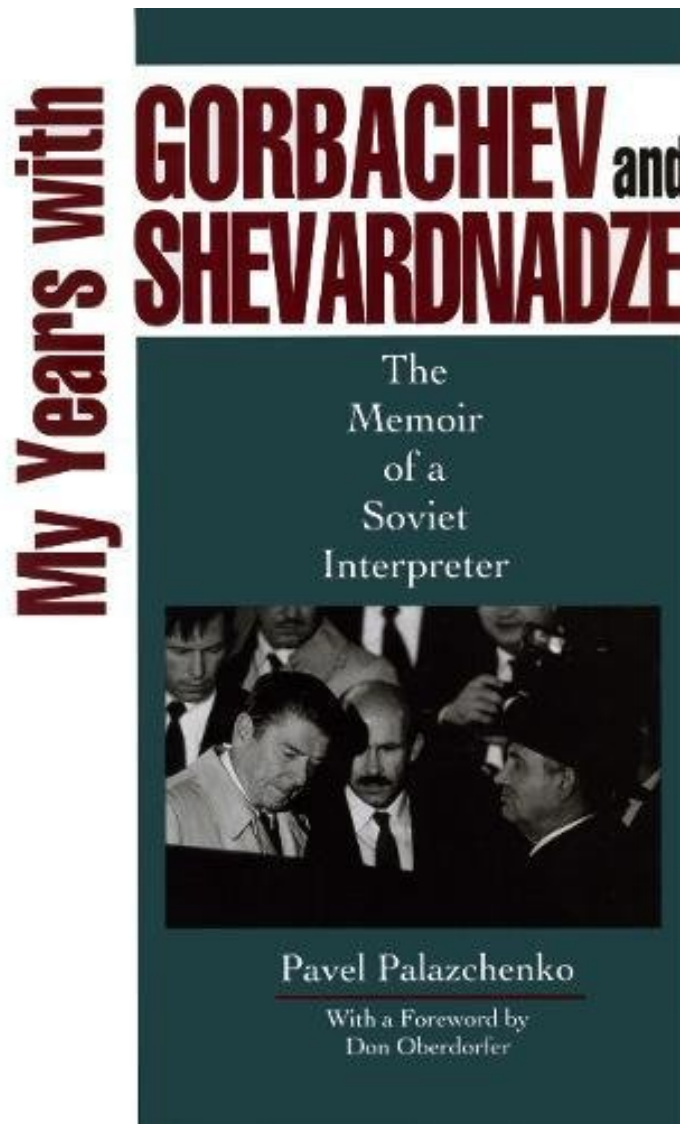


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My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter

Pavel Palazchenko

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Pavel Palazchenko : My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. very interestingBy Elenaa very interesting book. Gives a lot of insights into those years. But if you expect to read about the translation-and-interpretation side of the author's life, you

will probably be disappointed. The book is mostly about the author's memories and impressions of his life and work at that time, people he met, choices he made.⁵ of 7 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating, detailed account of the final years of the USSR By K G RAs a former student of languages and translator, and as someone who studied Russian for many years, I frankly thought that this would be more focused on the work of a Russian translator. I was expecting many detailed references to words and phrases that were difficult to translate from one language to another, and other esoteric references to a translator's work. However, this book is really much more of a history and insider's account of the final years of the Soviet Union. As the book's title suggests, it is particularly based on the author's experiences with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, and the last leader of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev. If you are a serious student of Soviet/Russian history, you will love all the behind the scenes details of Soviet foreign policy. Palazchenko also provides us with many interesting moments from the final months and days of the USSR. Although the book is a memoir of a "Soviet Interpreter", Palazchenko also held substantive policymaking positions, and thus we learn about many details of Soviet foreign policy making. I do have some critiques of the book. As I mentioned, due to the title I expected the book to be more concerned with translation. Unfortunately (at least for people with interests like mine), there are probably no more than 5-6 times in the whole book where the author details translation issues. I also expected the book to contain more biographical details. But the author ultimately either did not want to include them in the book or is an incredibly private man. There are probably less than 5 pages of material in the whole book about his family, education, and personal life. Treatment of events and history is sometimes haphazard and uneven. Some moments are described in great detail, while whole years/events are glossed over from coverage. The author prefaces the book with a disclaimer that he feels that even though the USSR no longer exists, he feels obliged to maintain his secrecy obligations. Therefore it's not clear if he's omitting materials because he feels he cannot do so ethically, because he feels they are uninteresting, or some other reason. At other times, he seems overly loyal to his former bosses, and particularly Gorbachev. The latter part of the book often seems like a panegyric to Gorbachev. In spite of my criticisms, this book is a must read for all those seriously interested in the final years of the USSR, and particularly its foreign policy. I was also pleasantly surprised at well the book was written, and how easy it was to read, especially considering that it was authored by a non-native English speaker, and published by an academic press.

