

Foreign & Commonwealth Office
**Cold War Summitry: Transcending the Division
of Europe, 1970-1990**
24 September 2014

Introductory Remarks

Patrick Salmon

Chief Historian, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

I will begin, if I may, by welcoming you all to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on behalf of FCO Historians. You have already seen quite a lot of the building since we had an opportunity to have a quick tour of the best bits. Now we are back here in the India Office Council Chamber. I know that for the last two nights you have been dining in the Mountbatten Room in Christ's College. This is another Mountbatten Room, probably a more authentic one actually, because this is where the future of the Indian Empire would have been decided, including the decision to grant independence to India and Pakistan in 1947. So here we are among the makers of the Indian Empire.

David asked me to say a brief word about FCO Historians and who we are. I am Patrick Salmon, and I am in charge. While my main interests remain in Nordic and German history, we are all working on different volumes of documents at the moment and I am editing a volume of documents on Britain and South Africa in the 1980s. My colleague, Isabelle Tombs, is working with Richard Smith on a volume on Eastern Europe in the early 1980s, in the Solidarity era. We are also still producing volumes on the 1940s, because there are lots of gaps in our series. We have just published one on the origins of the North Atlantic Treaty, which is topical given the summit that just took place in Wales. Another volume is coming out, on the period of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. So that is our publishing programme. We do lots of other things as well, including organising events like this, contributing to speeches, advising Ministers, answering questions. So that is who we are. We are a little like the historians' teams in other foreign ministries, although on a much smaller scale, than for instance the American one, who have about 40 people to our six, but we do what we can.

Again, I am very pleased to welcome you here. I have been participating in your discussions in Cambridge and I was extremely impressed by the level of knowledge and intensity you have reached in discussing the chapters that are eventually going to form part of your book. I am sure David will say more about that in a minute. Finally, we are grateful to two former diplomats who will bring their own experiences to bear on what, at the moment, has been, dare I say, quite an academic discussion.

Themes

Dr Kristina Spohr

Associate Professor, London School of Economics

Before I introduce our theme today and what we have been discussing for the last two days, so that our two witnesses are aware where our thoughts have been, I just wanted, as co-organiser, to introduce myself. My background is actually German-Finish and I have studied in Britain and France. I have worked on German-Russian Baltic relations in the 1990s, and currently I am writing on Helmut Schmidt in the 1970s, apart from this summitry project and anything else I do on the global end of the Cold War.

Apart from my work as a historian, my own trajectory has had a little stint in the diplomatic world, as I worked for a summer in the German Embassy in Helsinki in 1996. I have also worked in the private office of the Secretary General of NATO, Lord Robertson, in 2001, as the special advisor for European Affairs on the NATO enlargement question. So, I am, perhaps, between the witnesses and the scholars and historians. That is my background to this. Our conference and our book is very much, as our title suggests, about Cold War summitry, and transcending the division of Europe, 1970-1990, and I just want to introduce our witnesses to the overarching themes, and the background of the period that we have been looking at. We started out with an overarching big question, namely, to analyse the contribution of summitry to the peaceful ending of the Cold War, and to compare that process of summitry and the different meetings that took place with the more structural factors that took place, such as military pressure, wider economic change and social transformations.

We all, in our chapters, always bore in mind the background of the period 1970-1990, always through the eyes of the policy makers, whom we saw as men and women who had to handle, as in current politics, the effects of long term systemic, economic and political failures in the Soviet Bloc or massive socio-economic and technological transformation in the West. We also felt that they had to handle the tensions and the antagonism and the crisis that came with that bi-polar Cold War system. In the period we are concerned with, we looked at these leaders and the whole bureaucracy behind how summitry came to first manage these Cold War tensions and crises, and then eventually, how they perhaps helped move beyond this whole structure of bi-polar confrontation. The really big questions were very much: 'How far did these decisions that happened at the summit, although they are prepared perhaps before the summit, affect international outcomes?' and, 'Where, if you look at the process of summitry, does it fit in with the larger story of the Cold War evolution and then its final denouement?' We have also asked questions about how the leaders and the diplomats imagined such a process of transcendence and such an exit from the Cold War, and how they sought to deal with these circumstances, and their own circumstances.

Later on we will perhaps look at more specific themes, such as the rituals, the performance and everything that goes with summitry, the preparations and the aftermath, and the media presentations. Thank you.

Introducing the Witnesses

Professor David Reynolds

Chair of the Faculty of History, University of Cambridge

Unlike Kristina, I have no experience in diplomacy, but I have always enjoyed coming to the Foreign Office. We are all very grateful to Patrick and his colleagues for making it possible today. We are particularly grateful to two very busy people for coming to share some of their experiences with us. We hope Rodric Braithwaite will come in as well, but I will just introduce the two that are here, in the batting order they are going to speak. Sir Brian Fall, I think, entered the Diplomatic Service in 1962, had a variety of postings in Geneva, Moscow, and was Principal Private Secretary to a series of Foreign Secretaries in the early 1980s. He ended his career as Ambassador to the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, 1992-1995. He was particularly involved in the Helsinki process. He and Michael have already had some interesting conversations and I think that is what he is going to be talking about.

We are also very grateful to Lord Powell for coming here today. He will be off to the airport pretty much as soon as we have finished. Looking at the dates, I think, you entered the Diplomatic Service a year later than Brian, 1963. Posts included Washington, Bonn and Brussels. Then you moved onto a different trajectory by being seconded to Number 10 and serving as Private Secretary to two Prime Ministers, first Lady Thatcher from 1983-1990, and then more briefly, John Major, at the beginning of the Major Government. That particularly is probably what you are going to be talking about. We are very grateful to you both for coming, and what we have suggested is that these two gentlemen start by giving us their own experiences of summitry, which we can engage in in the first session. Then in the second session after tea, we will have a round table discussion about some of the issues that Kristina has mentioned that we wanted to put on the table now.

Witness Seminar

Sir Brian Fall

Principal Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary 1982-1984

High Commissioner to Canada 1989-1992

Ambassador to Russia 1992-1995

Thank you very much, Chairman. You have put together an impressive list of summits, which I do not think very many British diplomats can claim to have witnessed, other than in a fairly indirect sort of way. Helsinki and Guadeloupe, the two multilateral ones, are the two exceptions. I was not at either, but I can claim to have played a fairly active part in preparing the Helsinki summit. The Helsinki consultations lasted from November 1972 through to June 1973, and set out the conditions that the CSCE, the conference proper, should be convened. That included its organisation, and what it calls, 'Agenda and Related Instructions', because the Russians were not prepared to accept terms of reference, but that is what the committees and sub-committees were for, to do the work during the conference proper. That, in combination, gave Western Ministers the assurance that if

they turned up at the conference they would be able to raise the points to which they attached importance, and they would be able to have them discussed in appropriate detail and with some prospect of success.

The agreement to embark on a three-stage CSCE proper did not constitute agreement to the summit, which Brezhnev so clearly wanted. The final recommendations of the consultations say simply that, 'The level of representation at the third stage will be decided by the participating states during the conference, before the end of the second stage.' In other words, you had to earn Western presence at the CSCE, and you furthermore, had to earn a summit by producing something worthwhile. So no quick fix conference and quick fix summit, three years of fairly serious negotiation, which produced what the abstract to session four calls, 'Such unexpected results'. Unexpected, I think is probably right, but not un-hoped for.

Michael, I am not quite sure what the reference to ending the geopolitical détente that the superpowers built up in the 1970s means. What about the Reagan-Brezhnev summits? There are, no doubt, other examples. My real problem with the abstract is the earlier sentence, which reads, 'While the obvious outcome of Helsinki was the de facto ratification of the 1945 territorial status quo that was the Soviets' main objective.' Now, if you are looking for support for that judgment, you can find it from the writings and comments of a depressingly long list of American academics, politicians and journalists. This is rather more difficult to defend if you, instead, look at the facts. The chronology is crucial here. The FRG-Soviet Treaty was signed in August 1970, and it specifically includes the Oder-Neisse Line and says that it forms the western frontier of the People's Republic of Poland, fine, and the frontier between the FRG and GDR.

That frontier is included among, 'The frontiers of all states in Europe that are to be regarded as inviolable.' In the December 1972 *Grundlagenvertrag* between the FRG and GDR, Egon Bahr and Michael Kohl – not a summit negotiation or with a signature – the parties reaffirmed the inviolability now and in the future of the frontier existing between them. My question is: what did the CSCE do to add to that to earn its bad name in the United States? Not, surely, the statement that participating states 'consider that their frontiers can be changed in accordance with international law by peaceful means and by agreement' or the drafting of the principle of inviolability of frontiers – the participating states regard as inviolable all one another's frontiers as well as the frontiers of all states in Europe. Therefore, they will refrain, now and in the future, from assaulting these frontiers.

Western negotiators were also very conscious that the Soviet view of the relevant status quo was not only territory, in so many words, but also the Brezhnev Doctrine, which pledged protecting the gains of socialism above bourgeois concepts of international law, and also above the inviolability of frontiers, as the Czechs of course learnt to their cost. We did not go into the preparatory talks or into the conference expecting a recantation on that point, but we were looking for a text that could not be used to claim Western or, indeed, neutral acceptance of the Brezhnev Doctrine. As far as possible, we were looking for wording that a neutral observer would have seen as clearly incompatible with the Brezhnev Doctrine. Hence in the preamble, they declare their determinations to respect and put into practice each of their many relations with all other participating states, irrespective of their political, economic or social systems, the following principles. Principle 1: 'They also have the right to belong or not to belong to international organisations; to be or not to be a party to bilateral or multilateral treaties, including the right to be or not to be party to treaties of alliance. They also have the right to neutrality.' Finally in Principle 10: 'The participating states express their determination fully to respect and apply these principles in all aspects to their mutual relations and cooperation, in order to ensure to each participating state, the benefits resulting from the respect and application of these principles by all.' So much then, I would say, for ratifying the status quo.

On the positive side, the abstract is absolutely right in speaking, not only about respect for human rights, Principle 7, but also about freedom of movement, Basket 3, to which I would add freedom of information – what the recommendations of the consultations calls, ‘The freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds.’ Had this been a legal text, the KGB would have been spared the trouble of removing, ‘Of all kinds’, or of putting in sharper[?] language in due respect for the sovereign law and customs of the participating states, because the British Home Office would have done it for them. So, it was not a trivial point to argue that it should not be a legal document. It is crucial in respect of recognition frontiers and states, but it is also very important in the human rights field.

