Chapter Twelve: From a Funeral….

Hirohito died on January 7, 1989. He’d ruled Japan since 1926, overseeing both the most traumatic and the most prosperous days in his country’s history. Long infirmed, his passing was expected. One by one world leaders announced their plans to attend his funeral. Some declined their invitation, citing scheduling conflicts or matters of protocol. These were the lucky ones. Many who did plan to attend were in turn denounced by critics for honoring the man who had presided over the dark night of World War II. On his watch, rape camps, starvation, death and oppression followed each Japanese triumph, sewing bitter memories among those the emperor’s troops had conquered and fought.

Well known to the wider world, these and similar crimes were rarely discussed in Japan. They were certainly not stressed (or frequently even mentioned) in Japanese textbooks. German schools taught mandatory lessons on the Holocaust, Nazism, and the collective guilt each citizen bore for what their nation—their parents and their grandparents—had done and condoned. Unable to repay such a moral debt or remove history’s stain, German leaders considered it their duty to accept responsibility. They apologized routinely, even famously crumbling to their knees under the weight of their shame. Japanese officials typically accepted blame for World War II with less enthusiasm, if at all, and chose instead upon Hirohito’s death to focus on the post-war economic miracle and transition to constitutional democracy that took place during his reign. The war was thus conveniently overlooked by the bulk of eulogizers and historians alike, befitting the moniker of Hirohito’s reign proclaimed, as was custom, upon his death. Thereafter he would formally be recalled as the Emperor Showa, provider of “abundant benevolence,” who had overseen the nation’s rise from rubble to the world’s second largest economy. The dark
years were not his fault, Japan’s Prime Minister Noburo Takeshita explained when announcing
the Emperor’s death, as the “war broke out in spite of his wishes.”

Not everyone remembered things this way. He “should have been shot or publicly
chopped up at the end of the war,” New Zealand’s Defense Minister railed at the news of
Hirohito’s demise. A figurehead in most ways, he was also Japan’s ultimate authority. No other
Axis leader remained in place at the war’s end. Hitler was dead. Mussolini’s own people hung
his corpse from a wire. Japan’s wartime Prime Minister, Hideki Tojo, met his fate and a
hangman’s noose following a lengthy war crimes trial. Wars, even Cold ones, rarely end well
for the losers. Hirohito alone remained. The Americans who occupied his lands after 1945
believed they needed his support, and more importantly his ongoing presence on the throne, to
mollify Japan’s war-scarred and famously xenophobic population. “It would be most convenient
if the Japanese side could prove to us that the emperor is completely blameless,” one of Douglas
MacArthur’s chief aides urged. “I think the forthcoming trials offer the best opportunity to do
that. Tojo, in particular,” he said, “should be made to bear all responsibility at this at his trial.”
Tojo and his top aides obliged. Having botched suicide, this would be his final service to his
emperor. American prosecutors even allowed the disgraced former Prime Minister to recant and
then revise earlier testimony when he inadvertently implicated Hirohito by referring to the
emperor as his nation’s ultimate military authority. “The emperor system should continue so
long as the occupation does,” MacArthur’s staff reasoned. Hirohito, and their control over him,
was democracy’s “best ally” in Japan in the growing struggle against Soviet-led “communication
of the world.”

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2 Dower, Embracing Defeat, p. 232-324.
These decisions still rankled nearly a half-century later. The head of the Australian Returned Serviceman’s League, representing former prisoners-of-war, promised “the RSL won’t be sending a wreath…” to Hirohito’s funeral, but “if we did, it would be poison ivy.” South Korean voices were equally critical. “No matter how much Japan denies his responsibility,” editorialized Dong-a Ilbo, a leading Seoul newspaper, “it won’t be able to deny the fact that wars were declared in his name” and oppressive colonization took place “in the name of the emperor.”

