

Interview with

OLEG DMITRIEVICH BAKLANOV

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O.S. As we agreed during our preliminary conversation, you would like to start our talk with events preceding the period with which we are concerned, 1985-91.

O.B. It is widely known that the postwar system of international relations, as well as the groundwork for the actual division of Europe, was established at the conferences in Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam. The so-called Yalta-Potsdam, or bipolar, system was created. The Helsinki conference of 1975 was the next significant milestone in the development of the postwar world. Incidentally, at present, both here and in the West, people are trying to forget the Helsinki meeting and gloss over this historic event.

O.S. The road to the Helsinki accords was a long and difficult one.

O.B. And now people forget that the Soviet Union spared no effort to bring it about.

O.S. It is widely known that the Helsinki accords were actually established on the foundation of Yalta and Potsdam.

O.B. You remember, of course, that one of the basic conditions of the Helsinki accords was the inviolability of borders in Europe. At that time, in the '70s, our parity

with the United States was recognized. You could say that the process of détente in the '70s became a sort of breather in the Soviet-American rivalry. And both sides needed that kind of breather.

O.S. It is held that the Helsinki accords represented a great success for Soviet diplomacy, while they were an imposition on the United States.

O.B. I agree with that interpretation of these events.

O.S. It bears mentioning that in the United States many regarded détente as a temporary measure; some still see it this way. The United States didn't want to recognize the Soviet Union as an equal partner. Carter adopted a rather dualistic policy with regard to the Soviet Union: he strove to maintain the policy of détente and at the same time took active measures designed to allow the United States to race ahead once again. There were two opposing factions surrounding Carter. Again Brzezinski comes to mind.

O.B. In order to understand the real underlying cause of the events that took place in 1985-91, we must return to the events of the 1970s. In the '70s the basis was established for our relations with the United States and its allies. And this is very important to remember when analyzing Gorbachev's rule. You also can't forget about the previous history of our rivalry with the United States. The United States always wanted to "crush" us, beginning with the creation of the atomic bomb. In general, one should take note of the American character, their psychology: Americans are a very pragmatic people. The United States is very tough and clear-minded when standing up for its interests. And this factor, their pragmatism, played a significant role in the events of the second half of the '80s and the early '90s.

O.S. Do you think the approach the Americans took with regard to us was more pragmatic than our approach to them?

O.B. Yes, without question. The United States was more pragmatic in our relations. Again, take for example the creation of nuclear weapons. The United States played this card well in the political game. Later on, beginning in the '50s, the United States actively created military bases surrounding the Soviet Union. They numbered more than a thousand. The United States had powerful strategic aviation – in the form of the B-52 – and a tremendous advantage in nuclear warheads. In the late '40s and '50s, the United States had in fact placed us in a difficult strategic position. We quickly responded by creating an atomic bomb and even surpassed the United States in the creation of powerful hydrogen cartridges, but the most important thing for the Soviet Union remained the fact that, in the event of war, it was impossible to effectively deliver a nuclear strike to U.S. territory. In the '50s we had no bases surrounding the United States, not even in relative proximity!

O.S. We were always more vulnerable to a strike from the United States than they were with regard to our military capabilities.

O.B. That's absolutely right. Our policies always had to take into account this very important strategic factor. Above all, the Soviet Union had to settle the problem of how to effectively deliver a nuclear strike to U.S. territory. And at the Twenty-fifth Party Congress in 1976, Academician A. P. Aleksandrov said, with his usual sense of humor, that we finally had an effective means of delivering our "gifts" to the Americans in time for "lunch." I was at that congress and I liked Aleksandrov's speech.

Speaking of our American rivals, it bears mentioning that compared to us they were not very active in the missile race, and so in the second half of the '50s we managed to race ahead: we launched the first satellite in 1957, and in 1961 Gagarin made his flight. Our progress was based on the country's dire need to settle the problem of how to deliver a nuclear strike across the ocean. The United States lagged behind, despite the fact that they brought over Werner von Braun and took advantage of German know-how and all the work the Germans had done on nuclear weapons. The United States was hampered by a certain lack of ambition on this issue. The United States thought that it had more nuclear weapons, that it had many bases surrounding the Soviet Union, and that it had huge numbers of aircraft for delivery of atomic bombs.

O.S. Was this a clear example of complacency?

O.B. Exactly. Complacency and self-confidence. This is typical of them. Remember the atmosphere of those years. The United States placed great importance on the B-52 bombers, which were new at that time and could, with little difficulty, drop atomic bombs from tremendous elevations onto our major cities. We were well aware of this. We understood completely the danger of the situation.

O.S. The only way we could answer was to strike Europe with all our forces, conventional and nuclear. Perhaps only our ability to reach the English Channel, thanks to our striking force in Europe, kept the United States from more aggressive actions against us. Military considerations probably forced Stalin to maintain tight control in Central and Eastern Europe in the event of a military conflict with the United States. The road from Germany and Czechoslovakia to the English Channel was much shorter than it would be if our troops started out from home.

O.B. That's entirely possible. But in any case, the United States with all its strikes would have completely destroyed our industrial capabilities. So I repeat, we were not at that moment in an envious position in terms of our strategic potential. It is no coincidence that the United States was planning to use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union. For example, the infamous "Dropshot" plan.

O.S. Oleg Dmitrievich, could the Soviet leadership have known about these plans? Do you know anything about this from your own sources?

O.B. I think they could have known. And this affected our policy. And the tremendous efforts made by our leadership to solve strategic military problems speak for themselves. What happened next is widely known: both the United States and the Soviet Union began developing their military capabilities, which was increasingly being based on ICBMs in a state of combat readiness. As before, Europe retained a special strategic position in our rivalry. The Europeans understood that the presence of American nuclear forces on the continent represented a threat to them. Thus the slogan "Yankee Go Home!"

O.S. I'd like to ask a question in connection with Europe and its place in the Soviet-American rivalry. Was the deployment of Soviet SS-20 missiles in Europe an instance in which we were compelled to act, or were we just in too much of a hurry? What is your opinion about the nature of this decision and its consequences?