Finally, the abstract calls for more thinking and that, I think, is always a good idea. The West did not influence and shape the summit; they influenced and shaped the conference. The idea that the conclusion was something that neither super had intended nor desired is a bit of a cheap shot against the Americans, I think. It was certainly true of Moscow and was possibly true, to a greater or lesser extent, of most of the Western participants, who were always very conscious of damage limitation. To the point about desirability: while it may have been true of Kissinger, who was not a great fan CSCE process, and who saw himself always as having far more important business to do with Brezhnev’s Soviet Union. I think possibly he is one of the key architects of the CSCE because he may have contributed to Brezhnev’s view and, indeed, perhaps told him, that he need not worry about the principles because the reference to non-interference in the US-Soviet declaration of May 1972 was all that was needed to protect the Soviet Union. Besides, all the drafting would be done on US-Soviet basis and sold to the lesser folk. If you look at the follow-up conferences – Goldberg, Kampelman – it is quite clear that a desirable outcome was very apparent to the Americans and the opposite equally apparent to the Russians.

On summits generally, looking at them from the outside, we all recognise the positive contributions that they made. At the same time we were all worried about what Bryant was going to get up to on Brezhnev’s yacht. We worried what Reagan was going to get up to in Reykjavik and what it was going to mean for the British national deterrent. Ditto for the ABM Treaty. There were lots of negotiations that affect the interests of non-participants but, however good their relations may be bilaterally with an individual participant, there is a limit to how far you can get in pre-summit, ensure that the brief says roughly what you would like it to say and that nobody at the last minute is going to depart from it. Charles will know more about this from a Washington point of view. Departing from the brief is one of the tricks that make summits special. It accounts for their success, in some cases. Summitry at one removed is not always very comfortable. Multilateral summitry turned out to be a success for the West and particularly, as has been endlessly said, for the then nine members of the EU, whose first big foreign policy operation it was. I think it has been some time since they have done something that is quite so evidently sensible and well worked out.

Professor David Reynolds

Thank you. There are obviously a lot of things that Mike and others would want to come back to. We would also like to probe you a little more on your own more personal experiences of the process, but it would be good first if we had the other contribution and then they are both on the table. We will be able to take them both in together and then have a more free-flowing discussion.

Witness Seminar

Lord Powell of Bayswater

Private Secretary to the Prime Minister 1983-1990 and 1990-1991

I am full of admiration for Brian's professional expertise, his recollection of the detail of the events and the texts and his general wisdom. My point of view is a more broad brush one. I will say that straight away. It covers a number of the 1980s summits, up until 1990, but I will not go into details of texts and that sort of thing. You see, for me the end of the Cold War was brought about by three factors. One was the inherent rottenness of the Soviet system. The second was the enormous surge in Western self-confidence and defence capability from the early 1980s onwards. The third was the very quiet and persistent determination of the people in Eastern Europe to free themselves. For me, those were the objective forces that brought about the end of the Cold War. The summits, whether they were multilateral or bilateral, were really the way we managed and manoeuvred those objectives forward into a new alignment, aided by some pretty outstanding leaders and the relationships between them.

When I look with hindsight at the role of summits in ending the Cold War, I start from a rather broad perspective. It is not just those summits that dealt with specific Cold War issues, but those that restored the Western economies by coordinating economic and financial policies, by freeing trade, aligning currencies and generally restoring the Western brand. Successful foreign policies need a strong domestic base, and those summits – G5, European summits and so on – all had a key role in building that, and coordinating and aligning the policies that altered the balance of power strongly in the West's favour. That was, of course, very necessary following the West's decline in the 1970s, particularly in the US and UK. For my money, through this seminar, we ought to look just as much at the roles of the individual leaders and their inter-relationships. Whether you would call these summits or not, they were the people who were acting at the top, and particularly I have in mind President Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl.

What I think President Reagan and Margaret Thatcher brought was a much more robust attitude to the Cold War. Accommodating ourselves to the permanent division of Europe was just not enough for them; it was just not acceptable. They wanted more forceful diplomacy, backed up by much greater defence spending. The hallmarks of that period of the early 1980s were really the 'Evil Empire' rhetoric, increased defence spending, demonstrating technological superiority through Star Wars, deploying an INF and generally putting the Soviet Union on the back foot, after years that they had had us on the back foot.

Now, the role of NATO summits in achieving that result was important, I am sure, but I would be hard pressed to say quite why it was important. But it was not decisive. I would say that in the first part of the 1980s, NATO summits were a way of demonstrating NATO's unity and resolve. I think you could describe it as a sort of chest-thumping role. It was a bit like the civilian equivalent of the Soviet military parades through Red Square once a year. They were evidence that the West was not going to be intimidated; it was not going to be divided by Soviet manoeuvring. Then in the second half of the 1980s the tone changes and the summits deal with arms control policies, negotiating strategies, modernising weapons systems, elaborating a new NATO concept and extending a hand to Eastern Europe.

They were not always harmonious of course. They were not always harmonious, of course. I remember Margaret Thatcher being particularly reluctant to see NATO's military strength reduced

precipitately, particularly in SNF. Overall, in rugby football terms, the NATO summits were for me the point when the scrum bound tightly and went down and pushed. That is what they were there for, not perhaps specific initiatives or things you would remember. To be perfectly honest, if you scratched me hard, I would not now be able to tell you a single point from a particular NATO summit communiqué, except possibly the INF deployment.

Bilateral lateral summits were really where the real action was. There were of course an innumerable number of them. I am not going to go through them all, but briefly let me mention those between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, those between Margaret Thatcher and Gorbachev and those – and of course I speak second hand on this – between Reagan and Gorbachev.

The first meeting between Thatcher and Gorbachev at Chequers, in December 1984, was a seminal event. You see, right from the very beginning, there was a remarkable chemistry between them. You could tell, the moment that Gorbachev came into the Great Hall of Chequers – a building built in the 19th century, but medieval looking – with a huge fire place, in came this small robust man, bouncing on the balls of his feet, grinning at everyone, followed by an elegant wife. This was not Brezhnev; this was not Andropov. This was a different breed of human being. You did not have to be any genius to see that.

Margaret Thatcher identified Gorbachev absolutely straight away as someone with an entirely different background and an entirely different outlook to all earlier Soviet leaders, and that was even though, in the first meeting or two, he spoke exactly the same drivel as they did; but he did it in a different way. He was lively and he did not need people to brief him. He did not read statements; he ad libbed. She saw in him somebody who was open to argument, someone with whom you could have a dialogue rather than just exchange statements. She also saw in him, and I think she was perceptive here, someone who really wanted to bring about change and, in that famous phrase, ‘someone I can do business with’. In other words, she saw right from the beginning that Gorbachev represented opportunity, where that had been really none before, opportunity for reducing East/West tensions.

What did he see in her? Principally, the shortest and most direct route to President Reagan, at a time when the US and the Soviet Union were barely speaking to each other. The meeting for me was the beginning of the process of dialogue, which was central over the next six years to unravelling the Cold War.

At the end of that meeting, Margaret Thatcher resolved on two steps. One was that she would herself continue a dialogue with Gorbachev, and she did it in innumerable summit meetings, at least once a year right through to 1990, supporting him on *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and hammering him about the innate contradictions of communist ideology. She told him it was complete rubbish; it was a waste of time trying to modernise communism. Better to throw it away and start with something better.

The second and probably more important step was to convince President Reagan, and an initially quite sceptical US administration, that they should seize the moment and they should engage with Gorbachev. That of course led on to the summits between Reagan and Gorbachev, and later between Bush and Gorbachev. The Americans, in 1984-85, really were pretty suspicious. They did not really believe that Gorbachev represented anything very new.

Let me just deal with two other aspects of summits that played a part to me. One was obviously the Reagan/Gorbachev one in Reykjavik, and then I will talk about German reunification. The reason I mention the Reagan/Gorbachev summit in Reykjavik was that it illustrated the contradictions at the

heart of Western strategy in the Cold War, in particular the huge gulf between President Reagan's vision of a nuclear-weapons-free world, and Margaret Thatcher's belief that nuclear weapons were crucial to the West's security. She was absolutely rocked to her foundations when it appeared, at Reykjavik, that the President was about to concede Gorbachev's scheme for agreeing to abolish nuclear weapons, because she thought it would undermine the West's whole strategy of flexible response, as well as damaging her politically, by making it look as though President Reagan was lining up with Neil Kinnock, the Labour Party and CND.

It was a Saturday; these things always happened on weekends. That was one golden rule of politics. I was hustled down to Chequers. I arrived, and she declaimed dramatically, 'Charles, the ground has moved under my feet.' I refrained from comment on that one.

As we all know, Reagan's determination to preserve 'Star Wars' saved us from a commitment to abolish nuclear weapons. Within 10 days, Margaret Thatcher was on a plane to Washington to secure a statement from President Reagan reconfirming his support for NATO's strategy of relying on a mix of nuclear and conventional forces and, of course, thereby tranquilly embracing, not for the first time, two entirely contradictory positions.

I would also add that, from that point on, Margaret Thatcher became a very ardent supporter of 'Star Wars', observing it was the best way to stop Reagan giving away the nuclear shop and to force Gorbachev to drop his plans.

The last aspect I might just comment on was Margaret Thatcher and German reunification, though goodness knows enough has probably been said about it. Of course, it was discussed at quite a number of summits – bilateral summits, EU summits, NATO summits and so on – particularly in the autumn of 1989 in Strasbourg. In the margins of an EU summit, Margaret Thatcher and François Mitterrand sat like two old *tricotteurs* lamenting the awfulness of German reunification. She produced maps from her handbag, which showed how Germany's borders had moved over the centuries. He tut-tutted, said it was an awful and he must not let it happen again.

In her autobiography, Margaret Thatcher concedes that her policy on German reunification was a complete failure – not wrong, she did not say that. She said it was a failure, but it does deserve a couple of words of explanation.

There were really two streams to her thinking. One was growing up during the rise of Nazism and the Second World War, which gave her an abiding distrust of Germany, which is not uncommon among people of her generation. My own parents shared it. Intellectually, of course she knew that Germany post-1945 was different. It had changed; it was democratic and so on. Nonetheless, she had this basic instinct that told her that a reunited Germany would unbalance Europe to the detriment of the rest of us.

The other stream of her thinking, and probably the dominant one in practice, was a belief that rapid reunification would put Gorbachev's position in the Soviet Union in danger and would put in jeopardy all that had been achieved up to that point in helping Eastern Europe achieve its freedom. That, you know, was not an unreasonable view. Of course in the end, German reunification did precipitate Gorbachev's political demise. Indeed, you could argue that the rather cavalier way in which we in the West rolled our tanks over Gorbachev, over reunification, led on to the feeling of national humiliation in Russia, which later gave rise to Putin and his current policies in the Ukraine. I think you can trace that back to those early actions by NATO at the end of the Cold War.