Agreeing to honor the emperor by attending his funeral was thus no simple thing for leaders of nations that had fought the Japanese or suffered under their rule during World War II. Few wanted to dredge up memories of such violence, tacitly endorsing Japan’s sanitized version of the emperor’s past through their presence. Yet neither could they easily risk offending a regional powerhouse and Asia’s largest economy by refusing their invitation. Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke’s office initially suggested he would attend, for example, but then quickly backtracked in the face of public outrage. Hawke ultimately demurred, sending a deputy in his stead. In London the Foreign Office’s plan to send Prince Charles, heir to the throne, was similarly downgraded following intense domestic criticism. Prince Philip (Charles’ father, outside the line of succession) and the Foreign Secretary led the British delegation instead. Prime Minister Takeshita certainly did not help smooth matters when by once more publicly denying Japan’s responsibility for the war. Conservatives and nationalists alike routinely balked at the ritualistic apologies offered up by Japanese officials in the decades since 1945. Takeshita’s seemingly innocuous suggestion that it would ultimately be “up to historians” to assign guilt for the war sparked violent protests throughout Asia. In South Korea students stoned

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the Japanese Embassy; in China they burned Japanese flags in the street. Takeshita prudently, if reluctantly, backtracked two weeks later, slightly but enough to deflate most critics, when passively agreeing “aggression by militarism” caused the war. It was not a heartfelt repudiation of the past, but it was enough.  

Other world leaders vacillated but Bush announced his intention to attend the funeral without any real hesitation. “I know I’m doing the right thing, to represent the United States of America at this funeral,” he explained to reporters. There were few complaints from the press, though the Tonight Show’s Johnny Carson did note that Bush appeared to “have it backwards,” by attending a funeral as president while his vice-president stayed home. Kidding aside, Bush’s move offered a realpolitik chance to cement the crucial Japanese-American relationship at the start of his administration, and with hundreds of world leaders in attendance, the funeral would also be a rich opportunity to begin putting his style of personal diplomacy into action.

More profoundly, it simultaneously revealed something important about his sense of history. Baldly stated, he hardly had one. The past was the past for Bush. Never one to dwell too long on times gone by, what mattered in his mind was always what came next. “Obviously, as one who has served in the Pacific theater long ago in that war, if you had suggested to me in September 2—get this date now—September 2, 1944 that I would be representing the United States at this event, why I would have found that a little hard to believe.”  

This was not a date randomly pulled from the air. It was instead the day Bush’s plane was downed by Japanese fire. He nearly perished. Two crewmates did. The brush with death,

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and months spent flying combat missions against the Japanese provided political cover when
explaining his decision. “We have a strong relationship with Japan,” he explained. It was an
ally, and a partner, and in Bush’s mind “from the day he [Hirohito] went to see [General
Douglas] MacArthur there in Tokyo, when the war ended, that sent a tone of recovery that built
into friendship. And our relationship is strong. And what I am symbolizing is not the past but
the present and the future by going there.” ⁶

This was not just the rhetoric of a president eager to improve relations with a key trading
partner, though it clearly was that too, but was instead illustrative of a fundamental facet of
Bush’s life. He simply did not look back long enough to let the weight of history lay heavily on
his mind, and neither did he linger over the past. “I can’t say that in the quiet of the ceremony,"
he would later tell the American media traveling on Air Force One after the funeral, “that my
mind didn’t go back to the wonder of it all, because I vividly remember my wartime experience.
And I vividly remember the personal friends that were in our squadron that are no longer
alive…But my mind didn’t dwell on that at all. And what I really thought, if there was any
connection to that, is isn’t it miraculous what’s happened since the war. [In Japan] we’re talking
about a friend, and we’re talking about an ally.” ⁷

Lest we think this merely a good story concocted for the press, he made the same point
that night in the quiet confines of his diary. “My mind raced back to the Pacific,” Bush wrote.
“Here I was, President of the United States, paying respects to the man who was the symbol of
everything we hated. A man whose picture was always shown to keep us all together, fighting
hard. Endless pictures of Japanese soldiers cutting off the heads of prisoners or firing the coup

de grace against thousands as they were dumped into open graves alive, all in the name of Hirohito.”

He remembered, but decades later transformed those memories into a positive lesson. “Here we were,” he wrote late at night after the funeral, “paying tribute to him [Hirohito]…A man who decided to come see MacArthur.” A leader, in other words, who moved forward, unburdened by the past. Writing a trusted friend some years later Bush furthered the point, in the process further revealing his forward-leaning mindset. “I expect some families who lost loved ones in World War II might not share my view on the importance of reconciliation, about forgetting the brutal past; but given the importance of the US. Japan relationship and Japan’s commitment to democracy and freedom I am sure I am right. . . . Besides, isn’t it good to heal old wounds?”