O.B. I'll begin my answer by saying that the Americans were in a hurry back when they deployed their first nuclear forces in Europe. From the point of view of our strategic military position and our scientific and technological capabilities, you could say that the deployment of SS-20 missiles was not absolutely critical. Likewise, the later

deployment of Pershing-2 missiles on the part of the United States was not absolutely critical. It was really a matter of “an eye for an eye.” Because with an arsenal of missiles having a range of up to twelve thousand kilometers, you could devastate any point on the globe. And geography was not of great significance, since they could be launched from any convenient location. Europe was important for the United States in the sense that, by deploying missiles there, the Americans could reduce a missile’s flight time to the Soviet Union and thereby avoid getting hit themselves. Look at the structure of American nuclear forces. Their primary capability is in submarines. The main idea is to maximize all your capabilities in order to spare your own country from getting hit. A Yankee is a Yankee. They carried out their strategic line with precision. I repeat: despite this, we should not have deployed SS-20 missiles in Europe after all. Our actions gave the Americans an excuse to escalate the situation.

Let’s look at another event that happened prior to this. Do you remember how strongly the United States reacted in 1962 to the deployment of our missiles in Cuba? They were very nervous.

O.S. But they had surrounded us with their military bases and deployed weapons for making strikes even before the Caribbean crisis. And from a formal, legalistic point of view, the situation in Cuba was lawful. The strategic interests that the United States was prepared to defend by any means are another matter. I have always felt that we didn’t and don’t consider sufficiently the psychology of American politics, its pragmatism, its “double standard.”

O.B. You are absolutely right. I'd like to say this about the psychology of politicians: the generation of Stalin and his colleagues was tougher and better prepared to deal with the United States, though I don't want to be any kind of apologist for Stalin.

O.S. Remember how Stalin told Khrushchev and his other colleagues that when he died the West would crush them like kittens?

O.B. I would also apply Stalin's idea about the domestic struggle to foreign policy: the closer we were to parity with the United States, the more their struggle with us intensified.

The generation after Stalin, that of Brezhnev and other leaders, was dynamic and rather liberal during the first years of its rule. Brezhnev had been through the war, so he was very tough by nature. The fact that Brezhnev stayed too long at his post is another matter. I'd like to say the following in this regard. Brezhnev showed great organizational abilities when our Military Industrial Complex and missile construction facilities were created. I remember especially clearly what he did after the tragic death of Marshal Nadelin and other colleagues of ours during testing of the new ICBMs. Brezhnev started personally supervising missile construction, coming to the plants, and meeting often with the designers. In a word, he did everything necessary for solving a given task. This isn't mentioned very often, and rarely is this side of his life remembered. To many people Brezhnev appears to be just a flabby, sick man who was clearly not averse to receiving honors and awards. But this is the "later" Brezhnev. In the '60s he was a different person. And Brezhnev asked that he be dismissed from his post as general secretary, but why this was done in an untimely manner is a separate conversation. Under Brezhnev we achieved strategic parity with the United States. And

it was precisely for this reason that the Americans entered into negotiations with us on the ABM, SALT-1, Helsinki, and SALT-2 treaties. The main basis for parity was the fact that we had the effective means of delivering a nuclear strike on U.S. territory. The most important question had been resolved. We could feel more confident.

O.S. Do you think that our diplomatic successes are due primarily to our military and technological accomplishments?

O.B. Diplomacy is of secondary importance. A material and technical base is primary – a state's economic and military capabilities. Without our military and technological successes, it's doubtful we would have concluded any accords with the United States. And I want again to place special emphasis on Helsinki.

O.S. The logic of what you're saying is this: The United States enter negotiations and sign accords only if they are dealing with a strong opponent, and only if they sense their own vulnerability and pressure spurring them to reach a compromise.

O.B. You've understood me correctly. If there is an absence of pressure of any kind on the United States, they ignore agreements or don't enter negotiations. That's their nature. U.S. interests stand above all other considerations. I envy them, in a good way. We have lost the foundation of our own patriotism.

When the new generation of Gorbachev and others followed that of Brezhnev, it was clear that they were weaker in character than previous leaders. We turned out to be weak. And I say this with regard to myself. We couldn't withstand the pressure from the Americans or American pragmatism.

O.S. You are speaking incredibly openly and, what's most important, honestly.

O.B. This tendency for being weak on the part of the leadership was noticeable.

O.S. This weakness on the part of the leadership probably played a role in our defeat in the Soviet-American rivalry.

Let's turn our attention from Brezhnev's era to the times of Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev. In April 1983 you were appointed minister of General Machine Construction and remained at that post until February 1988, when you became secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee on issues related to the Military Industrial Complex. But for some reason you weren't made a member of the Politburo.

O.B. I could have been a candidate and member of the Politburo if I had occupied Gorbachev's position. But from the very beginning, I conducted myself differently with him: I believed that I should be as open as possible and not hesitate in my judgments. Unfortunately, I didn't know Andropov personally. We communicated on paper.

O.S. I want to move our conversation in the following direction. The situation in the mid-80s is widely known: Reagan is actively attacking us, proclaims us the "evil empire"; the arms race is intensifying, negotiations have stalled. Reagan announces the SDI program, threatening us with the possibility that in the future the United States would be invulnerable to our ICBMs. An intense psychological attack against the Soviet Union is under way. Reagan and his administration want to force us to spend even more money on the military and thereby ruin our economy. It is believed that in the mid-80s our defense spending was already at intolerable levels, that we had overtaxed our forces and realistic capabilities. Was it really necessary to make sharp cuts in defense? And how much should it have been cut? Given our desire to preserve parity with the United States, what could our new defense policy priorities have been under Gorbachev?

O.B. Your reasoning has obviously been influenced by the propaganda and clichés that have entered the public consciousness.

O.S. That's not entirely true. I have not expressed my own point of view yet. I was speaking about conventional wisdom.