History is unforgiving; Margaret Thatcher ended up on the wrong side of it. She under-estimated the tidal wave of support for reunification in both parts of Germany. Actually, of course,

Helmut Kohl under-estimated it completely too and kept reassuring us all that it was not about to happen. The difference was he managed to surf the wave, whereas she was left behind and becalmed by it, and she did keep pace with events.

From what I have said, you will deduce that, for me, the interplay of personalities and personal relationships had a very decisive part in managing the end of the Cold War. It was the ability of Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl and Gorbachev to look beyond the day-to-day events and see the big picture that made a crucial difference. They understood, they really did understand, the changes that needed to be made in their own countries in the first place. That applies both to the West and the Soviet Union. I do not think that the objective forces, real as they were, if they had just been left on autopilot, would have brought that peaceful end to the Cold War that we enjoy. They needed a steer from some pretty remarkable statesmen to accomplish the task.

I can either stop there or give you one or two thoughts on summits generally, if you would prefer.

Professor David Reynolds

Please do that now then.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

They are fairly uncomplimentary, I have to tell you, but there we are. In a way, it is hopeless debating the pros and cons of summits, because the pros are always going to win. Summits are here to stay. They are going to become much more pervasive. However great the realistic points against summits are, the pros are just irresistible to politicians. If you are given a choice between an afternoon locked in a dull discussion in the Cabinet Office about local government finance, and being shown on television striding manfully a jet or a limousine into some council chamber, it is just not a contest. For me, summits are ego-, media- and bureaucracy-driven and, therefore, simply irresistible.

The arguments against are very easy to articulate. First of all, summits just grow like Topsy. They multiply in number, size and frequency, and they develop a life of their own quite independent of the issues that they are supposed to debate and settle. They come along rather like buses on a pre-determined timetable, and the agenda just has to accommodate the meetings, rather than the other way around. They are timetable-driven.

Secondly, for me, generally speaking they distort the normal process of negotiation between governments, by constantly pulling everything up to a higher level, acting as a sort of court of appeal, which makes it much more difficult, if not impossible, to reach decisions at lower levels. I ask myself sometimes what the hell we pay foreign ministers for, if they cannot settle anything themselves. All they can do is prepare higher-level meetings and summits.

Thirdly, summits actually make it more difficult to resolve problems, because they drag them into the full glare of the headlights of publicity and the media, and everybody feels it much more difficult to give way. Many issues that could be settled quite reasonably behind the scenes, out of the headlights, would achieve more than what a summit could achieve. I guess what I am saying is: bring back secret diplomacy please. It worked.

My fourth point would be that the second a summit shows any sign of being useful, by just engaging a small number of heads of government in a pretty free-ranging discussion, without the presence of Sherpas, advisors and notetakers, the bureaucracy goes bananas, and insists that it is

simply not safe to leave heads of government on their own. I have to say, in my time, it used to be said that the only thing you could safely leave to heads of government was the date and place of their next meeting, and they normally made a pretty good hash of that too.

President Giscard's original vision of G5 summits, as fireside chats between a few heads of government talking freely, was lost within a very short time. The legions of Sherpas and media advisors turned summits into theatrical performances. It is rather like seeing *Aida* performed on the banks of the Nile; it is all in the performance, not in the substance, most of the time.

You may just have gathered that I am not a great fan of summits generally. I have had some fun in them. I used to enjoy European and EU sometimes. I got in the habit of, around five in the afternoon, walking into the Council chamber with a very stiff whisky and soda for Margaret Thatcher, which she certainly enjoyed and welcomed. After I had done that at two or three summits, I was once beckoned by Helmut Kohl to come round to him. He was in the Chair, and he said, 'I wish you would stop doing that; you're making her even more difficult.' I said, 'Well, I'm sorry to say, *Herr Bundeskanzler*, that is the whole purpose.' There was a certain amount of play-acting there.

I really do think that a lot of these summits simply distract heads of government from what I would call real work. You do not need everyone there. You do not need Luxembourg for a discussion on nuclear weapons; you really do not. You also have this phenomenon that everyone has to come out of a summit declaring himself a winner. Everyone wins a coconut. It is a bit pointless.

Margaret Thatcher did not like summits. I make no secret of that. She saw two principal disadvantages really. One was that they were held abroad, and the other was that they were attended by foreigners. I tried to point out to her that that was basically the point of them, but it did not help. Of course I am exaggerating; there are occasions when a summit can be helpful but, in my experience, bilateral summits or summits of a very few heads of government, without the main glare of the media, were the only ones that were really effective. The rest of it really is theatre. Heads of government ought to find some way of weaning themselves off summits, at least such frequent ones, and restoring a better sense of hierarchy to the levels at which useful decisions can be made. Thank you.

Discussion

Professor David Reynolds

Returning diplomacy to the diplomats, returning government to the civil servants, Sir Brian, before we open this up, I would be interested in your reactions to what Lord Powell said there, your own take on the utility of summits and the problems of them.

Sir Brian Fall

Charles used to find the EU summits very tiresome, because you ended up sitting in an antechamber and you could only enter the conference occasionally by pretending to have a message. I should have graduated to whisky and soda; I should perhaps have thought of that. Out would come notes written by the foreign secretary, whose job it was to note things down. I

remember, at an early one, a piece of paper came up from Carrington, via the Antici group. All the knights of Whitehall insisted on being there because it was departmentally important that nobody should be able to do things without them. A little note had on it 'DD' and then rather nicely drawn Beatrix-Potter-like pictures of little rabbits. All the knights said, 'What's this?' I was finally consulted. I said, 'It's perfectly simple. It means that [Anka Yogutson?] is speaking and has gone on for too long. Dreaded dame rabbits on.'

Lord Powell of Bayswater

Do you remember the other one that used to come out, Brian? It referred to somebody called 'BLG'. It took a little while to work out who was meant by that. It stood for Bloody Little Gaston[?], which was [Gaston Forme?].

Sir Brian Fall

I agree with Charles on the idea that too many things are being done by the heads of government. The difficulty is that, if they were not done by heads of government, they would probably have to be done by foreign ministers, which means that foreign ministers would have to be able to speak for the minister of defence and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The only way, in the modern Whitehall or its equivalents abroad, that somebody can speak for all these various departments, is to have the person who chairs the Cabinet. It would be lovely to go back. Again, the [*in German*], Egon Bahr, not even the foreign minister – work was done by people who were highly competent and trusted to do it, but that is not the way it works now. Changing the idea of the European Council in particular would be hugely difficult. The NATO summits are, for the most part, less operational. Again, Charles is absolutely right: the message to the outside world is that the top guys can get together, and you have foreign policy and defence under the same roof, but not for the small print. Those communiqués go on and on and on like Christmas trees; everybody needs to hang a little bauble on the branches.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

Before you go on, can I just take issue with the first part of your point? I absolutely concede that it would be very difficult now, with the way things have developed to get rid of European summits. You are not going to, but your remark presupposes that governments are not capable of reaching a unified position in themselves. I think a good government is capable of doing that. The position maybe has to be blessed and endorsed by the head of government, but that does not mean that the heads of government themselves have to go trooping off to Brussels, Copenhagen or even Cardiff, God help us, speaking as a Welshman, to sit there for two days and do things.

Why did Margaret Thatcher lose office in the end? She was sitting in a ruddy summit, instead of defending her position back here in London. It is worth bearing that in mind. Foreign policy experts love to see heads of government going off to summits. They should not; they should be doing other things.

Professor David Reynolds

Sir Brian, in the light of what you have just been saying generally and both of you have been saying about summits, could you just reflect on the Helsinki process? You clearly feel this was a very successful piece of diplomacy and crafting something that mattered. It was very laborious. It kept a lot of political leaders at arm's length, until the very end. Do you see that as a model way of

doing things or was this just a particular moment, where something like this was possible? How do you see it in process terms?

Sir Brian Fall

Brezhnev had failed to listen to Charles Powell. He was so keen to have a summit, he was the person who wanted it done at his level and that was the weakness in the Soviet Warsaw Pact case. Had it not been the need to have a summit, and the need to have a summit as quickly as possible before the Grim Reaper reached too far beyond the Kremlin walls, many of the things that the West had been able to negotiate would not have been possible. If we had been sitting there with Dubinin[?] not feeling any time pressure from above, we would never have got what is now the Helsinki final act.

Professor David Reynolds

The Soviet desire or Brezhnev's desire for a summit was used by you, as a kind of lever to get more into the framework of the document, which suited Western policy.

Sir Brian Fall

The Western case, basically that you cannot take a step forward from preparatory talks to conference, from conference to summit, without convincing people that something worthwhile had been achieved, I cannot think of another example where a major player left themselves so vulnerable to a need for a summit, particularly somebody with such wonderful control of the media in his own control. He was not worried about what the *Daily Mail* would say if there was no summit. It was a great deal of vanity, impatience and possibly a Kissinger-inspired feeling that it would all be fixable with the Americans.

Professor David Reynolds

Where did that idea of using the summit as a kind of bait come from? Was it there at the very beginning? Who introduced it? Who pushed it?

Sir Brian Fall

Before the preparatory talks opened in Helsinki, a great deal of work had been done in NATO by deputy heads of delegation and senior officials, including some from capitals, and then a lot was done first by the six, then briefly by the seven, because we got in there before the Irish, Danes and Norwegians joined us. By the time we arrived in Helsinki, this was a group of people who had been working and knew each other's strengths and weaknesses. There was a real sense of a team. People were defending papers that they themselves had written.

Professor David Reynolds

At what level are we talking here, the level of bureaucracy or foreign ministers?

Sir Brian Fall

It varied. There were first secretaries from the United Kingdom and rather older and grander people from most of the other participating countries. The feeling that there was an attempt by the

Soviet Union to bounce people unprepared into a summit that would ratify, if possible de jure, the territorial status quo, the Brezhnev doctrine and all that; they were in a hurry and they said, 'We can get the agenda all over by Christmas.' The reason that the baskets were numbered is that the Western side said, 'You cannot have names on baskets because, if you do that, it becomes an agenda,' hence Basket one, two, three and four. That sort of thing emerged particularly from coordination among the nine, because this group was meeting regularly before and during the consultations, in the breaks between the stages.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

I am sure everyone sees it as obvious, but the Helsinki summit was unique. There was nothing else like that where East and West met. There was nothing in the 1980s at all, until you have Gorbachev attending the Versailles summit in 1990. There was no other occasion that I can think of, off the top of my head. Otherwise it was all bilateral.