He had not always been so forgiving. “I feel so strongly that the Nazis, fascists, or whatever moniker they use, should all be dealt with severely,” then Lieutenant Bush had written in a wartime letter home to his parents. “The leaders—those responsible for murder, famine, treachery, etc., must be killed. . . . [I]f this is not done with all leaders who have collaborated with the Nazis, whether they be recognized heads of government or quislings ruling in conquered countries,” he concluded, “I fear these 4 years of bloodshed will have been for naught.”

Clearly Bush was not the same man by his sixties that he was in his twenties. He had matured, just as he believed Japan had matured. So too with Germany, as we shall in time see, whose own evolution away from its dark past would play a great role in Bush’s diplomacy still to come. He seemed in fact to have moved beyond the past more than most of his contemporaries, especially given the

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8 Bush, *All the Best*, p. 415.
9 Bush, *All the Best*, pp. 415 and 644.
10 Bush, *All the Best*, p. 49.
ongoing economic tensions within the Japanese-American relationship. While sixty-three percent of Americans polled approved of their president attending Hirohito’s funeral, merely forty-one percent of those over the age of 64, those therefore with memories of the war, endorsed Bush’s trip. Ongoing wariness of Tokyo’s economic ambitions didn’t help. A mere 34% of Americans polled in February, 1989, believed their bilateral trade good for the United States. That last number had been 42% only a year before. More than 40% of Americans queried in the same poll opposed Japanese ownership of American property. Bush flew to Tokyo, in other words, because he thought it would be wrong to send another in his stead, but also because Japan loomed large on the mind of most Americans. More than a third admitted to harboring ill-feelings towards the country that bombed Pearl Harbor. At the same time, nearly half of the Japanese polled reported similar hard feelings towards the nation that atomized Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a veteran he held the opportunity voice his true thoughts on the past’s hold over the present when it came to memories of the Pacific War, and as his Communication’s Director later explained, “he knew if anybody was going to bury the hatchet, he had the credibility to do it.”

Hirohito’s funeral offered Bush the opportunity to begin massaging these issues from the start of his term, and more fundamentally it allowed him to make Asia the first substantial overseas trip of his presidency, with brief stops in Beijing and Seoul quickly scheduled for after the funeral in Tokyo. These would be brief trips, without the pomp and circumstance of an official state visit. He’d be on the ground a mere day and a half in Beijing and less than six hours in Seoul, time enough to at least begin Bush’s oft-stated mission of improving national relations by first improving the personal relationships among leaders, a tactic he had touted since

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his United Nations days. A short trip was also easier to manage, as the months of planning typically required to coordinate the wealth of logistics behind a formal presidential visit were simply not available. Washington staffers and the American Embassies who would host their visit had a mere six weeks to plan, during which most of the White House staff additionally had to learn their way around their new offices and colleagues. It turned out they needed a bit more practice. White House handlers, many new to their jobs, miscounted and managed to leave CNN’s camera crew behind following Bush’s brief refueling layover in Alaska.

Bush’s itinerary struck many in the nation’s capital as perhaps a bit too coincidental, given that Mikhail Gorbachev had only recently announced his own plans to visit Beijing in the spring of 1989. He would arrive in May, the first Soviet leader to visit China since the 1950s. Speculation over Gorbachev’s designs for Asia consequently ran rampant through Washington’s policymaking circles, as did rumor that the two visits were intentionally connected. “The President is right to attend Emperor Hirohito’s funeral,” longtime diplomatic insider Richard Holbrooke wrote only days before Bush’s departure. “American-Japanese cooperation is now an absolute requirement for global progress.” Ultimately, however, “the country the President is not visiting, the Soviet Union, will be a constant presence on this trip,” as “Mr. Gorbachev’s new emphasis on the Soviet Far East and Pacific is casting an important shadow” throughout the region.12 Marlin Fitzwater, Bush’s press secretary and one of the few holdovers from the Reagan years, directly refuted claims the two trips were linked in any way. “The President has given every assurance of our continued cooperation with the Soviet Union,” he told reporters.

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“This trip to China is associated with the trip to Japan, and there should be no inferences or special signals to the contrary.”