O.B. I see. Let's approach your questions from a different angle. I'd like to talk about space and the arms race in this new milieu. I always told Gorbachev and the other leaders that the United States couldn't do any more than we could in space. And I explained why. By creating parity, we had amassed a potential industrial power that could resolve any technical issues. There is another aspect to this problem: we had spent tremendous amounts of money and created a powerful Military Industrial Complex, so it would simply have been foolish not to use it, both for the benefit of defense and for developing new technologies as a whole. You can't stop progress; the future would lie in conquering space and developing space technologies. Having a presence in space is a more significant leap than conquering the atom. The discovery of a new human habitation has tremendous possibilities.

O.S. Did Gorbachev understand the significance of conquering space for the Soviet Union?

O.B. The problem was not Gorbachev. Gorbachev is a small speck of dust compared with the problem of conquering space.

In the late '70s politicians agreed that space wouldn't be used for military purposes. But this was more like a break, for thinking about what we had done. At that time a new term appeared in the West, "dual purpose technology," with regard to military technology. This was clearly a propaganda move, since it was obvious to everyone that

any technological accomplishment or discovery could be used for both peaceful and military purposes. These are interrelated dimensions of progress. The same can be said with regard to space. With certain modifications, a civilian satellite can rather easily be used for military purposes, and vice versa.

Our rivalry with the United States in conquering space determined the development of thought around the world in science and technology. After the United States suffered a defeat in satellite development and human space flight, the basic objective of the rivalry became the moon. Kennedy had already earmarked about twenty billion dollars for the lunar program. The United States constructed a powerful, new engine for lunar flight. We didn't yet have such a powerful engine. Glushko, the designer, asked that he be given time to create such an engine, but Korolev rejected his idea (it's possible that Korolev was in a hurry; after all, the stakes were whether we or the United States would reach the moon first). Korolev decided to use Kuznetsov's engines, which were being manufactured in Kuibyshev. And instead of one or two powerful engines for each rocket, they started to install thirty-six engines. Imagine! It was very difficult to achieve synchronization of all thirty-six engines. It was simply unrealistic. This resulted in numerous disasters during test launches of the rockets. So we lost the moon race. The conquest of space could not serve peaceful purposes alone. This has to be acknowledged.

Let us return now to Reagan. Reagan was completely illiterate when it came to talking about problems of a scientific and technical nature. He didn't understand them. Reagan didn't understand anything he said about SDI. It was possible to invest money in "Star Wars," thereby accelerating the process of conquering space, but to win (in the

sense that Reagan wanted) was impossible. The price of victory was the death of humanity.

O.S. Was the SDI program a proverbial bluff and a genuine myth?

O.B. A bluff and a myth. Call it what you will, this impracticable project.

O.S. And how did we react to SDI? What was our starting point in evaluating SDI? Did SDI frighten us? Did we believe that the United States could be invulnerable to our missile attacks?

O.B. Our experts, who worked on missile construction and space as a whole, did not believe SDI could be implemented. As far as Gorbachev's reaction deep down, I can't say anything for certain. Perhaps Gorbachev wanted to use the myth about the capabilities of SDI for certain purposes, such as a foil for his later actions.

O.S. You have an interesting approach to Gorbachev's motives.

O.B. I can't tell you anything specific. I don't want to lie. In 1983, in one of his speeches, Gorbachev spoke about the significance of U.S. military strategic parity like a sensible politician who understood the essence of the world order. But when Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee, his speeches changed: gradually and in a veiled manner Gorbachev pursued a completely different policy.

I spoke about SDI with Gorbachev several times. And scientists spoke with him. With this in mind I came to think that SDI was really used as a pretext for getting us to surrender.

O.S. Did you tell Gorbachev that SDI was a bluff?

O.B. I told him, I explained it to him, but nobody listened to me. Solving the problem of SDI wasn't difficult for us. There were many ways in which the Soviet Union could have countered. I speak about this with complete responsibility. Creating an SDI system in space would have required enormous, and ultimately worthless, expenditures. Space is immense and it would not have been possible to keep any form of SDI under control. We had limitless possibilities for reciprocal measures. In space, shield and sword change places easily. Now, they are working on a plan to illuminate the earth from space. But this technology could be used for military purposes as well.

O.S. Speaking of spending on the Military Industrial Complex, could you comment on the point of view according to which in the mid-80s the Soviet Union exceeded all reasonable limits on military spending.

O.B. That's completely untrue. That's a propaganda maneuver on the part of those who brought about our ruin.

O.S. Then please explain your point of view on this question.

O.B. The entire Military Industrial Complex comprises nine ministries and has a gross annual product of 140 to 160 billion rubles (this figure includes budgetary allocations). If this sum represents 100 percent, then 40 percent of it goes to the national economy (tractors and automobiles; television cameras, and other consumer technology; oil equipment, etc.). This indicator is from 1988. In the same year there were constant calls to action. "Let's unload problems of the national economy on defense," they said. "We'll undertake conversion and effect a transformation of the capabilities of the Military Industrial Complex." In accordance with this, the Military Industrial Commission, the Central Committee, and the ministries worked out the necessary plans.

And in 1990 we came up with the following indicators: 50 percent of the entire Military Industrial Complex was directed toward the civilian sector. Within these two years the Military Industrial Complex took upon itself responsibility for sophisticated medical equipment (drawing up plans for such equipment and producing it), as well as the entire inventory of equipment for reforming agricultural production.

In the Military Industrial Complex we had a special program called “200,” later changed to program “100.” These programs stipulated that we could not use any materials that could not be produced by our own industries.

O.S. The most important goal was not to depend on foreign purchases?

O.B. Exactly. Under no circumstances were we to miscalculate. This rule was observed religiously. We learned, for example, that some new material had been made in the West that was better than its counterpart here. And this material was immediately included in program “200” (this name implied the reworking of 200 programs and projects on new materials and compounds), then in program “100” (when their number was cut in connection with the general crisis). All this was supervised by the Military Industrial Commission of the Central Committee. On the basis of models for the Western materials obtained through intelligence channels, we made our own materials or altered them in accordance with our purposes. We avoided dependence on anybody. And this had a tremendous significance for the country’s security. But there was another approach. I’m talking about the civilian sector. Often some kind of technology or equipment was bought overseas. And this made people happy. But when some part of the technology broke down, we had to buy parts, which were sold to us for outrageous

prices. Incidentally, Gorbachev was often at fault for approaching it in that way. We should have worked on developing our own production.