Questions and Answers

Mike Morgan

I do not want to monopolise the discussion and keep it entirely focused on Helsinki but, Sir Brian, could you comment on the Soviet perception of what they were signing up to? The final act was drafted and approved in five languages, and there were subtle differences between the Russian and English versions. For example, on the point about inviolability of frontiers, if I remember rightly, the Russian term is *нерушимость* and it is *unverletzlichkeit* in German, which have, as I understand it, slightly different shades of meaning from the English term 'inviolability'. I wonder if that ambiguity of language affected the perceptions of the various participants.

Sir Brian Fall

нерушимость is not as good from the Western German point of view as [*in Russian*], which at one stage it was, but there was no stomach to fight the case to the end. The *Oxford Dictionary*, which is not a huge reference and is a university-student-level dictionary, gives 'inviolable' and 'indissoluble' as alternative meanings of *нерушимость*, so it is not a complete giveaway.

There was interesting play among the German team, which was a little bit afraid at one stage that the consultations were producing texts on items that they would have said were of predominantly better than the ones that Bahr/Kohl had been able to negotiate on the ordering of the inviolability of frontiers and the use of the term [*in Russian*] instead of *нерушимость*. There was a real sense that there would be political trouble at home and that the CDU/CSU would say, 'Ho, ho, ho. Lousy negotiating, Brandt and Co. Look, the Luxembourgers have done it better for you.' Bruner[?] was inclined to have minor nightmares of that kind.

Cheating on language was absolutely a standard Soviet negotiating technique. Where the English text says, 'Shall not be refrained from assaulting them,' I think the Russian uses [*inaudible*], which is a little calmer. I am talking about the consultation, because I was not at this stage in the conference proper, but we had an equivalent of EU linguists' jurists. The British team, which had fielded two members of our research department, made themselves extremely unpopular with the

Russians by pointing out where feet had been put out of touch. Ultimately, this was a little bit more than the Western caucus was prepared to accept. There was a great deal of justifiable sympathy with the German view that 'By God, we have peaceful change. What more do you want? What the research departments please stop niggling away at the small print?' If you compare the languages, there are those differences. God knows what the Spanish-language text on territorial integrity may turn out to say. I confess to not having studied it.

Gottfried Niedhart

Perhaps we could just follow up this point. Do you know whether the top people in the government or the in the Foreign Office, where the legislative decisions were made, were prepared to think about these problems? Were they aware of what was going on? For instance, Helmut Schmidt said that 'The only interest we have in Helsinki was that it should not be a kind of peace treaty, and that the formula of peaceful change is in the West German interest,' not in the German interest, but in the West German. What about the British side, for instance? Was it a topic for experts, a topic at Cabinet-level or for the foreign secretary?

Sir Brian Fall

The fact that it came from the national capitals rather than the resident ambassadors – ours was very good and he was set there knowing that these things were likely to happen – was not true of all these colleagues. There was a functioning group of deputies who did it. That the Brits fielded a first secretary as their deputy says a little in answering your question. I do not claim that I was having regular meetings with the foreign secretary before leaving for Helsinki.

We were of course clearing the instructions in the normal way. Alec Douglas-Home came to the first stage, which was of foreign ministers. As the conference proper moved towards a conclusion that would justify a summit, and the assumption was that there would be a summit, you then found the likely participants in that summit, I would imagine for most of the countries, taking a little bit more of an interest. If they were told that we cannot do that because of some obtuse point of inner-NATO or EU law, there was a political impatience with these nitpickings. Luckily, the nitpickers were allowed to pick most of the important nits to have a clean-ish text. Imagine going straight to a summit and leaving it for a three- or four-day meeting to try to cover this sort of ground. God knows what would have come out. The political importance developed.

Mitterrand was much more involved right from the beginning, because the French delegation took a very robust line. We worked very closely with them. Even though we had just thrown out 105 Soviet diplomats, we were not the favourite delegation in Helsinki from the Soviet point of view. The French and we worked extraordinarily closely together. The French equivalent, Jacques Andréani, had to negotiate not only with Zorin in Helsinki, but with Mitterrand, who was very interested in quite what was happening. Towards the end of those preparatory talks, the French ambassador called a NATO meeting, because he thought we were in danger of losing contact with our allies by doing it [all with the nine?]. It was quite an extraordinary situation. I think that different countries would have had a different degree of involvement from their top politicians, because of issues of particular sensitivity to them.

Professor David Reynolds

James Cameron is working on the US/Soviet relationships over ballistic missiles in the 1970s.

James Cameron

This is another one for Sir Brian. Could you comment on the British attitude towards superpower détente, so the US/Moscow summit and the US summit in Beijing with the Chinese? You mentioned anxieties over the ABM treaty, so I was wondering if you could expand some more on what the British anxieties were regarding these meetings between superpowers, as opposed to European powers?

Sir Brian Fall

There is a story that, in the 18th or nearly 19th century, there was a summit-type discussion of territorial matters in present-day Luxembourg, and a delegation of people immediately concerned with what was being discussed knocked on the door and were allowed to be admitted to the conference chamber. The butler consulted, and came out with the statement [*in French*]. There is a little bit of a sense from the outsiders to summits that we are playing the same tune a little.

On the INF issue, the degree of knowledge within the two NATO special groups set up, one chaired by Richard Burt and the other by Richard Perle, meant that people in the Alliance had a very good idea of what was happening and were taken along. Charles knows more about this than I do. You cannot decide to put Pershing missiles in the Federal Republic of Germany without having fairly close consultation with Helmut Kohl. Depending on the issues, much more sense of the way to do business with the Soviet Union was inevitable at general secretary level.

Although Gromyko, as a member of the Politburo, offered a certain amount of political clout, it was clear that these were issues that could only be dealt with by Brezhnev and, therefore, could only be dealt with by the President of the United States or other heads of government, on bilateral occasions. There was nothing suspicious or anxiety-making about the fact that that was how it was being done.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

I think you are right. No one likes being shut out of negotiations that affect them but, on the whole, consultation was pretty good, particularly between the US and the UK. I do not suppose it extended quite so much to other parts of NATO. The level of communication was extraordinary; by my time, I had a direct line on my desk to the US National Security Adviser, and it was used several times a day pretty much every day, so there was not much that was concealed.

Obviously there were specific issues. You mentioned the ABM treaty. Of course, our interest was really to preserve the treaty because, if it disappeared, it would make it possible to develop defensive systems that would put at risk our own rather limited nuclear deterrents. That came later, and that is why, when Margaret Thatcher went to Camp David in December 1984, she secured a text that prohibited the testing and deployment of 'Star Wars', simply on the grounds that otherwise the ABM treaty would be breached and we would be at risk.

Kristina Spohr

I have a question for Lord Powell about the comments you made that, if we look at the development of the G5, NATO, EU or EC summits, we have these annual events, which are a theatrical performance and, in part, pre-fabricated. Maybe they sign something, but it is basically a media theatre. At the same time, you said that, if you look at some of the other summits, perhaps bilateral summits, these are big ego trips and there are issues with that.

It struck me that there was perhaps a tension because, when you talked about Margaret Thatcher talking to Gorbachev, for example, it struck me that, if you have a moment when two leaders are set loose, they go off and have a chat, and perhaps not everything is prepared, something might come out. That was the sort of question we posed ourselves when we looked at these various summits of different sorts. Sometimes if there is something informal, and there are just two leaders, or perhaps two leaders, a close adviser and a translator, and it is left a bit open, something can come out nevertheless, either in terms of dialogue or a better meeting of minds. It might perhaps be something more, which sets up the next meeting where something more tangible is to be achieved. I would like to know a bit more about that tension. Is it at all valuable to have these very close bilateral events?

Lord Powell of Bayswater

I think it can be. That is what I would say. Once again, a lot of them were subject to the bus dilemma. That is, 'At a time for an Anglo-French summit, because we always have an Anglo-French once a year, so let's have one.' We used to have an Anglo-Italian summit and it was our despair; we did not know what we wanted to talk to them about. I remember once the Craxi asking Margaret Thatcher where she wanted to have the Anglo-Italian summit in Italy, and she looked rather desperately at me, because she had never been to Italy and I have an Italian wife. I consulted her, and she said, 'It must be up in Barnio Palanza[?].' I said, 'Why?' She said, 'It's our mayor; he's up for re-election.' I do not want to trivialise it, but there is that.

More seriously, things did emerge from summits but they did not emerge actually at the summit. I think bilateral summits gave a lot of food for thought, when you were having those extraordinary discussions. I remember when Margaret Thatcher went to Moscow, either in late 1986 or early 1987. It was a rather dramatic summit. Of course, I always still think in terms of the way she dressed for a summit. She had a fur hat and a fur coat. They talked for a total of 12 hours, and the only other people in the room were Chernyaev on their side and me on the other.

Now, there was no communiqué; there was nothing settled there. From a discussion as far-reaching and –ranging as that, things were distilled later, as she thought them over and I am sure as Gorbachev thought them over. You would find them re-emerge months or even years later, in the way that events moved. It is very hard to be very precise in changing the roots of these things. All I can say is that I cannot think of many summits that went seriously wrong or produced a very bad result because there were not enough people there or diplomats to take notes. You leave heads of government together and they get the measure of each other.

Thatcher and Reagan had done it already, long before. They had known each other in the mid-1970s and become friends then, long before either of them came to office, so there was no need to build that rapport. Gorbachev was a process over a number of years. Again, Margaret Thatcher took great care over George Bush when he was Vice President. Every time she went to Washington, she would always go and see George Bush. Everyone would say, 'Who cares about the Vice President? Don't worry about the Vice President.' She said, 'Of course we must respect him. He may be President,' and she would always extend her programme, go up to Observatory Circle and sit down and have a drink or dinner, and talk to him. That cultivation of leaders is valuable.

I do think bilateral summits between leaders are useful. What is not so useful is when you have seven Italian and seven British ministers looking rather blankly at each other. Again to illuminate from another angle the Italian summit that was held at Number 10, everyone was brought together to the dining room at lunchtime and we found ourselves short of an interpreter, so I asked my wife

to come racing round and agree to be an interpreter. She sat between Paul Channon, then Minister of Trade and Industry, and his Italian equivalent. After two minutes, she said to them, 'Look, you're simply going to have to talk about something else, because I cannot understand a word you are saying.' These things could be rather for the record.

Jonathan Hunt

Lord Powell, I wanted to ask you to elaborate more on the circumstances both before and after Reykjavik, because this is of particular interest and is a chapter I have been assigned. Your remarks certainly accorded with much of what I saw in the Reagan presidential library, where his decision to walk back some of the promises made at Reykjavik and to focus on the start of the INF treaties seems really to have been at Thatcher's goading. The National Security Council in particular was quite thankful for her intervention.

