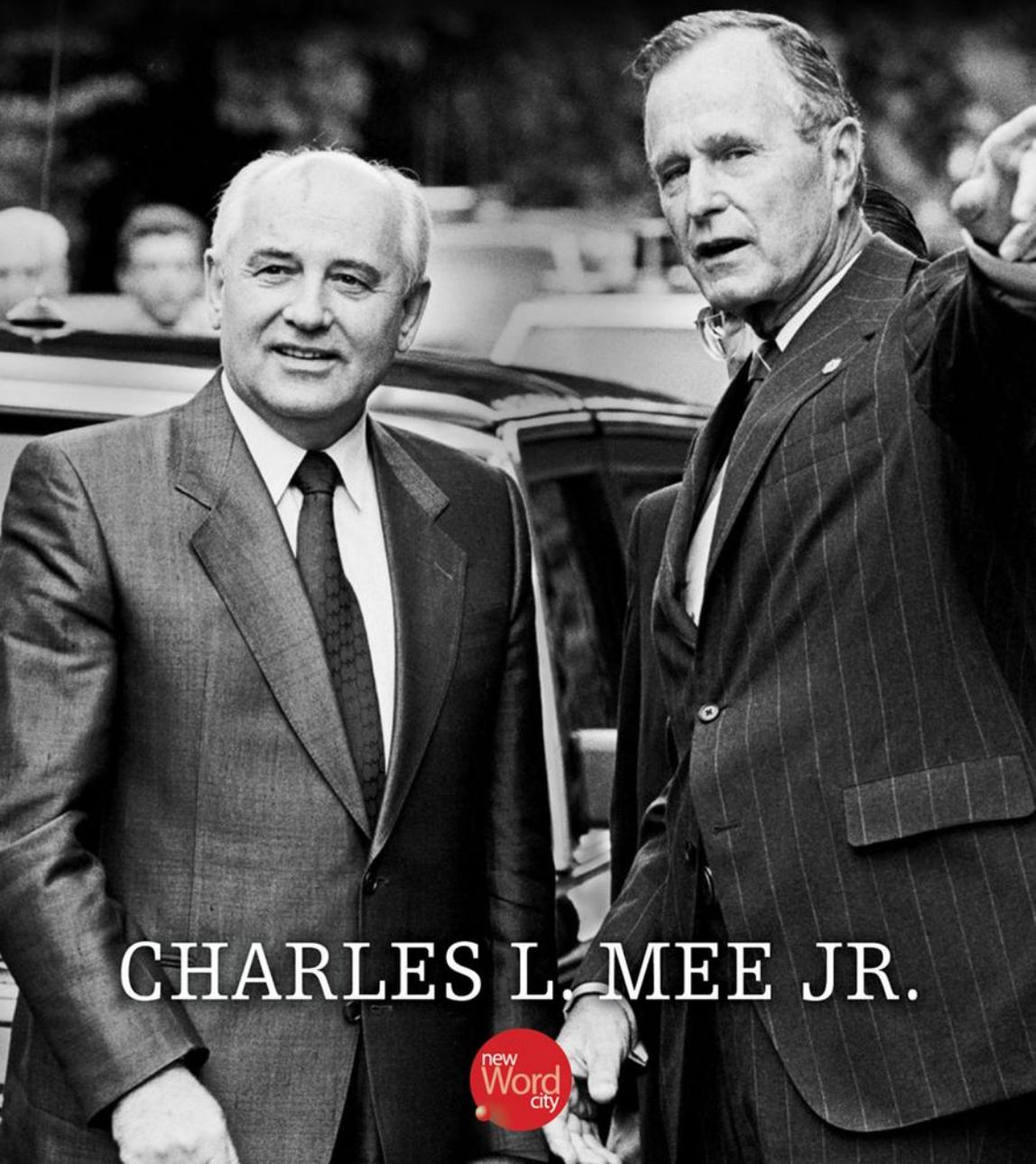


# GORBACHEV VS. THE WEST



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Today, the nature of summits has changed. No longer are there two superpowers to hold the balance between them, as the United States and the Soviet Union did for forty years of the Cold War. Now, there is only one great military power and a multiplicity of other considerable, increasingly assertive powers and would-be powers. The nationalities rearranged after World War I and repressed during the Cold War are no longer so easily managed by the Great Powers. The rivalry between East and West that made an enforced order in the Middle East and Africa and elsewhere no longer restrains the passions and aspirations and hatreds it once did. And the shape of summit meetings begins to look not so much like that of Yalta and the Cold War summits that followed as, once again, like a variation on the Congress of Vienna.

And yet, although the size and shape of the conference table changes, the same familiar puzzles of knowability, surprise, contingency, unintended consequences, and others remain with - indeed, may well become more acute.

Because the twentieth century developed such sophisticated techniques of handling and analyzing complex information, it would seem reasonable to imagine that a large enough body of well-processed data must inevitably yield a guide to policy. But, as the chemist Peter Coveney has written, "to predict the future," and so suit our actions to the given situation and to the situation as it will develop over time, "you would have to measure the initial conditions with literally infinite precision - a task impossible in principle as well as in practice."

Then, too, as Coveney knows, history is not merely the working out of initial conditions. The system, as Paul Veyne has written, "is not isolated: there constantly come onto the stage new data . . . that modify the original data. It follows that if each link is explicable, the concatenation is not, for . . . the system is not entirely explicable from the initial data." It is this that makes the notion of realism a delusion.