In 1992 we were planning on the following indicator: 60 percent on the civilian sector of the Military Industrial Complex and only 40 percent on strictly military needs. In six years we changed the ratios almost completely. We worked for the good of the country. The Military Industrial Complex had always been an inseparable part of the economy and its foundation for technological development.

I remember one conversation with Gorbachev. He said to me, “You’re used to looking at America through a gun port.” And I said, “Yes, we are.”

O.S. That’s the way he put it to you?

O.B. Yes, we were very candid in our conversations! That’s what he said: “You always look at them through a gun port.” I ask him, “How should one look at them?” The way they look at us is the way we look at them. Everything else – the smiles, the diplomatic evasion – is meaningless.

O.S. Then I have the following question: in your opinion, should defense spending have been cut?

O.B. I would answer your question by saying that if the Americans cut defense spending, then we also had to make cuts.

O.S. But the United States didn’t make cuts.

O.B. Therefore, we also shouldn’t have made cuts. Everything should be identical.

O.S. The axiom that was popular before the disarmament question, that we couldn’t bear the burden, turns out to be incorrect?

O.B. What is meant by “to bear the burden”? Let’s look again at the numbers. After beginning his destructive policy of compromising the socialist system, Gorbachev started to play with the numbers in the course of several semi-public speeches. He used completely wild numbers that supposedly confirmed the resources we spent on defense, 30 to 40 percent. I had the following conversation with him. I asked him, “Mikhail Sergeevich, where are you getting these numbers from? We have Gosplan, we have ministries. Let’s use the real numbers, not the ones you’re throwing out. They’re not the ones included in the plan or in our financial figures.” Gorbachev got out of the conversation by saying, “I have the numbers here, and that’s all there is to it!”

At one Party forum all Politburo members were forced to give a report. And I was listed as secretary of the Central Committee. In my report, which was published, I showed all the numbers I had with regard to defense spending – from percent to 12 percent of GNP. I used these numbers, and no one had any objections, including Gorbachev. But in closed and partially closed forums he calculated 30 to 40 percent of GNP.

O.S. Was exaggerating the share of defense spending important for Gorbachev?

O.B. Yes. I don’t know his motives, but that is a fact.

O.S. In other words, you observed this tendency over the course of several years?

O.B. That’s absolutely correct.

O.S. Did you try to convince Gorbachev otherwise?

O.B. Of course I tried. We met in private, where I reported to him on certain decisions, which went in the so-called special folder.

O.S. Were you already secretary of the Central Committee at that time?

O.B. While I was minister, I reported to him on the whole concept of our work on conquering space, and on strategic nuclear forces. This was part of my function. Our first introductory meeting lasted between three and three and a half hours. I drew the conclusion from that meeting that Gorbachev had a poor grasp of the subject matter. I'm not saying that he should have understood all these things. But he had no understanding of it, no definite idea about issues related to defense.

O.S. In what year did you first speak with him?

O.B. In 1987. Gorbachev was on top of things, he had visited several of our plants. It was at that time that I made his personal acquaintance. I wanted to meet with Gorbachev face to face. And Boldin helped me out.

O.S. You asked Valery Ivanovich to arrange the meeting for you?

O.B. Yes, I asked him to arrange the meeting, since I thought that we had many questions at the ministry connected with space exploration, including creation of a new human habitat; with SDI; and with the whole polemic that was going on, in one way or another, in all circles of the political elite. All these questions involved us. We had materials that were based on science. So I asked Valery Ivanovich to arrange a private meeting. I prepared for it. I had several illustrated volumes with lists of our work that showed what kinds of problems were being decided, the level achieved by the Americans and the level our country had achieved. Everything was laid out point by point. And in the course of three and a half hours I gave him a report about all this, in condensed form. It was a long discussion.

O.S. How did Gorbachev react to your information?

O.B. Our meeting ended in an interesting way. Gorbachev heard me out, understanding and agreeing. There was no argument, and there couldn't be. It was just information. He listened, nodding as if he understood what I was talking about. Then he started asking questions. I explained. And he ended with the words: "Reagan announced that it's possible to launch missiles and then return them back to their starting position." In fact, Reagan had made such a gaffe. At some point the American president had let loose these words. It was in the papers. Gorbachev asked me this question after I told him how missiles were made and what they were capable of doing. At that point I understood that all three and a half hours had been a waste of time. Then he took some foreign newspaper with an article titled "Cannons or Gorbachev," and said, "Do you see what they're writing?!"

O.S. I don't think any commentary is necessary. In general, Gorbachev was probably poorly prepared in this area.

O.B. He wasn't prepared at all in this area.

O.S. But he should have been prepared, since he was the leader of a huge country.

O.B. He tried to understand, he made an effort. Otherwise he wouldn't have invited me and would not have held a discussion for three and a half hours.

O.S. But nonetheless he didn't understand.

O.B. You can't understand from one conversation. And it's probably difficult to demand in-depth knowledge in a certain area from someone of that rank. He had to trust the people who worked in this area, and he shouldn't have falsified certain facts but

relied on the advice and knowledge of these people and correctly interpreted it when he was dealing with the other side, the West.

O.S. It would be logical to conclude that at that moment Gorbachev trusted you.

O.B. If he hadn't trusted me, he wouldn't have recommended me as secretary of defense issues for the Central Committee. Our first personal talk was a sort of evaluation. Then, in 1987, he was at the testing ground where the first launch of the Energia missile took place. I did everything I could to invite him and show him what it was. And he flew in together with Zaikov, Chebrikov, and others. I for my part invited all the general designers. Each one reported with respect to his field about what had been done and talked about the future possibilities. Then Glushko gave his report. He was the senior most general designer; he was responsible for Energia and Buran.

After that there was an interesting talk at Korolev's house. Glushko talked not only about technical matters, but about his whole life and his relations with Korolev. So instead of leaving an hour later, as was planned, Gorbachev and his entourage left three hours later. Gorbachev was interested the whole time and soaked up all the information.

During the drive to the airport, Gorbachev was talking about missiles and announced: "We've built some minarets." It was a strange association.