I am curious myself, from the perspective of Whitehall and also Number 10, to what extent can you see these sorts of fissures within the government. Within the Reagan administration, those such as Shultz very much seemed supportive and even wedded to rather drastic arms controls measures and others were sceptical, whether in the Pentagon or the White House itself. Is there a way for a foreign government, especially a close ally, to use those divisions within a government to the betterment of their own policies? I am curious too; what was the sense before and during Reykjavik, from your perspective? Did you think this was going to be the shocking, ground-beneath-your-feet quaking? At least from a contemporary perspective, there was not that much expected from this meeting, which was not even a summit. All of a sudden you have to contemplate a completely different world and notion of security. I would like to hear more of your thoughts about that.

Lord Powell

It is a very good and rather complex point. Of course there were divisions on the American side. For instance, I have talked about the Camp David in December 1984, when Margaret Thatcher persuaded Ronald Reagan to put his name to a bit of paper, which effectively put the handcuffs on 'Star Wars'. Both Cap Weinberger and Richard Perle, who were not present, were livid, furious, about it. I was harangued down the telephone at great length about how I had allowed this to happen, because they regarded themselves as her best friends in the US Government. Cap Weinberger had come to her aid during the Falklands War. What sort of payback was this?

Professor David Reynolds

He became Sir Caspar.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

The Hon. Sir. After Reykjavik, there was actually the sort of reaction you described. George Shultz was not very happy that Margaret Thatcher went racing over to Washington. It was literally 10 days later, and she did not take a delegation or anything like that; she just went. We went with a bit of paper that had been drafted between Sir Percy Cradock and me, which tried to reiterate the basic principles of Western strategy and the flexible response. It was not revolutionary or anything, but it was entirely contrary to what he had been on the verge of agreeing to. She got him to put his name to it and George Shultz was not too happy about it. He had come round to see

us the evening before and remonstrated, but she was not having it. She knew what she wanted from those meetings.

Of course, it did lead on to the fact that, when you had the change from President Reagan to President Bush, there was initially a very deliberate tilt against the UK. Jim Baker and George Bush Senior decided that Margaret Thatcher had had altogether too great an influence over Ronald Reagan, and it was time to put things back on a better keel and pay more attention to French and German views. I remember being very worried about this when it started to happen, going to her and saying, 'Do you see what's happening? We're beginning to lose out in our position with the US, and they are paying more attention to the French and Germans.' She simply said, 'Don't worry, Charles. They will soon discover who their real friends are.' When it came to the first Gulf War, they did. These things matter. You have to keep it in mind.

In her case, it was quite simple. This may sound outrageous but, quite honestly, she did not give tuppence for the views of her ministers on foreign affairs by this stage. She was not, as it were, battling against Geoffrey Howe, Douglas Hurd or anyone. She knew what she thought, she knew what she wanted and she was determined to go for it. It was manageable in that way. She achieved it by linking her position on foreign affairs with political gestures towards Ronald Reagan. In that rather crucial time after Reykjavik, he was under huge fire under aid to the Contras, a birthday cake for the Iranians and all that. She went on seven television channels before breakfast haranguing all the media for attacking the President, referring to the tremendous achievements he had had. He was delighted and thrilled, and that just reinforced her personal relationship with him even more. They became almost soppy at the end. No doubt it was a very valuable political tool.

Professor David Reynolds

I would like to ask both of you one general question to conclude this session. We have been talking about this tension between what the professionals would like done and what the leaders decide they are going to do by themselves. You have both been in positions of being private secretaries to people who are making decisions, in your case the Prime Minister and in yours to three foreign secretaries at a very critical time in British history. How did you see your roles as tugging at the sleeves of the great ones, whispering in their ears or listening to them when they come out?

You said, for example, Lord Powell, you had 12 hours in the room with Gorbachev, Thatcher and Chernyaev. Presumably she talks to you afterwards. Do you see your role as simply listening to what is said? Do you have an agenda when you are dealing with a Prime Minister or a foreign secretary who you are advising, or am I not talking in the right language at all about the role that a very senior and influential person, who is a professional diplomat by training, has vis-à-vis their political boss? Would either of you like to comment on that?

Sir Brian Fall

From the periphery and then we will move to Charles at the centre, I found it differed very much from foreign secretary to foreign secretary. Lord Carrington had vast experience and a relationship with Margaret Thatcher, which meant that she did not always agree with him and instinctively did not approach issues in the same way, but she respected and liked him, and they could talk it over. I was a new private secretary and I was learning from him. I did not find that I needed to put things to him, certainly not things that he was busy discussing with the Prime Minister.

Francis Pym was a very different and able man in a different way, whom the Prime Minister did not like, because she felt that he was positioning himself as the head of the West to take over from her

when she left. I do not know how far that is justified. I do not think he was energetic and persuasive enough in convincing her that the opposite was true. There was a huge amount of work that needed to be done there discussing foreign policy things with him. Why had the department put them up in that way? What should come back?

Professor David Reynolds

Is that because he was new to foreign affairs?

Sir Brian Fall

Yes. There was a sense in the Foreign Office that he worked less hard and knew less than he did. Anything that went out from the private office in a minute, in more than about three sentences, was immediately regarded as Fall trying to take over. That was awkward. Geoffrey Howe was a different matter again. He had huge experience in different areas of dealing with abroad, and a relationship with the Prime Minister that was better than Francis Pym's. It was very difficult to get him into Number 10 at all. During the Falklands War, she was convinced that he was trying to 'do a Munich' on her and come back with the 'peace in our time' paper to the plaudits of the opposition benches at least. It varies much from person to person.

The official view is very clear. After the Falklands, you remember there was the Franks report. They took evidence and nobody came anywhere near me. Private secretaries exist only to take pieces of paper, put them in alphabetical order and put them in the boss's box.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

As Brian has very elegantly and diplomatically hinted, there was a great difference between theory and practice in this area. Constitutional theory is very clear: the Prime Minister, as *primus inter pares*, chairs the Cabinet; ministers provide her with advice; and ministerial officers as there was Brian says, to arrange the papers in order. Of course it was not like that and it increasingly cannot be like that, particularly when you have a strong willed Prime Minister who, in Margaret Thatcher's case, saw herself as somebody who was wholly opposed to the system itself. She had got to the top despite the system, everything in this country, our culture and our history. She had overcome it and, therefore, she felt no great debt to the system. She quite frequently would say to me, 'Have you seen what the Government is doing, Charles?' She looked at me as if I was slightly mad. It was a very different atmosphere.

To be honest, an awful lot fell on to my shoulders that should not have done, but did. After a period of seven or eight years, ever more of it did, as she became more detached from her government and, having been there so long, knew better than they did most of the subjects with which everyone was dealing. Inevitably it became more concentrated in Number 10. I believe that I did honestly try my very best always to ensure that the Foreign Office was informed, not necessarily consulted, but it did receive very detailed records of everything that she said, did and what her views were. I do not think I could have been faulted on that, but there is a great institutional problem there too.

I remember being summoned by one of the then permanent secretaries of the Foreign Office who was angry with me for something, probably quite justifiably, and told, 'I should remember who my real boss was. It was him.' I said, 'I'm sorry, but it really isn't like that.' If you're working in Number 10 Downing Street, you have only one person you're responsible for and that is the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister does not have thousands of bureaucrats sitting in a ministry,

supporting her, advising her and so on. She has a handful of people. We had fewer people in Number 10, if you leave aside security staff and cleaners, in Margaret Thatcher's time than they had in Neville Chamberlain's time. It was tiny; it really was. There was nobody else involved in foreign affairs, defence, intelligence, security, trade, aid, except me. I did not have a clerk; I did not have anyone even to arrange the papers. There was just one person. It was a very light structure.

That had huge advantages. If you wanted her view or something or to discuss it, you just stuck your head around her door and said, 'Prime Minister, are we going to go to nuclear war or shall we surrender?' whereas in Paris, Washington or Bonn, you have three weeks of going up through hierarchies, deputies meeting, the National Security Council and so on.

There were advantages until it goes wrong. When it goes wrong and, on the whole, in her case, it went wrong more on domestic policy than on foreign policy, it can be very devastating. It is not a system that is either in tune with our constitution or our practice, but there was an inevitability about it given the personality involved, the length of time she was in office and given, too, the tendency everywhere for these events to come more to heads of government than to departmental ministers. It just seems to me to be an inevitable magnet.

You come to Tony Blair's time, he has eight people dealing with foreign policy in Number 10 Downing Street, two of permanent secretary rank. I never rose above the rank of being, I think it was called, an assistant secretary at the time, which is about eight ranks below what Brown would have been by the end of his very distinguished career. It was a very different world, but it worked quite well in many ways. If you look at where Britain stood at the end of her time, compared to where Britain stood in the world in 1979, you have to say that we were a lot better off and her style of diplomacy had a lot to do with that. I am rather rambling on, so I apologise, but one has a train of thought.

Professor David Reynolds

We will take a break now for tea. When we resume, we will talk more broadly about where all this is going and some of the larger themes that Kristina mentioned. Thank you both very much beginning this so well.

[Break]

Kristina Spohr

We would like now to move more to the nitty-gritty of summits and what is actually happening in the dialogue. We just heard before the break how important the bilateral meeting of minds is, especially at the leaders' level with that issue of chemistry. The value, when such meetings take place and leaders are particularly forceful and have a particular view, is that there is this element of informal dialogue and getting to know each other, with perhaps a trickle-down effect later, as opposed to prepared bargaining with a treaty at the end. With that in mind, and with some of the stories we heard, especially about Mrs T, and her relationship with Ronald Reagan on the one hand and Gorbachev on the other, and considering that she was female Prime Minister, I would like to ask: is it actually possible to develop personal friendships in this kind of diplomacy, or is the way they engage an instrumental friendship?

Lord Powell of Bayswater

I think it is possible to develop them, but extremely risky to put too much weight on them. They help in the process of communication. There are not that many of them, I would say. For instance, Helmut Kohl really tried to get on with Margaret Thatcher. He was kind, generous and polite. Every time they had a bilateral meeting, he would bring her a little present, usually one he had chosen himself, quite small, but nice, and she just gave him hell. It didn't work. They were supposed to be on the same side politically, but she got on far better with Helmut Schmidt than she ever did with Helmut Kohl, but that did not buy her much when it came to European Union affairs.

If you take the Reagan-Thatcher relationship, the fact that they both believed deeply in the same things at the same time, and were in power together, had a profound effect. They both believed that communism was evil and had to be defeated, not accommodated, that taxes had to be low and markets had to be free. One has to say that their joint philosophy was a very powerful force in the 1980s, and it was based on a very close meeting of minds and friendship, even though their characters could not have been more different. He was quintessentially the Chairman of the Board, and she was a fussy chief executive running around trying to tie up all the details.