The truth was more complicated. Bush desired to enhance American relations with the Pacific in his own right. But Gorbachev was on everyone’s mind. “With US-PRC relations entering [a] more mature, less dramatic phase,” Secretary of State Baker advised Bush on the eve of his trip, the “spotlight has shifted to Soviet success in achieving [a] breakthrough toward normalizing Sino-Soviet relations.” The upcoming “Gorbachev-Deng summit,” he feared, “could feed perception that [the] strategic underpinning for US-China relationship is eroding, an impression both we and the Chinese wish to counter.” The “key purpose” of the president’s visit was therefore, in Baker’s opinion, “to consolidate your personal ties with China’s leaders” in order to “offset [the] impression that Sino-Soviet rapprochement is at our expense.”

Washington’s Ambassador to Beijing was blunter. Soviet reforms put each of Moscow’s relationships into new light, Winston Lord and his embassy staff believed, and Bush needed to “obtain Chinese assurances that Sino-Soviet relations will not upset the strategic balance, i.e. that the emerging Sino-Soviet dialogue [won’t] undercut U.S. interests.” Gorbachev was already making deep inroads in Europe, in other words, undercutting traditional American ties to the continent and eroding Washington’s leverage point over its allies. Now it seemed he had his sights set on Asia as well.

This was the Beijing Embassy’s official view, generated for widespread dissemination within the U.S. government in Washington and in posts around the world. Embassies and

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government offices frequently cabled messages back to Foggy Bottom offering at once their best advice, but also words they expected would be forwarded and read, perhaps several times, throughout the Foreign Service and government bureaucracy. Lord had more to say for only the President’s eyes. Ambassador since 1985, his successor was scheduled to arrive in May. A decade younger than Bush, though like the new president a Skull and Bones man from Yale, Lord had been part of Kissinger’s first secret trip to China in 1971, and then with Nixon the next year for that historic first presidential visit, before directing the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff. A career diplomat, he’d never in fact held a job that did not involve foreign affairs, and like Bush he also spent much of his career working Chinese issues without speaking the language or having studied much of Chinese history. He was instead a generalist, trained by Kissinger, suspicious of those who spent too much time studying the trees of one country to the exclusion of the global forest. “A China expert is an oxymoron,” he frequently quipped.\(^\text{16}\) He had other qualities, including family wealth and a wealth of personal connections throughout Washington and New York, where he headed the Council on Foreign Relations immediately before his posting to Beijing. His name was bantered about as a potential National Security Adviser in the Bush Administration, not least because he and Bush frequently found time for a tennis game whenever in the same city. Lord consequently felt comfortable in mid-February going beyond his embassy’s official report by writing a personal letter to Bush at the White House outlining his suggestions for the upcoming Sino-American talks, writing in particular as one Ambassador to China to another. He also wisely sent copies to Baker and Scowcroft, lest they think he was trying to circumvent procedure.

\(^{16}\) James Mann, \textit{About Face}, p. 162.
Lord’s wide-ranging letter was eloquent, broad, at more than ten pages far longer than the average memo that crossed a president’s desk, and it ultimately centered on two points. First, Deng’s impressive achievements also brought unexpected challenges. “Since you were here last three years ago,” Lord began, “China has prospered in the world and floundered at home.” Economic productivity and affluence were on the rise, and “any Chinese will tell you they are better off than when you were first here [in 1974].” At the same time, however, “many Chinese will tell you they are worse off than when you were last here,” because prosperity had brought with it unmet political expectations and a growing awareness that state-sanctioned corruption marred the dreams of many. Many Chinese were better off following Deng’s reforms, but not all, and with the disparity between rich and poor widening, matching the even starker disparity between the wealthy coastline and the impoverished hinterland, popular frustration seemed on the rise. “Within a stone’s throw of Chairman Mao’s mausoleum sits the world’s largest Kentucky Fried Chicken,” Lord wrote, proof that China engaged the global economy as at no time since the 1940s. Yet “in both the cities and countryside there is growing cynicism over shifting political winds, stop-and-go economic policies, ‘back door’ influence, nepotism at the highest levels, and outright graft.”

This was no accidental reference. The restaurant illustrated China’s internal quandaries as the 1990s approached. Tens of thousands of ordinary citizens walked past the store in the weeks after it opened in 1987, peering inside in hope of understanding they mysteries that went on behind the glass and walls. Few could afford a meal there, however, though neither could they possibly avoid the smells that wafted daily from the storefront. Eyes are easy to avert; the powerful effect of smell far more difficult to turn on and off. Not only were the Western delicacies just out of reach for most of the city’s residents, one could not avoid being reminded
that luxury existed for some, but not all. In truth fried chicken and biscuits were too exclusive.