O.S. Tell me, did Gorbachev have all the prerequisites for successfully implementing *perestroika*?

O.B. Yes, without question. And immediately after Gorbachev came to power "acceleration" seemed like a new and interesting idea that involved everyone. All those unresolved questions that had piled up, when the leadership was weak and age was a hindrance, demanded resolution at the time. They had to be settled. A new leader had

arrived with an alluring vision. No one had an inkling even thinking about any kind of destructive processes. Acceleration was perceived as normal at the time, and *perestroika* was understood as an intensification of that process. *Perestroika* is one thing, destruction is something entirely different. Take parity, for example. In the '70s we talked about parity. This word is key for indicating the position that had been achieved by 1975-76. What can we say now about parity? There was the Warsaw Pact and NATO. We told Gorbachev that we were losing the Warsaw Pact. This was happening for various reasons, both political and economic. What do we get in exchange from our Western partners? Just promises, empty promises.

O.S. And did you say this to Gorbachev personally?

O.B. Of course. I and other leaders told him about this periodically. But when Shenin appeared in the Party leadership, he also took part in these talks with Gorbachev. In addition to him, Yazov, Kryuchkov, Pavlov, Pugo, and Boldin took part. On our own initiative, on a quarterly basis or more frequently, we asked Gorbachev to meet us so that we could express our views with regard to all elements of this unjustified unilateral action, whatever it's called – disarmament, surrender, or retreat from parity. What could we get in exchange for parity? We could only lose. Without receiving anything we yielded our positions one after another. We told Gorbachev about all this, but he would just answer, “Why are you looking at the West through a gun port? Take off your blinders!”

On the other hand, when he couldn't get away from our arguments, Gorbachev would say, “Why do you want to be holier than the Pope? I'm general secretary! You

don't really think that I'm trying to make it so that all this is taken away from us?"

Gorbachev would become hysterical.

O.S. Became hysterical?

O.B. Yes, he pulled at his shirt and yelled that he cared about the matter and the good of the country more than anyone else.

O.S. Did you propose any alternatives on a strategic level?

O.B. Depending on when our meeting was. Some later action that was meant to disturb the balance and parity served as a pretext for such meetings. The question was simply: "What do we want? What are we doing?" I found out that while he was causing scenes with us, Gorbachev was meeting at the same time with Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, and others, who had unlimited access to the general secretary. Yakovlev and his ilk had joined him. Naturally, we didn't know what Gorbachev talked about at these meetings. The most horrible thing was that as a result of such actions he began creating two camps around himself: a camp of conservatives (he never said to us that we were conservatives), and another one of so-called democrats. Later on Gorbachev started to play with this. But in the leadership of such a superpower such things are fraught with disaster. It's not the same thing as the Democrats and the Republicans in the United States. We were all accustomed to unity.

O.S. Since you have already touched upon the situation within the leadership, I'd be interested in hearing your opinion about how the opposition to Gorbachev was formed. Were there stages in the process? Did you see what was going on? Did you try to join forces? Or did all this happen spontaneously?

O.B. I think that to a large extent it happened spontaneously.

O.S. I'm not talking now about August 1991, but an earlier period.

O.B. I understand. Unfortunately, there was no clearly defined organized opposition. However, as Central Committee secretary, I traveled to election conferences where reports were made. Naturally, during those trips I met with the local party activists. In 1989 or 1990 I was in Kuibyshev while on one of these trips. And the following incident happened. Some party activists requested a meeting. There were about sixty or seventy people – the local party elite. The conversation did not take place according to protocol. I proposed that everyone who wanted to should speak his or her mind. Various things were said. The practice at that time was for Politburo members to report at Politburo sessions about the results of these trips by the Central Committee Secretary. In addition, a written report to Gorbachev was prepared. He would then read a report in front of us about his trips.

So, during my meeting with party activists, one of the secretaries from the Kuznetsov enterprise Party Committee stands up. He couldn't have been over forty. And he says, "What's going on here?! This is bad, this is bad. At first it was acceleration, now it's *perestroika*, but there are no visible signs of improvement in our lives. Indeed, *perestroika* is having the opposite effect. Don't you in the Central Committee and Politburo see that Gorbachev has betrayed us, that he's a traitor?"

I listened to him calmly and summarized all the basic issues, but in silence. When the results were being tallied, everything came down to economic issues, to the fact that the Council of Ministers was not being active.

O.S. And were there many such speeches?

O.B. The speech that I was talking about was the most extreme, when that man said straight out that Gorbachev was a traitor and had sold out to the West. He had expressed his opinion publicly. He won my respect. I had only one choice: either agree, or refute him. I didn't do either. I said: "Neither I nor my comrades can even conceive of the general secretary as a traitor. Many things also give me cause for concern. I also understand that many things are not going as they should. But how could the general secretary be a traitor?! I don't think there is any basis for saying that." With that we split up. When I arrived in Moscow I understood that I had nothing to hide. I told Gorbachev about the incident personally when I was signing some papers in his presence. And he answered me: "If you were to read the letters I get, you'd see that what happened with you is no revelation. I haven't slept for several nights because of what people write me." He sort of evoked my sympathy in this conversation and deflected suspicions.

O.S. I understand your position. I try to put myself in your place, in that situation, when no one could guess what would happen later, in a year, when the Soviet Union would cease to exist. But nonetheless I'd like to know if you, Kryuchkov, Boldin, Shenin, that is, everyone who came to Gorbachev.

O.B. Don't forget Pavlov.

O.S. Yes, and Pavlov – if you proposed any alternatives to Gorbachev's policies.

O.B. Of course we proposed alternatives. For example, the anti-alcohol campaign. We broke the budget.

O.S. That was a horrible mistake! Incidentally, were Ligachev and Solomentsev to blame in this?

O.B. I don't know how much at fault Solomentsev was, but Ligachev is always trying to "wash himself" of this, as they say. He was a conformist in this regard. I don't even know who the primary author of the anti-alcohol campaign was, Gorbachev or Ligachev.

O.S. Despite all my respect for Yegor Kuzmich as a man of principle, I am convinced that he was the main figure in this matter.