It used to be wonderful sometimes. They would be having a talk and she would be into the finer details of the ABM treaty, and you could see his eyes strain towards the clock, thinking how long it was until lunchtime and they could have a martini. There was no doubt it was important.

In a strange way, it was important with Gorbachev too. In a sense, it was so unlikely the idea that Margaret Thatcher, of all people, would have a good relationship with a Soviet leader. She regarded the whole system as utterly evil and had been declaiming against it for all her political life. It was improbable and, similarly with him, she was the enemy. I sometimes used to think that, for him, the advantage of Margaret Thatcher was that she was a sort of anvil on which he could hammer out his ideas. If he could get some acceptance from her, then probably the rest of them were not going to be too difficult, because she was likely to be the ultimate obstacle.

I really do think the chemistry between them was important and he wanted to develop it too. We have these little occasions, both in Moscow and in the UK – I remember little dinners in Moscow, just him, here, Denis and Raisa, Chernyaev, me and the two interpreters sitting there, where he was obviously wanting to create an atmosphere, a setting, in which their minds could understand each other better and try to come to a common appreciation of things. It is a mixed answer and, as I say, it can be dangerous to depend too much on that kind of thing and pursue it outside the framework of an overall policy and strategy, but occasionally it can be absolutely crucial in a positive sense too.

Sir Brian Fall

I would just add, from the outside on Thatcher/Gorbachev that, before this 12-hour session that Charles has reported first hand, she organised two consecutive weekends at Chequers, bringing in academics, newspapers and Sovietologists, one mainly US and the other home-grown. She was much more impressed by the US versions; the big-hitters were on that side of the table, as a reflection of the very close relation between the two countries. She would have emerged in Gorbachev's office more knowledgeable and more curious about the problems facing the Soviet Union than most other Western leaders, who would have tended more to pick up a brief and remember what IMF stood for, done their bit, had their lunch and gone home. He, because he is the sort of man who does his homework too and thinks, and was also thinking very much out of the box by the standards of the Politburo, would have appreciated that. That was an important element in the building of the relationship.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

It is a very good point and a wider one too, because she relied a lot on seminars at Chequers. They were not just on Russia; we had seminars on all sorts of things. I remember when post Grenada on 'when is intervention ever justified?' We had Foreign Office people. We had generals, civil servants, businessmen and lawyers. It was wonderful. They all said, 'It is very difficult to justify intervention. You can hardly ever justify it,' all except the lawyers, who all said, 'Intervene whenever you want. International law is at an early stage. We can always find a reason for intervention. Don't worry about it at all,' rather destroying the whole purpose of the seminar.

She did generally cast her net wide, because she was intellectually curious and interested. It also extended to people like Bukovsky and Gordievsky, who she did not include in seminars, but who she saw individually. I remember Gordievsky coming to us to talk in great detail about how Soviet leaders prepared for summit meetings, what the process was, where the papers would come from, how they would be processed and all that. It was extremely valuable. She took these meetings very seriously.

Professor David Reynolds

Was it because she had a scientific training that she was interested in that kind of thing, or were you pushing that or other people pushing that as a useful way to open up channels of alternative thinking?

Lord Powell of Bayswater

It was partly her scientific training, of which she was enormously and perhaps almost exaggeratedly proud. I certainly encouraged her in that direction. I cannot, to be honest, say that the Foreign Office encouraged her much in that direction. I think they would have prepared a monopoly of advice. She just wanted views from as wide a spectrum as possible. She did recognise that there was no single unique wisdom in these matters, and people seeing it from different perspectives, as Brian says, quite a lot of Americans. Her particular guru on the Soviet Union – and I just cannot do his name, the guy at Stanford who wrote about Stalin –

Mark Kramer

Robert Conquest.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

Yes, it was Robert Conquest, thank you. He came in once a year and that usually stiffened her spine a bit.

Kristina Spohr

Taking from this point that the atmospheric side mattered to create a chemistry and have a good environment, there was also the issue of the ritual side. Yesterday, one anthropologist offered views on our thoughts in general on summitry, that the location matters and the question of whether we have handshakes, bear hugs, kisses or whatever. There is this issue that, for some summits we have looked at, which were informal summits that had this trickle-down effect, happened in weird and wonderful locations. We had Guadalupe, when Schmidt pointed out that everybody was sitting

in polo shirts and T-shirts by the beach, which made it easier to communicate. We have the woolly-jumper diplomacy between Kohl and Gorbachev at Gorbachev's dacha in Archys in the Caucasus. Earlier, and this is why I picked it out, you mentioned that Thatcher thought about taking her fur hat to the Soviet Union. To what extent does the atmosphere, these little rituals and how one dresses really matter, or is it just something for the media, because it is fun?

Sir Brian Fall

The best British hat in Moscow was Harold Macmillan's, rather than Mrs Thatcher's. He wore a wonderful big white hat from way back, but that was more memorable than anything else. Bilaterally, when you are dealing with what used to be called a 'high-level visit' rather than a summit, I think the atmospherics are very important if you are trying to build up trust. At the foreign minister level, I remember that Geoffrey Howe had worked out that Andreotti was a fanatic of horse racing and gambling, and would always organise something at Epsom, which worked extremely well. If you try that on the next foreign minister down the road and you have wasted your day.

We had a good example of that when the Armenian President, who was a distinguished orientalist this was Ter-Petrosyan – paid a virtual state visit to the UK. He spent three hours in the British Museum, because that was one of the things he wanted to do in London, and it was a huge help. A few months later, Heydar Aliyev from Azerbaijan came and had clearly given instructions to his people that his programme was to be not one jot less good than the one that Petrosyan had. Aliyev, and it serves him right, spent three hours in the British Museum wondering what the hell he was doing there. It was very helpful in one way.

If you are bothering to have one individual at whatever level, head of government, head of state or foreign ministry, coming for a day or more of talks, getting a programme that they will appreciate is an important part of the success or otherwise of what you are trying to do.

In the multilateral context, I cannot remember it mattering hugely where those G7 summits were held, though I do remember the first time I sat in Canada. We were all sat in what is claimed to be the biggest log cabin in the world, and I think it probably is, but there was a central core and then there were spokes. Each delegation had its spoke, but you were really able to move very quickly to avoid trouble or to lobby somebody, which was helpful. Spreading people around too far from each other, so that all the work has to be done around the conference table, is less successful. I am not sure that the beach or otherwise is particularly important.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

I would only add to that that different rules obviously apply to female prime ministers or heads of government. Men in grey suits look like men in grey suits; women do look different. Margaret Thatcher spent a lot of time preparing for meetings in terms of dress and what she was going to wear. Her speeches were always an overall production; it was not just the text of what she was saying. It was her hair, her dress, the lights and everything like that. It all mattered. It can play a part. I think I was probably the only prime ministerial aide in the 1980s who carried a spare pair of tights in his briefcase.

As to the informality of the meetings, I was thinking as Brian was speaking of the Commonwealth heads of government meetings, where there was always a retreat, as it was called. Some of them were quite pleasant. I remember one in an island off the north of Malaysia. They all went up there and ended up singing around the piano, with Mahathir playing the piano and Brian Mulroney

singing. Now, did that really advance the Commonwealth in any significant sense? It did not stop Margaret Thatcher, the next day, from issuing her own declaration on South Africa, as opposed to the conference one. There is a certain amount of artifice in these things that does not have that much impact.

If there are just two of them meeting, yes, maybe it helps to create an atmosphere of intimacy. Gorbachev trying to recreate Chequers with this former sugar baron's house in the middle of Moscow, with a big roaring fire, clearly had a message. He wanted it to be the same sort of atmosphere that he had enjoyed in London, but you cannot really build a general rule on that.

Sir Brian Fall

One other point that I was very conscious of in Helsinki, rather than the atmosphere, was that there were glimmerings of difference between the attitudes of various members of the Warsaw Pact. The Hungarians has an ideology that sensed where there was money to be made. You went for it and you covered up afterwards. The Poles, knowing what the Soviets regarded as decadent art, were equally keen to be firm on decadent art. Whereas in the Soviet Union it was destroyed, the Poles worked out that you could make rather good money selling it to Poles in Chicago. You had all these differences that were fascinating for people working in the bilateral embassies, but they did not show when you were around the conference table. All the East Europeans were there in front of mother, and they were not able to show any indication of flexibility there. Things that were beginning to be part of bilateral conversations with individual countries and the work of embassies posted to those countries were just not doable around the table, in Helsinki or Geneva.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

At one of the working funerals in Moscow – I honestly cannot remember which it was – it was winter and everyone was very heavily dressed. Margaret Thatcher had on a thick coat and boots, and she had her personal security officer with her, Chief Superintendent Ray Parker, 6ft 4in, size 14 boots and the lot. He was walking behind her with these bulging pockets. You could see the Russian security think, 'My God, he really packs some weaponry in there.' Then we went to the Kremlin for the reception, when she took off her coat and her hat, zipped down her boots, and he reached in his pockets and handed her the high-heeled shoes.

Professor David Reynolds

Stiletto diplomacy. Does anybody want to come in on this?

Mark Kramer

The comment about the Azeris and Armenians prompts one question, and I have another as well. How do you recover from faux pas, especially major ones? It would be easier in this case, because the Azeris had requested that itinerary, so they were given what they asked for. The one that immediately comes to mind is when George HW Bush vomited into the lap of the Japanese prime minister. How do you try afterwards to mitigate the consequences of that?

The other question is on a comment that Lord Powell made at the beginning. He was talking about some of the conditions that led to the success of Western efforts on the end of the Cold War. These have connections to summitry as well. The second one you mentioned was about a surge of Western self-confidence. During the break, I was looking up some of the opinion polls at the time and they showed a very pessimistic mood, at least in the United States. 85% of the American

public, in 1989, thought that the United States was in decline. 80% thought that the Soviet Union was militarily superior. There was this rash of books that appeared at the time about decline. The perception was there about the first point you mentioned – that the Soviet Bloc was in decline – but there was also a perception that the West was in decline. Did you sense that at all at the time? If so, how did it affect some of the views that were conveyed in summits and the ways that leaders prepared for them?

Lord Powell of Bayswater

You surprise me with those opinion polls because, if you look back over Ronald Reagan's eight years as President, and particularly the earlier part, it was – I've forgotten the phrase, 'sunshine in America' or something like that.