Beijing authorities ultimately had to dole out special “foreign exchange certificates” to party members so the restaurant could meet its minimum guaranteed attendance. The masses had no such access to this piece of Western “culture” plopped down in their midst. Before they might have wondered what prosperity looked like; now they could not avoid seeing what they lacked.

Deng’s government knew the growing minority of dissatisfied citizens grew in both number and volume with every passing month, but had a far less certain grasp on how to either appease them or mollify their legitimate concerns. With Deng himself nearing retirement along with the generation that had implemented his reforms—the generation that also marched with Mao and helped win China’s independence in 1949—the next set of Chinese leaders faced unprecedented problems. Now was the time, Lord argued, for Bush to imprint on their minds an American solution. The reins of power were soon to change hands, he wrote, and “it is a very important time for you to sketch the agenda of our bilateral relationship—with the Long Marchers leaving behind their legacy and with the next generation of leaders who will dominate the coming four years.”

The main point of the meeting was thus, as Bush explained at every turn, to renew old friendships and improve new ones, though Lord proceeded to list twenty-two points of contention in the Sino-American relationship ranging from Taiwan’s future to intellectual property rights. None of these items would be resolved over the course of such short visit. That was not the point, which was instead to help Beijing’s leadership understand better where he stood on the issues now that he was no long following orders within his own government but

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17 Westad, p. 379.
instead now calling the shots, and for the new President to reinforce his desire to hear Chinese views. “In a working visit of forty hours, four meetings, and three banquets you can only lay down a few brush strokes, to be filled in during the coming months and years,” Lord wrote. Among the many issues potentially dividing the two nations ongoing concerns over Chinese violation of copyright rules should have particularly meaning to the new president, he sardonically noted, given that Bush’s campaign book co-authored while a candidate was a best-seller in China, now in its eighth edition. The good news was people were reading Bush’s words. “The bad news is that the author is receiving no royalties—a prime example of why we must press the Chinese to protect intellectual property.”19

Lord listed human rights as a potential bone of Sino-American contention as well, though it ranked only nineteenth out of his twenty-two items. Both sides knew where each other stood on this issue. Bush had to mention the issue lest he suffer the criticisms of liberals and conservatives alike back home, as concern for human rights cut across party lines. But he was not going to convince the Chinese in a single visit to free its political prisoners or suddenly embrace true freedom of expression and the wisdom of open elections. “There will be no way to avoid or easily resolve the tensions that flow form the meshing of our societies and cultures,” he therefore advised. “We will—and should—continue to raise human rights issues. [But] The Chinese do not seek to impose their concepts on us and thus will continue to resent what they perceive as our attempt to do so on them.”20

In this one line Lord crystalized the central difference between the two cultures, at least when it came to the foundational belief of their respective foreign policies. Both considered

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
themselves exceptional nations, but differently. Chinese leaders thought their culture and history, long and storied but also cast by the lingering sting of colonialism and Western oppression, made their case unique in the world, and largely viewing foreigners as unsophisticated and frequently barbaric no matter the wealth or power outsiders might wield. China was exceptional, and thus its values both non-transportable and largely immune to outside influence. Americans conversely believed their values universal, and their democratic system ideal for any wise enough to replicate.

Political leaders and policymakers from of each nation might move closer or further away from those central starting points depending on circumstance and their own inclinations, but notions of Chinese and American exceptionalism formed the core around which all other foreign policy ideas revolved. Americans believed in democracy and believed more importantly that the world would be a better place if only foreigners would learn to be more like them. Their Chinese counterparts longed for a world that stopped trying to change China. Bush therefore could not change Beijing’s views or its sense of China’s role in the world, Lord advised, and had to offer any opinion or suggestion lightly lest his hosts take offense, but neither should he back away from promoting American values. Religion mattered, for example. Despite the crush of time on such a short trip the President was planning to visit his old church from the 1970s, where his daughter, Doro, had been baptized. That visit alone within a tight agenda would symbolize more than any statement his concern for religious liberty. So too would he have the opportunity, denied Reagan, to speak to the Chinese people directly during a nationally-broadcast interview, and after much negotiation Chinese authorities had even authorized the president to make a scheduled “spontaneous” stop on his way to meetings at the Great Hall of the People so he could press the flesh with ordinary citizens on Tiananmen Square. These were huge concessions by
Deng’s regime, unthinkable only a few short years before. Before demanding more Bush had also to consider just how far China had come. Human rights and the country’s general transparency mattered. But in Lord’s view Bush needed to focus on issues that mattered most, and more importantly, on issues in which a president’s influence and attention might make some substantive difference without driving a wedge between these two exceptional nations.21