O.B. I know that in Tomsk he took a very conformist position on this question, an extremely negative position with regard to fighting drunkenness and alcoholism. So it's entirely possible. But in Stavropol, where Gorbachev was, and in other places I didn't observe this. So I can assume that Yegor Kuzmich simply applied his experience to the whole country. But it apparently wasn't very difficult to persuade Gorbachev. That's why this campaign started.

O.S. And what did you propose with regard to the anti-alcohol campaign?

O.B. No reasonable person would suggest that people ought to drink to the point of forgetting. But to take that kind of income-producing item out of the budget without replacing it with anything was a disaster. Pavlov even talked about this at the height of the campaign when he was minister of finance. He spoke about it openly in the Politburo. I remember how Pavlov made a fiery speech in a small circle during a session of either the Politburo or Council of Ministers. I made appeals more from the point of view of defense interests.

O.S. You made appeals in the sense that the anti-alcohol campaign was doing harm to the economy and budget?

O.B. No. I never made any speeches in connection with the anti-alcohol campaign. I spoke specifically about economic issues. For example, I know for a fact that due to parity considerations the nuclear potential of France and England was made a secondary consideration. There was parity between the Soviet Union and the West. That is, between the Soviet Union on the one hand and the United States, England, and France on the other. Germany had a special status. And suddenly the negotiators say that we aren't taking into consideration France and England. I was a member of Zaikov's commission. Zaikov, by the way, was a member of the Politburo. I was supposed to head this commission, but I wasn't a member of the Politburo, while Zaikov was. In the final days Zaikov was only formally involved with the commission.

In general, on this question Gorbachev acted in "Gorbachev style." He set up a Politburo commission, put Zaikov at the helm as padding, and did what he needed to do through Zaikov. In addition to Zaikov, Shevardnadze, the chief instigator of the senseless disarmament, formed part of the commission together with his negotiators. It was disgraceful that the talks with the Americans were led not by specialist, but by "negotiators," according to the terminology of the time. You see, they knew the language, the situation, and among them were even representatives at the deputy minister level who led the talks with the Americans. But the heads of defense ministries and specialists from institutes, leading academicians, were, in essence, kept away from the negotiation process.

O.S. The commission couldn't influence the negotiators?

O.B. They exerted an influence, expressed their opinion, but then Shevardnadze erected obstacles. Later even Yakovlev was included in the commission, though he had

no relation whatsoever to issues that concerned the commission. When passions started flaring, and I made categorical objections and wouldn't sign the proper documents or would sign them with reservations, this caused a great hullabaloo. "In two days we have to meet for negotiations with the Americans. This question has to be settled urgently!" What's the hurry? I wrote categorical objections in those situations, too. However, a decision was made anyway. Yazov and Kryuchkov, who were on the commission, were also engaged with these questions. But the majority of the commission was selected in such a way that decisions were made against our objections. My written objections are preserved in the archives.

O.S. So your opinion wasn't taken into consideration?

O.B. Of course not. However, I stuck to the point of view that the nuclear forces of France and Great Britain ought not be left out of parity considerations. But they were. The Krasnoyarsk outpost was situated in the heart of the Soviet Union, but the 1972 ABM Treaty stipulated that such stations were lawful if they are situated on the perimeter of a territory. We had outposts on the country's perimeter: in the Baltics, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, etc. Why did they choose Krasnoyarsk? Because if they chose to build the station in Kamchatka, every brick there cost as much as gold. It would be very expensive to ship equipment there. So they built the radar station in Krasnoyarsk. But they apparently didn't submit it to the Americans for approval (I don't know all the details of this incident). The Americans lodged a claim with us. During a discussion about this issue Shevardnadze lost his temper: "How could we have been in violation? Again those defense personnel!" The decision was made to destroy the outpost. I categorically objected to this. On the other hand, in violation of the agreement the United States itself

put one outpost in Greenland, the other in Norfolk. In a word, both stations were beyond U.S. borders.

O.S. They, too, were observation stations?

O.B. The same thing! We would say at sessions of Zaikov's commission, "They also violated the treaty." And they would answer: "So what. They deployed weapons on their allies' territory." In general, all sorts of ridiculous arguments. I would say, "We have to demand that their actions correspond to ours." In the end there was nothing done in this area. Similar issues came up in talks with Gorbachev himself. We were talking about how our negotiators were hurrying for no reason. In such cases Gorbachev always talked about how this was high-level politics and that we had to take an attitude of trust toward the West. "Why have you latched on to the question of some distant outpost. Is it really that serious?" Gorbachev exclaimed.

An interesting thing once happened. Three months after I became secretary of the Central Committee, when I was in the know...

O.S. That is, three months after February 1988, before the Nineteenth Party Conference.

O.B. I don't remember exactly. All these political passions concerned me to a lesser degree than the other leaders. I thought everything was empty talk.

O.S. Letting off steam?

O.B. Something like that. But the real issues were something entirely different. The most important thing was to keep one's hand on the pulse of the state apparatus. What bothered me most were the disarmament negotiations and our parity with the United States. Maybe in the future in a separate conversation I'll express my opinion of

Reykjavik (1986) and the negotiations with the United States that followed. Some kind of rupture took place. In 1987, for no reason at all, Gorbachev gave away a missile with a range of five hundred kilometers.

O.S. Do you mean the Oka missile, during preparations for the Intermediate Forces Treaty?

O.B. There was a general deterioration of the situation. Apparently there was something going on backstage.

In my contact with Gorbachev I tried to be clever. I felt that people like Shevardnadze were putting the brakes on settling issues related to the Military Industrial Complex. I should have settled them quickly and clearly. You know that there was a “special folder,” and members of the Politburo voted about documents contained in the folder. My staff and I would prepare some material for the special folder, insert a special sheet of paper that said, “Dear Mikhail Sergeevich: A certain kind of weapon is being tested and is being added to our arsenal; it gives us this and that for the country’s defense; and it costs so much. We ask for your vote of approval.” And I would include this note with the decision of the Communist Party Central Committee and the Council of Ministers and go to see him. Sometimes I passed on these kinds of notes to Gorbachev through Boldin.

O.S. Was Boldin very helpful to you?