Mike Morgan

Morning again in America.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

That was reflected again in the mood. It was the reaction to Carter and the post-Vietnam malaise. There was certainly a feeling in the rest of the world that the United States was in a very important phase of recovery and strength. Although there were problems with the deficit in the first half of the Reagan presidency, as Margaret Thatcher kept reminding him, growth continued and defence budgets soared, so I find that a bit hard to reconcile.

Certainly in this country the mood was entirely different. As you know, we had the strikes and the unburied dead in the streets, so it was a very bad period up until 1979. There really was an overall sense of the West getting back on the front foot, as the Soviet Union had always appeared to be out front, whether in Angola or wherever, challenging Western positions. Our attitude was 'We've just got to live with this.' The whole atmosphere of détente, which was clearly a bad word, as far as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were concerned, changed for me.

I suppose I was probably the world's expert on trying to repair gaffes, since Margaret Thatcher made a considerable number, most of them to enrage the Foreign Office. I remember a particular one that got me into a lot of trouble, and it was not my fault either. After Germany had beaten Britain at football in the World Cup, she was questioned by some rather aggressive German journalists about what it felt like to be defeated by the Germans. She smiled very sweetly and said, 'I remind myself that we defeated them at their favourite sport twice this century.' You can imagine Douglas Hurd was not pleased.

Sir Brian Fall

On gaffes also, if you were to Google Bush in Japan and sub-Google projectile diplomacy, you would probably find something about the ABM treaty, which shows there is no perfect answer to gaffeology. We had an example at the foreign minister level, when Lord Carrington was foreign minister. We had just become EU Chairman, and the nine had decided that the tricky business of going to Moscow to tell the Russians how badly they were behaving in Afghanistan was a very good subject to leave until the British Presidency. The first thing that happened to Carrington was he was to go off to Moscow to tell them to sort themselves out and improve their behaviour.

He decided on a little bit of consultation before he went, so he invited Chesson and Genscher to spend the night at Chequers, and we had a preparatory talk for Carrington to gain a feel for what was happening in the EU and their views on Moscow. Off we went to Moscow. Meanwhile, the Italians had got wind of the fact that they had not been included in this particular gathering and they were livid. After talking to Gromyko and getting nowhere, as you can imagine, the next immediate job was to go and apologise personally to Emilio Colombo for misunderstandings and leaving him out. The only slight disadvantage from that was that the plane was full of British journalists who had come for the Moscow visit, so the embassy had to deal with about 30 hungry and bewildered journalists, who did not understand why a plane going from Moscow to London had to go via Rome. It was probably one of the more public apologies.

Professor David Reynolds

Mark's question will perhaps move us on to some larger issues towards the end. One of the points we have been wrestling with in our discussions is whether leaders at the time, people making policy and decisions, had a view as to how this process of rapid change in the 1980s might end. It now all has an air of inevitability about it, the fall of the Berlin Wall, collapse of the Soviet Union and so on. As you look back over your own experience in the diplomatic service and in policy making, did you imagine spending the whole of your whole careers dealing with a Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc, were therefore the main objective was to try to reduce tension, or did you have a scenario, a world imagined beyond the Cold War? Maybe a more practical question is: at what point in the 1980s did you start to say, 'Wow, things are really going in a different direction'? Those are hard questions to answer, because you know the dénouement, but it is really important for us as historians to try to understand what people thought or were imagining at the time.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

I recall Margaret Thatcher saying in 1988 that she did not expect to see the end of communism in her lifetime and, less than two years later, it was finished. On the other hand, the first time we began to believe that things were changing in an important way was coming from Eastern Europe and contact with the Hungarians. She went there in 1984. I am sorry if this is a very British-centric thing, but obviously this is the perspective I see. She invited a lot of the Eastern European leaders to come to London. Kádár came in 1985 or 1986. Then it came on to Poland next and meeting Jerelzelski[?], Lekpo[?] and so on. With hindsight, I started to realise that at least Eastern Europe was moving away in a more liberal direction, and might be able to develop a greater degree of autonomy from the Soviet Union. That dates from about 1985 onwards. I cannot say that that was a plan or a fully formed vision, but it was a sense, an instinct, that that was the way things were going.

Sir Brian Fall

I had a spell in NATO in the 1980s, 1984-86, when Lord Carrington had taken over as Secretary General. You could see the developments within NATO on a re-emphasis of the political. It had become very rigid. Luns probably stayed a year or two longer than he should have. There was no sign of thinking about the possibility of change. We discovered that there was not an academic Sovietologist anywhere in the organisation, and we invented one, partly by not filling a vacancy somewhere in the Secretariat and partly by getting a grant from the Ford Foundation. Enid Schoettle said that she never thought that she, as a Quaker, would end up signing off a fairly generous grant to NATO. It was the beginning of the feeling that there was more that could be done, and that relations between NATO and the European neutrals, again which had been ignored, were things that had to be done.

Carrington made speeches in Sweden, Austria and Switzerland, stepping out and underlining the fact that there was experience of new developments in Eastern Europe that did not necessarily emerge from talks between foreign ministers. In some ways, the foreign ministers of the Warsaw Pact were trusted people. It was known that you could let them out on a two-day visit to the West without any disastrous changes in routine taking place, so you were dealing with some pretty wooden figures. The more one talked, particularly to the neutral and non-aligned in Europe, the more one sensed that they were developing business and cultural links, in the spirit of the final act, taking advantage of the fact that Brezhnev had signed something. When you were told by the police that you should not be doing X, you could say, 'I'm just doing what Comrade Brezhnev had just signed.' There was a sense of the beginning of the flaw.

For all the people who criticise foreign offices for not being far-sighted enough – there are academics and journalists who do this – nobody to my mind, among these distinguished groups, claims that they predicted the day that that Wall came tumbling down. Lots of people said it is not going to last forever. Fine, lots of us have said that. When that Wall came tumbling down, it was a huge surprise at the way it happened and the speed at which it happened. The heads of states and governments, who had to consider the consequences for them and their own diplomacy, had to do so very, very quickly. There were new pieces of papers called for very quickly and quite a lot of backs of envelopes, because nobody had really been able to plan for it. When the ice broke, my God it broke with a thunder and it caught everybody rather by surprise. Possibly even the German Government at the time found that it was beyond the forward look that the planning staff had issued the month before.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

There was a rather good study by Sir Percy Cradock about the role of the Joint Intelligence Committee in trying to predict events, and he admitted, absolutely frankly, that it was pretty lousy. They failed to foresee the Falklands Conflict, at least until it was already underway. They failed to predict the fall of the Berlin Wall. They failed to predict Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. On the whole, they advised that that would not happen and, within less than 12 hours of their report being issued in Whitehall, Saddam was driving over the border.

It is not because they are incompetent, stupid or anything like that, but they weigh a very wide number of factors and try to come to a consensus view between a lot of people. Usually the consensus view comes down against the improbable happening. That is just life, but I can think of very few other organisations – academic, intelligence or diplomatic – that have successfully predicted startling events, otherwise they would not be startling.

James Cameron

I wanted to shift the focus slightly from looking forward to looking back. You mentioned that Thatcher spent a lot of time with Sovietologists and current experts on Soviet politics. You also mentioned that she had an ingrained suspicion of German power, which was gained from her reading of history. I was just wondering how much Thatcher and other people you both worked for knew about the history of past British summits. Did they draw anything from that? Were they more reliant on their intuition as politicians and their own personal experience, rather than looking at the history of British foreign policy and summitting?

Sir Brian Fall

I do not think that the history of summits loomed very large, but certainly when the Foreign Office research department was bigger and better resourced than it is now, in dealings with the Soviet Union in particular and Eastern Europe to a lesser degree, there was a huge amount of historical knowledge that could be deployed to write a brief, speech or article, or prepare a visit. There was a sense that we were well grounded. In the days when Ted Orchard ran the Foreign Office research department, a wise head of department, before going with the minister to Moscow, would ask Ted to write the Soviet brief, and very good Soviet briefs they turned out to be. That can only be done by somebody who has a sense of what is inspiring thinking on the other side.

Professor David Reynolds

By the 'Soviet brief', do you mean how these issues would be seen by the Soviet side, the other side of the hill?

Sir Brian Fall

If we were to have talks with Gromyko, what would his brief say on the four or five key items on the agenda?

Lord Powell of Bayswater

When Margaret Thatcher came to power, there was a general condescension towards her. Here was this shrill Finchley housewife who really did not know about foreign policy, and who was all too likely to make gaffes. They thought of Margaret Thatcher as George Brown in a skirt, which was just not right. She was a highly educated woman who had followed international affairs, in a general sense, for several decades. Unlike present generations of our leaders, she had been in top-level politics for nearly 30 years before becoming Prime Minister. She actually knew quite a lot and had a very retentive memory.

To take the case of summits, she knew very well what the attitude of Harold Macmillan had been to summits. It was to desperately struggle to suggest that Britain was still the third power. It was still the Churchill time and he hoped that he could insert himself in the US/Soviet relationship as a third party. She knew absolutely that there was no way that that made any sense in her time and, therefore, she cast her lot 100% in with the United States, and believed that the best way for Britain to exercise influence was through the United States, by having us a very close relationship that gave us a voice in their policy-making. She did understand the background of summits in that way extremely well. She knew that they were a reflection of the current power division in the world, and that ours was very limited.

Benedikt Schoenborn

I would like to return to the point we mentioned earlier about the relationship between top-level summits and lower-level negotiations that can be conducted in secret. I understand you are critical of the practical results of top-level summits. Sir Brian mentioned the negotiations between Egon Bahr and Michael Kohl as successful negotiations at a secret lower level. I would like to ask if you would endorse the following interpretation. I have worked for this conference on a paper on the German-German summits, in 1970. The conclusion or the hypothesis I produced was that Willy Brandt's goal in the summit with East German leaders, but later on also with Polish and Soviet leaders, was to start a process of reconciliation with the Iron Curtain. He wanted to start a

process from the top, but then negotiations would be conducted at lower levels. His role at the top would then be to give public weight to the results negotiated at lower levels. This would be my interpretation of the longer-term processes of the role of top-level summits and secret negotiations. Would you endorse this?

Sir Brian Fall

I do not think, with what the Brandt *Ostpolitik* achieved, the ball could not have been set rolling other than at the summit level. An ambassador could be sent off somewhere else in two years' time, and nobody would hear have him again. You have to establish the political commitment to achieving A, B and C, and to talk to your opposite number about that to gain agreement that, in principle, this is something we would like to see done, subject to the detailed work being done by less grand people and submitted to us for final approval. I do not see how one could cope with that sort of issue in any other way.