Gorbachev topped the list. Indeed the Gorbachev phenomenon was Lord’s second and more significant reason for writing directly to Bush at the White House. For all their differences, Chinese and American policymakers faced a singular and shared problem as the 1980s drew to a close: how to react to perestroika, and how changes in the Soviet Union might affect the world’s broader strategic map. The Soviet leader was foremost on American minds, as we have seen, but in Lord’s opinion his example offered a direct challenge to Deng’s hold on power, especially if Chinese students and workers found his words as catalyzing as their compatriots in Eastern Europe. Gorbachev’s reform of the Soviet Bloc’s economic system had led to political reforms and unrest. On the tail end of a massive economic reform project of their own, including adoption of the same embryonic market forces as now unsettled communist regimes in Europe, authorities in Beijing hoped above all to keep political dissent at bay. For Lord, and for American officials more broadly, the triangulation of Soviet, Chinese, and American power stood out as Bush’s chief strategic concern in Asia. Indeed the three top items on Lord’s long list of potential items for Sino-American discussion were in fact different articulations of the same issue: “our intentions toward the Soviet Union; Chinese intentions toward the Soviet Union; comparison of assessments on Gorbachev’s policies and prospects.”22

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
Bush needed little convincing. Just like in the 1970s triangular diplomacy, the dynamic of Soviet-American-Chinese relations, was at the top of the president’s mind as he boarded Air Force One for his first trip beyond North America, but Japan would be first. He was there, of course, for a funeral, though official ceremonies aside, it was a work trip. With leaders from 158 nations represented, there was opportunity aplenty for him to put his faith in personal diplomacy into practice quickly after arriving at the American Ambassador’s residence in Tokyo. In rapid succession he met with Japan’s Prime Minister, the Kings of Spain, Jordan, and Belgium, and political leaders from Thailand, Israel, Egypt, Portugal, India, the Philippines, Italy, Turkey, Zaire, Germany, Singapore and Nigeria. In short order he scanned the world and its varied problems all without leaving the room, as world leaders pulled into the residence’s driveway, one after the other, like some earlier century’s satrap receiving homage. They were not there to pay homage to Bush as much as show their respect for the American President, who remained despite the nation’s economic woes and strained diplomatic ties the single most powerful office-holder in the world. Bush did leave the American compound for an audience with the newly installed Emperor Akihito at the Imperial Palace, though as was customary, no record of their conversation exists. Secretary of State Baker sat in on some of the meetings, and Brent Scowcroft others. But Bush also met alone with counterparts when his confidants had other pressing matters, with only a junior aide or translator for assistance. He and France’s Francois Mitterrand shared a private lunch, for example, joined only by their interpreter. Not surprisingly, Gorbachev was their main topic of conversation, though neither man kept notes of their conversation. They were there to share a meal and their private thoughts, and thus there to build trust.
Several themes emerged from this round of diplomatic speed-dating in Tokyo. The first is the way Bush strove to implement his long-held belief that friendship between leaders could lubricate diplomatic relations between nations, especially if the personal connection was made in calm moments, well before crises made urgent communication necessary. Remembering the old adage that people almost always enjoy a conversation if they are the one talking, Bush warmed each guest up by asking to hear the major problems their country faced, asking in effect how the world looked through their eyes, frequently following up by offering American help for their particular problems. He devoted much of his time during these conversations in Tokyo to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a topic that had vexed presidents since the late 1940s, drawing opinions more than offering his own. “We always appreciate your sage view of the world scene,” he told Israel’s President Chaim Herzog.23 Tell me “your opinion of events in the region,” he began with Jordan’s King Hussein, similarly beginning his discussion with Portugal’s Mario Soares by noting he “looked forward to learning his views on many issues.” Of course these world leaders knew such pleasantries were merely that: pleasantries offered by a man for whom decorum and manners mattered. At the same time they also knew not every world leader listened before speaking. Any leader could be polite or cross depending on the circumstance or their mood, yet broad trends of character can still be discerned. Gorbachev could drone for hours on most any topic; Deng preferred lengthy monologues to give-and-take discussion; Margaret Thatcher frequently let foreign visitors know the moment they entered the room if the discussion would be difficult, silently staring down foreign diplomats till they nervously began. To one of Gorbachev’s closest advisers it was the way leaders like Kohl and his own, those “at the highest level,” strove “to speak to as one human being to another,” and not just as mouthpieces for their