How should one behave under these circumstances? Professional diplomats have dealt all their lives in this familiar world of no certain ends, and endless means, hoping that their actions may have some effect on the course of history. And the great practitioners and historians of diplomacy are in rare

agreement about what is required of such a person. Generally, diplomats of any time or place would agree with François de Callières, whose *De la Manière de Négocier avec les Souverains* was published in 1716. A good diplomat, said Callières, must have "a spirit of attention and application" that is not easily distracted by the pleasures of society; a "right judgment" that is able to understand things clearly and follow the main lines of significance without getting lost in details or subtleties; a "quick penetration" to understand the "secrets of men's hearts, and to take advantage of the least motions of their countenances;" a "spirit fertile in expedients;" a "readiness of mind" in order to deal with the unforeseen and avoid pitfalls; an "evenness of temper" in order to "hear patiently" what is being said; a "free access" that encourages others to come to him with information; and an "easy and engaging carriage which invites affection." Above all, said Callières, "the good negotiator will never base the success of his negotiations upon false promises or breaches of faith; it is an error to suppose, as public opinion supposes, that it is necessary for an efficient Ambassador to be a past master in the art of deception. . . . Doubtless the art of lying has on occasions been successfully practiced. . . . But even the most dazzling diplomatic triumphs which have been gained by deception are based upon insecure foundations. They leave the defeated party with a sense of indignation, a desire to be revenged and a resentment which will always be a danger."

The twentieth-century English diplomat Harold Nicolson listed a different, but compatible, set of requirements, mentioning in particular truthfulness, precision, calm, patience, modesty. Vanity, said Nicolson, might lure "its addicts into displaying their own verbal brilliance, and into such fatal diplomatic indulgences as irony, epigrams, insinuations, and the barbed reply. It may prevent an ambassador from admitting even to himself that he does not know Turkish." And a diplomat must avoid self-satisfaction. "Diplomats, especially those who are appointed to, and liable to remain in, smaller posts, are apt to pass by slow gradations from ordinary human vanity to an inordinate sense of their own importance. The whole apparatus of diplomatic life - the ceremonial, the court functions, the large houses, the lacqueys and the food - induces an increasing sclerosis of personality. Such people, as they become older, incline to a slowness of speech, movement and perception which

is almost akin to pompousness.”

“These, then,” Nicolson concluded, “are the qualities of my ideal diplomat. . . . ‘But,’ the reader may object, ‘you have forgotten intelligence, knowledge, discernment, prudence, hospitality, charm, industry, courage, and even tact.’ I have not forgotten them. I have taken them for granted.”

Underlying this practical advice on the ideal diplomat lurks an idea of how the world works - what might even be called a philosophy of history - that diplomats share without having bothered to articulate. The assumption of the diplomats, acquired after their years of work around the world, is that individuals cannot create the conditions in which they work, or transform events by themselves, but if they have a clear vision, unclouded by bias or unexamined assumptions, they might be able to “read” the historical field accurately. And if they have the requisite patience and modesty in addition, they may enter the historical field as one of its actors and have a hand in shaping events.

In the history of diplomacy, the full combination of the familiar old conundra that erode confidence in realism has not been more distinctly seen than in a meeting of the so-called G7 nations in London. There the leaders of the United States and the other major industrial nations were joined by Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, of what was then still the Soviet Union, for his last hurrah - frustrated by the enduring custom of summitry, that one cannot come to the table as an equal member of the Club without something substantial to bring. The meeting of the G7 provided a demonstration of summitry with all its old mysteries intact, its new preoccupation with economics, its need to resolve more of the new problems by negotiation than by force, and with its practitioners trying to measure up to the demanding standards set by Callières and Nicolson for operating in the world as it is.

By the last decade of the twentieth century, the Cold War was well over - Eastern Europe had come unhinged from the Soviet Union, the Berlin Wall had come down, the USSR itself was in a state of political turmoil and economic chaos, civil war raged in Yugoslavia, and the war led by the United States against Iraq in the Persian Gulf had concluded with an astonishingly impressive

display of American military technology. The world order that had organized relations among nations since Yalta had caved in with remarkable suddenness. The world was possessed by dislocations and disasters on a scale such as those in the aftermath of World War I or World War II or the Napoleonic Wars of the nineteenth century - and political leaders were in search of a new world order.

It was generally agreed among analysts that if there was to be any new order at all, it would be based not only on the immense military power of the United States, as the world's only remaining superpower, but also on the combined economic powers of the industrialized nations as a whole. (The CIA would announce in the spring of 1992 that 40 percent of its budget and attention would henceforth be devoted to the gathering and analysis of economic information.) The world order would be a consequence, in large measure, of an ability to manage the world economy with skill and foresight. And it was agreed, certainly among the leaders of the industrialized nations, that the managers of the world economy would be, essentially, the seven nations whose leaders met in London in mid-July 1991 - the members of the so-called G7, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada, and the United States. As *Le Monde* said: "One sign of the times: the meeting of the Seven now clearly eclipses the periodic Soviet-American 'summits.'"

This meeting was, in fact, the seventeenth annual summer session of the G7 that had begun at Rambouillet, just outside Paris, "with a handful of national leaders," as R. W. Apple put it in *The New York Times*, "gathered in relative obscurity to talk about economic problems," something of an exclusive club of the world's most privileged. "But they have turned into the annual meetings of the Board of Directors of the Planet Earth."

That the world at large had not elected the G7 to be its board of directors did not go unnoticed. The economics editor of *The European* noted that "the rich should not decide for the poor. It is true, alas, that Indian or African economic weight is close to zero, but this is not a reason for leaving them out of the decision process."