O.B. He helped me out. I often stopped by to see Gorbachev to give him essential papers. I would call him directly and say that I had to stop by on urgent business. Gorbachev always found time for me. Gorbachev’s conduct in our personal meetings was completely normal. When we met privately, I gave him my papers, which

had everything written clearly and precisely. As a rule, Gorbachev looked them over and voted “yes.” And after this everything automatically went in a positive direction.

O.S. After Gorbachev gave his approval, no one voted against the measure?

O.B. Yes, everything proceeded automatically. Incidentally, Chernyaev in his memoirs mentions my private meetings with Gorbachev. He complains that I exhausted Gorbachev’s patience, that Gorbachev understood that I was abusing my stratagem. Apparently Gorbachev didn’t feel comfortable turning me away. But once he gave Chernyaev some material that I had prepared, though Chernyaev had no relation whatsoever to defense issues. That’s the way it was. I brought Gorbachev some papers. He said that he wasn’t going to sign them right then, and then he apparently handed them over to Chernyaev. Chernyaev wrote a note to the effect that nothing I had proposed was advisable. When I was turned down, I knew that this was Chernyaev’s doing. Then I made my case again. I couldn’t let a mere assistant treat a secretary of the Central Committee like that. I subsequently settled this issue, and in the end Gorbachev signed. That’s what happened.

O.S. This incident suggests that Chernyaev had a certain degree of influence on Gorbachev?

O.B. I wouldn’t exaggerate Chernyaev’s influence on Gorbachev. There were other people surrounding Gorbachev who would often tell him that he was agreeing to projects that were supposedly inauspicious, that he was looking over my materials too quickly. This became a factor in putting pressure on Politburo members.

You see, that’s how the system worked. For example, when I would receive some kind of document that didn’t directly concern my area of supervision but required my

sign-off, I had to cast a vote, and as a rule I voted yes, since I couldn't object, not knowing the central issue. In exceptional cases, when an issue seemed serious to me, I would nonetheless object. Once I came to Gorbachev and said to him, "Mikhail Sergeevich, you entrusted all defense matters to me. And I want to tell you the whole truth about these issues, whatever the truth may be. That's my duty. You know, it seems to me that Shevardnadze's positions are in direct opposition to the interests of the Soviet Union and that he is giving up our defense." Gorbachev leaned back in his chair, looked at me intently and said, "Look here. First, you have to get a handle on everything. This is only your third month as secretary of the Central Committee. Get to the heart of the issues, then tell me these things." That was his harsh reaction. At the conclusion of our talk he said to me, "We'll talk about this later in more detail."

O.S. Did you talk about it later?

O.B. No. We didn't talk about this specifically. Gorbachev himself didn't return to the matter. I tried to talk about it later on during general discussions on problems of the Military Industrial Complex. I realized that the first crack in my relations with Gorbachev appeared after this discussion.

O.S. Did you try to understand the content of Gorbachev's strategy? Did you try to ask him outright without any kinds of clichés like "new thinking", etc., "What do you want, Mikhail Sergeevich, what concrete goal are you trying to achieve in foreign policy by destroying parity?"

O.B. In the way you have formulated it those kinds of conversations took place much later. I remember one incident. In early August 1991 we were escorting Gorbachev on leave. At that time a difficult situation had arisen in connection with

Yeltsin's signing of a decree that placed outside the law party organizations situated within enterprises. We had a conversation with Gorbachev: besides myself, Slukianov, Shenin, and others took part. Shenin and I told Gorbachev that he had to repeal Yeltsin's decree. "Otherwise we will have a situation in which there are two documents with regard to this problem. This will help party organizations act as they see fit. Naturally, this can provoke conflict. But there's no need to fear this. We must proceed from the assumption that we will not let the situation in the country get out of control. Shenin also added his wholly convincing arguments in support of repealing Yeltsin's decree. We discussed it for no less than an hour. In the end Gorbachev refused flat out to sign the decree. He passed and avoided the issue. Everything became clear.

O.S. Complete paralysis of power?

O.B. That's what many say. Many of Gorbachev's colleagues explain his actions by saying that he was a coward. It was typical of him to try to avoid making any personal decisions, from taking personal responsibility on any issue. There are many famous examples, such as the events in Tbilisi and the Baltics. Gorbachev settled disarmament and defense issues in a similar manner. Gorbachev often said about defense policy, "Figure it out in Zaikov's commission." I called Gorbachev and said, "Under no circumstances is this resolution to be adopted." And he replies firmly, "Figure it out in Zaikov's commission. Why are you calling me? There is a commission in the Politburo, settle it there." This was typical of Gorbachev's conduct.

O.S. Gorbachev didn't have enough leadership qualities?

O.B. I don't know how to answer that. I believe that a leader must take personal responsibility and make the key decisions personally. Compare Gorbachev, for example,

with even Yeltsin. They have completely different personalities. Yeltsin can take personal responsibility for anything in order to assert his own authority.

O.S. Maybe that's why Yeltsin defeated Gorbachev.

O.B. Gorbachev was and is a coward. I'd say that he is a leader who somehow never came into himself.

O.S. Oleg Dmitrievich, did you go through a period of euphoria in relation to Gorbachev?

O.B. At a certain level, yes.

O.S. And when did the "moment of truth" come?

O.B. It's difficult to say. There was no moment as such. It was a gradual process of understanding Gorbachev's true nature. I can say that I already understood a lot during my imprisonment in Matrosskaia Tishina. I always wanted to hope that Gorbachev was led to his downfall by personal delusions, a lack of understanding about what was happening. Before Gorbachev's book *The August Coup* came out, I still thought that everything that happened was a fateful coincidence. Reading the book eliminated any last doubts for me. How, then, could a man like Gorbachev come to power? I am constantly searching for an answer to this question.

O.S. It is widely known that A.A. Gromyko played an important role in appointing Gorbachev as general secretary. But that's a separate conversation.

Now, with your permission, I'd like to switch to the events of August 1991. Tell me, what was Gorbachev's reaction to your arrival in Foros on August 18, 1991. Describe your meeting with him.