state interests and ideologies, that truly set conversations from this tumultuous era part.\textsuperscript{24} That this veteran of diplomatic wrangling found it surprising to see leaders engaged as people furthers the point that friendship rarely played a role at the highest level and was not international diplomacy’s typical characteristic.

No matter the tone of Bush’s talks in Tokyo nearly all turned in time to the topic that dominated this thinking the most: the Soviets. Israelis and Arabs alike had much to report over growing Soviet involvement in the region, even including nascent Soviet engagement with the ongoing dispute over Palestine, something Moscow had refused to touch in decades. “The Soviet position has changed,” Jordan’s King Hussein reported, “and had become quite constructive.”\textsuperscript{25} Israel’s President echoed the theme, noting that debate “in Israel focuses particularly on the influence of two countries which have no relations with Israel. These are China and the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{26} Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak added during his own private meeting with Bush that “the Shevardnadze meeting had gone exceptionally well,” news Bush and his staff could hardly have welcomed.\textsuperscript{27} Everywhere Bush looked, there was Gorbachev peddling perestroika. And people seemed eager to buy.

The only thing he had to sell for the moment, however, was patience. “When the U.S. finishes its policy review,” he told Japan’s Prime Minister, “there will be nothing that adversely

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\textsuperscript{24} “Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev Regarding a Meeting Between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, October 28, 1988, in Masterpieces of History, p. 309. \\
\textsuperscript{25} Bush Presidential Library, Brent Scowcroft Files, Presidential Correspondence, Memorandum of Conversation, “Meeting with King Hussein I of Jordan,” February 23, 1989. \\
\textsuperscript{26} Bush Presidential Library, Brent Scowcroft Files, Presidential Correspondence, Memorandum of Conversation, “Meeting with Chaim Herzog,” February 23, 1989. \\
\textsuperscript{27} Bush Presidential Library, Brent Scowcroft Files, Presidential Correspondence, Memorandum of Conversation, “Meeting with President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt,” February 23, 1989.
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affects Asia, especially China or Japan.” Speaking to Italy’s President, Bush promised “the U.S. would fully consult with allies” well before implementing any new initiatives. More importantly, he “intended to see that Gorbachev did not achieve dominance of public opinion in Europe,” a point he reiterated to Germany’s President with the comment that “we don’t want Gorbachev to win a propaganda offensive.” Bush admitted he “was not sure what was in fact happening in the Soviet Union,” but for NATO to survive “we must stay together and not be naive.” To each he urged caution, especially for members of the Atlantic Community. He heard in response that the clock was ticking. The Americans had best not wait too long to move, Turkey’s Prime Minister warned in response. “If Gorbachev were successful, the change would be bigger than that of 1917.”

This Bush already knew; and was growing weary of hearing.

28 Bush Presidential Library, Brent Scowcroft Files, Presidential Correspondence, Memorandum of Conversation, “President’s Meeting with Prime Minister Noburo Takeshita of Japan,” February 23, 1989.
29 Bush Presidential Library, Brent Scowcroft Files, Presidential Correspondence, Memorandum of Conversation, “Meeting with President Francesco Cossiga of Italy,” February 24, 1989.
30 Bush Presidential Library, Brent Scowcroft Files, Presidential Correspondence, Memorandum of Conversation, “President’s Meeting with President Richard von Weizsäcker of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 24, 1989.
31 Bush Presidential Library, Brent Scowcroft Files, Presidential Correspondence, Memorandum of Conversation, “President’s Meeting with Prime Minister Turgut Ozal of Turkey,” February 24, 1989.