That was the impetus for SALT. It had to be started at that level, although the detailed negotiation obviously came much lower but, in the case of SALT 1, not that much lower, because the Americans were dealing with the Soviet Union and the ministry of defence about matters that the Russian generals had not discussed with the civilians. They were very upset at the end of SALT 1 that the brilliant press conference by Kissinger was putting into the public domain things that they had not told their own foreign minister. You can be too secret for your own good.

I agree that that German experience is a very good example of what needs to be done at the most senior level by a visit from a head of state or government to another. Whether one needs to call it a summit or not, I am less sure, because the implications of summitry are now so tied into publicity and public expectations that it sometimes makes the job harder to do.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

My impression from some of your questions is that you have a slightly exaggerated view of the importance and role of summits, which is very understandable because, historically, they were extremely important. If you think of the Congress of Vienna and the Second World War summits, they were absolutely crucial in determining the course of the War and the subsequent peace.

To come back to one of my earlier points, one of the problems is that summits have become rather trivialised, simply by having so many of them and dragging everything up to the top level. Looking back and without having a particularly strong view on this – I did not even really think about it until you very kindly invited me to this meeting – summits were milestones. They marked the latest pace you were taking, but they were not the place where those paces were determined. Of course, as I said earlier, I thought the Helsinki one was quite exceptional, but there was no other one like it anyway.

The rest of them were just a summary, at a point in time, of where we had got to in numerous other contexts. They just consolidated it, but they were not launch pads for great new ideas. They were not the place where dramatic initiatives were taken. Bilaterally they were. Look at Nixon and Mao Tse-tung. That is a classic case of a very important bilateral summit that determined the whole future course of the world, the balance of power and everything, but 99% of summits, if one is absolutely frank, are slightly humdrum affairs – professionally prepared and important in their way, but not decisive in the course of history.

Kristina Spohr

I wanted to follow up on this because, in David and my thinking on which summits to choose and how to sub-divide our book, if you look at this period in the early 1970s and some of the conceptual points we considered, what these bilateral summits had to do in the first part of our book were, from the situation we had, with confrontation and total antagonism, to create something that brings about reconnaissance, trust building, dialogue and engagement in the first place, before you can even reach a proper bureaucratic underlying process where you can negotiate and bargain more until your next milestone, as you have now put it. Is it then not so that for those summits we picked in the first part, the German ones, the Beijing one and Moscow, in 1970 and 1972, there is this unusual moment in time when they acted as a launch pad to bring about some kind of change? It had to come from the top because, at the lower level, there needed to be some moving in the first place, and the agenda had to be set for this particular point from the top.

Sir Brian Fall

When you are starting by trying to do something very new, which was the case with a lot of that German diplomacy, it has to be started by somebody who is unlikely to be sacked by his boss, for the very good reason that he does not have a boss. That is why you go to the top: to launch the process at the level of a foreign minister, emissary, state secretary or a special representative always leads to the fear that whoever it is will have the rug pulled out from under them. Of course it can happen to heads of state and governments as well, but it is less likely and more reassuring to the interlocutor to be able to say that this is Nixon/Mao, beyond which there is no court of appeal and then nobody is very evidently sackable. In that case, you have to start from the top and rely on the top to give the right instructions to the people below them, who will be doing the detailed work.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

I would not disagree with that, but surely most major diplomatic initiatives in history have been prepared in conditions of absolutely paranoid secrecy. If you look at Nixon/Mao, nobody knew about that outside the tiniest circle, and quite a number of events that were world-changing and significant were prepared in paranoid secrecy and blessed as a summit, but not really taken forward as a summit.

Professor David Reynolds

We have your useful ideas of summits as milestones and summits as blessing, in a sense, to which we may want to return.

Mike Morgan

Lord Powell, you mentioned a few minutes ago that Mrs Thatcher and President Reagan regarded 'détente' as a dirty word. One of the questions we have been talking about over the last couple of days is whether we should regard détente as an unnecessary, maybe even mistaken, detour or distraction from the correct course in the Cold War, or rather as an essential prerequisite with lasting effects for the changes of the 1980s. I would be curious for both of your views on that question of whether détente was an ephemeral phenomenon or something absolutely fundamental to what came after.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

My recollection is that détente was essentially a sign of Western weakness. It was defensive. It was a feeling that we had better try to stabilise things where we can because, if we go on much longer, it is going to get even worse from the West's point of view. That was particularly the view of many on the American side. Therefore, it was not as though détente was a positive conception that this would really lead us on to the end of the Cold War. It was, 'Let's try to hold the Russians back. Let's try to nail them down. Let's not let things get any worse.' When you then had an entirely different philosophy from President Reagan, it changed and détente was forgotten about. History comes to be written at least by those involved in it at the time, and the talk is of winning the Cold War and if that was a meaningful concept. That is the difference in attitude.

Sir Brian Fall

Back to summitry or to almost summitry – those endless visits by Prime Ministers and foreign ministers around Europe – endless communiqués emerged from that, and you could not go home without signing a communiqué that was dripping with détente in every other paragraph. That was rightly regarded as dangerous nonsense by the more realistic and backboned members.

Détente needs translating; this is a process of reducing tension. You reduce tension by removing the causes of tension, and that requires analysis. Why is there tension? It is build-up of arms and disagreements on nuclear affairs. That is where the Western approach to Helsinki applies; détente required activity on the human front, more trouble and more exchanges of information. It was putting into place very micro recommendations about more of that where you built up a situation that maybe the tensions would be reduced and you would have achieved the aim of reducing tension.

Talking about détente does not serve to reduce tension; it tends to produce apoplexy in certain capitals at certain times, and quite rightly so. It became very cheap and the Soviet Union was able to put a lot of ideological baggage into their definitions of détente, peaceful co-existence for instance, and non-interference rather than non-intervention, both of which the US/Soviet declaration of 1972 gets wrong, from the point of view of a purist Helsinki veteran. What we thought we were doing, in the preparatory talks and in the final act, was producing a definition of what needs to be done to establish something worthwhile, something that really can be justifiably called a reduction of tension and, therefore, détente.

Jonathan Hunt

I was quite struck, Lord Powell, by a couple of points you made about summitry. First there is this eternal question of whether or not they are simply bookmarks in the chapters being written by external circumstances, or are they areas where a certain new impulse can be injected into foreign relations?

Secondly, there is a certain contradiction between the need for privacy and discretion, in order to move away from bureaucracy and public opinion, in order to strike deals that are hopefully mutually advantageous. There is also the desire for summits to be pageants and to consecrate those steps in the public eye.

I am curious about another point: how do we understand the issues at stake versus their symbolism, and how policymakers think about them? I am particularly struck by this Reagan/Thatcher/Gorbachev triad on the importance of arms control. Whether we want to call it

the second détente of the late 1980s, arms control was very much at the heart of most of these parlays. I will include SDI in this category as well. From a contemporary vantage point, it all seems a little artificial. SDI never ended up working. Perhaps one day, when my children are old, it will work, but there was nonetheless so much attention paid to it, and the number and distribution of certain nuclear systems on both sides. There is a material reality that these are guns pointed at each other's heads, but there also seems to be a strong symbolic, almost psychological, element to arms control at this time. I suppose I want your viewpoints on how arms control – the material reality of the arms and the symbolism of the arms – plays into larger questions of bilateral relations, especially superpower relations with Europe, in this very consequential final stage in the 1980s.

Lord Powell of Bayswater

Your first point about the domestic political impact of summits is obviously true. Why the hell did we have a NATO summit in Wales three or four weeks ago? It just happens that we have an election coming, and the Government suddenly saw an opportunity to have a summit. We spent £200 million on that summit of, would you believe it, public money. What did it achieve? The 14th repetition that NATO countries would, within the next 10 years, spend 2% of their budgets on defence. Anyone who believes that needs their heads examined. We did not get very much for our money so, in that sense, summits can be almost frivolous sometimes, and I think that was a case of a frivolous summit.

You are absolutely right in your identification of arms control as the main theme, but that is not really a surprise. The Cold War was about war. It was about preparations for war, defence, weapons systems, trying to gain the advantage or stop the other side getting the advantage, so it was pretty natural that arms control would be the central theme of negotiations, whether they were nuclear, the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions or the other artifices of the time. In a sense that is not surprising. Some very cleverly, professionally organised agreements were reached.

Once again, I would say, certainly in terms of the early SALT negotiations and so on, that they were trying to hang on to the Soviet's coattails. It was Kissinger realising that, whatever the Pentagon was saying, there was no chance of the Americans developing certain weapons systems or more of them, because they would not be given the authority by Congress and, therefore, trying to halt the Russians was the main intention of those negotiations. I would agree that, from the middle of the 1980s onwards, the reduction in weapons began to become a much more serious issue.

I do not want to go into all the details of all the negotiations, partly because I cannot remember them all anyway, but Margaret Thatcher always wanted to be sure that the Russians would reduce their conventional forces before we agreed, in NATO, to abolish short-range nuclear weapons. The Germans did not quite take that view. When Bush came in, the Americans did not take it either. We ended up getting rid of our short-range nuclear weapons before there were significant reductions in troops. Certainly when it came to the constructive period of the Cold War, which I would honestly define as the last four years, arms control was absolutely at the heart of it.

Again, in the summits, agreements were hammered out between the Americans and the Russians, with NATO consulted along the way. Sometimes people like Margaret Thatcher were kicking and screaming. I think it was George Bush who always described her as 'the anchor to windward', always the last person to fall into line, which was quite helpful in a negotiating sense. They were not negotiated at summits really. They were not.

Sir Brian Fall

As a gloss on arms control and disarmament, as the negotiations proceeded and we had increasing agreement, it became more widely recognised as necessary that the ability to verify was a crucial element – perhaps the crucial element – in deciding what could and what could not yet be negotiated. The fact that the Soviet Union was led to accept that as being right and the only way they were going to get what they wanted on the disarmament side built a very useful block of trust. Reagan said, *Доверяй, но проверяй*. It got somewhere and it was very helpful in persuading the more reasonable worriers about arms control within Western countries that the reasons for slow progress, where verification was not possible, were quite possible. The political impact there on the way that populations looked at the agenda is an important part of it all.

Closing Remarks**David Reynolds**

It falls to me just to say thank you to you gentlemen very much indeed for spending the afternoon with us, listening to us moaning on about summits, perhaps more than is justified, and for offering your own perspectives, both as participants and also as people who have thought hard about the whole thing since you were in positions of responsibility. Thank you to Patrick and the FCO historians for hosting us, and for giving us the opportunity to be in this amazing building. With that, we say that our own summit is now over. Thank you very much.

This Full Transcript was produced by Ubiquis UK ☎ +44 (0) 20 7269 0370
<http://www.ubiquis.co.uk> / infouk@ubiquis.com