O.B. At the beginning of our conversation, I initially sensed that Gorbachev was scared. He was very reserved and nervous. Gorbachev was dressed in a sweater, although it was hot outside. Apparently he wanted to emphasize that he really was sick. An interesting detail: we were able to make contact with him only an hour after arriving at his dacha. At first we expected to hear something from him at his guesthouse, and only afterward we walked over to his residence. He didn't show up for a long time. We waited for him near his office. He still didn't show up, although the head of security, Plekhanov, was with us. He was told right away about our arrival, but apparently he was getting his thoughts together, preparing to speak with us. He was probably consulting with his wife, Raisa Maksimovna, about what to do. They had had a family squabble.

O.S. Did he figure out why you had come?

O.B. I don't think so. But then, as he thought about it, I decided that he understood something. He is, after all, an intelligent man. He might have thought that we came to arrest him. When he appeared before us his emotional anxiety was visible. In extreme situations even a coward sometimes shows elements of bravery. He began the conversation with a psychological attack. He was shaking violently. He clasped hands and said, "I'll sign a telegram about a meeting of the Supreme Soviet to discuss the problems you have raised." Then he threw down his arms. Suddenly he says, "No. There's Lukyanov. Let him call a meeting of the Supreme Soviet." We for our part proposed to him, "Let's go to Moscow." Or: "Let's immediately invite everyone who stayed in Moscow to come here. Let's talk about it right now." Gorbachev says that he's sick and asks if it isn't obvious. He started talking about his sciatica.

On the other hand he continued to speak and said that he would be at the signing of the union treaty, no matter what, “even if they cut my legs off!” The situation grew tense. Everyone was on edge. Suddenly Gorbachev blurts out at me, “Go on, say your piece!” I told him that we ought not under any conditions sign the union treaty, that this would put a stake through the Soviet Union. He replied, “I just wrote an article that said that we would get out of the current difficult situation.” He was upset. The other comrades spoke up after me. The conversation was growing uneven. Raising his voice, Gorbachev asked who had sent us. I answered, “We’re your colleagues, your friends. We came at this decisive moment to clear things up with you.” “And who shares your point of view?” Gorbachev asks. I answer, “All your closest colleagues share this point of view: Lukyanov, Kryuchkov, Yazov, and others.”

O.S. What decision was made as a result of your discussion?

O.B. It was decided that Gorbachev would come to Moscow after all and we, in turn, would undertake certain actions until his arrival: prepare public opinion, begin the process of convening the Supreme Soviet for examining, along with other critical issues facing our society, the legitimacy of signing the new version of the union treaty. I went to the meeting feeling inspired, hoping to head off the country’s collapse and hoping that I would be understood. My personal interests were unimportant. I left devastated. I saw a dull man thinking in a dull way about himself, rather than the matter at hand. A renegade. I think my comrades who returned with me were experiencing the same thing.

I’ll tell you the following interesting fact. At a session of the Council of Ministers on August 3 or 4, 1991, Gorbachev said that the situation was very grave and that he had ordered Pavlov not to allow any of the leaders to go on leave. As he left for vacation,

Gorbachev wanted us to “sweep away” all these difficult problems in a week or two. He was thinking, “I’ll leave so as not to disturb you.” That’s what Gorbachev said. (I dug this up in a stenogram from a session of the council of ministers while familiarizing myself in Matrosskaia Tishina with my case.

O.S. That’s an incredible fact! That is, you came face to face with Gorbachev’s attempt to avoid the matter?

O.B. Yes.

O.S. Kryuchkov also talks about this.

O.B. So everything fits.

O.S. What did you think of your discussion with Gorbachev on August 18 in Foros before flying to Moscow?

O.B. You see, besides going to Foros we had other things planned that our comrades who remained in Moscow were supposed to handle. We had to make contact with Yeltsin for negotiations that would prevent the signing of the union treaty.

O.S. As far as I know, on the morning of August 19, there was supposed to be a meeting with Yeltsin that you, Pavlov, and Yazov were supposed to attend.

O.B. The meeting didn’t take place because people who were supposed to arrange it had not done so. It had not been set up.

O.S. Kryuchkov writes that Pavlov’s high blood pressure acted up. It may have been someone else. In any case, the meeting had to be organized in time and arranged from a logistical point of view.

O.S. Was breaking off the meeting with Yeltsin a big mistake?

O.B. I think so. You see at that time Yeltsin was already playing the same political role as Gorbachev was.

O.S. What could you have agreed to with Yeltsin if the meeting had taken place?

O.B. We could have settled questions about whether to allow for the signing of the union treaty.

O.S. I get the feeling that one of the chief reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union was the fact that people started to associate Gorbachev personally with the all-Union center. The majority of the population didn't understand that with Gorbachev out of the way it would have been possible to preserve the Soviet Union.

O.B. You're right. But the main thing is Gorbachev's renegade nature.

O.S. We needed to make a clear separation between Gorbachev the person and the importance of the office of the president of the Soviet Union

In concluding our conversation today I want to ask you one more question. Why, in the end, was the Supreme Soviet not convened immediately?

O.B. I personally insisted on convening the Supreme Soviet without delay.

O.S. Was this possible logistically?

O.B. Of course.

O.S. So why wasn't it done?

O.B. Because Lukyanov held a certain position on this issue and started to delay the process. This delay lasted a few fateful days, since we didn't manage to meet with Yeltsin and didn't convene the Supreme Soviet. We lost the momentum. This led to our defeat.

O.S. But why wasn't Shenin included as part of the State Committee for the State of Emergency? Do you have an answer?

O.B. It wasn't because of personal qualities that Shenin was not included. On the contrary, he always worked very hard and was always a good organizer. Within a short period of time, on the night of August 18, Shenin arranged for the publication of all materials of the Emergency Committee. And his political views were clear. He wasn't included because he was a member of the Politburo, a leader of the Communist Party. And at that moment the Communist Party had been labeled a reactionary force. The Emergency Committee had to emerge from something new. And direct involvement by the Communist Party in the Emergency Committee could have had a negative effect on the course of events.

O.S. Thank you very much for speaking so candidly.

I AGREE with the text of this interview.

O.D. Baklanov.