As the principal English interpreter for Mikhail Gorbachev and his foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, in the critical period of 1985–1991, Pavel Palazchenko participated in all U.S.-Soviet summit talks leading to the end of the Cold War. This personal and political memoir sheds new light on Soviet/American relations and personalities during that time. Palazchenko focuses on what he saw with his own eyes during important negotiating sessions with world leaders such as Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Secretaries of State George Shultz and James Baker, and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. He shares his impressions and opinions about these leaders as well as their Soviet counterparts and gives a firsthand account of the phase of preparation leading up to important international events, including the process of hammering out positions on sensitive arms control issues. Palazchenko describes the events themselves, such as the summits in Reykjavik, Malta, and Moscow, adding many fascinating details to previous accounts. Palazchenko contends that the peaceful end of the Cold War was possible not because of some behind-the-scenes dealings, but because of the trust that gradually developed between world leaders. He shows us how this developing trust led to the remarkably peaceful transition from the dangerous pre-1985 confrontation to the new relationships between major powers. This book sheds light on Soviet thinking about Soviet-U.S. relations, the Third World, arms control, German reunification, and the Gulf War. It also provides an insider's view of domestic politics and policy during Gorbachev's last year in power and Soviet developments leading up to the collapse of the USSR.

From Publishers Weekly The principal interpreter for both President Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze from 1985 to 1991, Palazchenko attempts to shed light on the demise of the old Soviet order. Unfortunately, this rather plodding memoir only partially succeeds. Palazchenko generally looks for intimate, personal causes rather than larger, historical ones and maintains that it was personal trust between Reagan and Gorbachev that allowed the Cold War to end peacefully. While there are some insights into the role of translators in the most secretive political transactions, there is rather too much emphasis on what he thought of world leaders or about governmental positions—for example, regarding the "developing relationship" between Rajiv Gandhi and Gorbachev, Palazchenko notes that he "thought then and later, [it] could become an important moral factor in the world for years to come." He even recounts that he informally influenced diplomatic processes. More usefully, Palazchenko records Gorbachev's growing isolation in the latter part of his regime, even from his friend and ally Shevardnadze. Currently a consultant to the Gorbachev Foundation (the Moscow-based think tank), the author consistently defends both of his former bosses and exhibits bitterness about Boris Yeltsin's rise to power. Readers interested in a blow-by-blow recap of the last years of Soviet diplomacy from a glasnost insider will find the book fruitful; those who want some help in interpreting these crucial events, however, will be disappointed. Copyright 1998 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal These two memoirs are indispensable sources for historians, diplomats, and students of international affairs interested in

Gorbachev's relations with foreign leaders, especially Presidents Reagan and Bush and Prime Minister Thatcher, and in Soviet international diplomacy in the final years of the USSR. Both authors stood at the elbows of Gorbachev and foreign minister Edward Shevardnadze as their interpreter, and it is fascinating to view from behind the headlines the several summit meetings of the period and see how Soviet leaders reacted to their foreign hosts/guests. The authors, particularly Korchilov, have much to say on the human-interest side, offering personal impressions and judgments, for example, that Gorbachev saw California as "paradise on earth, with the sun all year round." Palazchenko is more analytical about how successive Soviet domestic crises affected his and his bosses' jobs. But both books complement each other well, confirming Gorbachev's attractive personality and sharp intelligence, and the former Soviet president is very much the hero of both accounts. The two authors also write feelingly on the collapse of their country. Essential for academic Soviet studies collections and larger public libraries.

Robert H. Johnston, McMaster Univ., Hamilton, Ontario
Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. "There are few subordinates better placed to describe the amazing turn in Soviet foreign policy between 1985 and 1991 than Pavel Palazchenko. . . . He has produced a solid, reliable account . . . that will be important supplementary reading for future historians and students of the Cold War."—Washington Post Book World

"The historical record is fortunate that a man as gifted and capable as Pavel Palazchenko served as interpreter for Gorbachev and Shevardnadze from 1985 through the fall of the Soviet Union. His is a keen mind, and his recollections and observations add to our understanding of those crucial years."—James A. Baker, III, 61st U.S. Secretary of State

"Palazchenko was always more than a gifted interpreter, and his book is thereby an especially revealing account of pivotal events and pivotal people. A compelling read."—George P. Shultz, 60th U.S. Secretary of State

"The memoirs of Pavel Palazchenko are remarkably revealing—not in the sense of sensational new disclosures, but in the re-creation of the thinking and decisions of the Soviet leaders, in particular illuminating their relationships with Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush and Secretaries of State George Shultz and James Baker. It is a straightforward account by a keen observer at closest hand, full of insight, and makes a real contribution to understanding the history of these crucial final years of the Cold War and of the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is, as well, well-written and a pleasure to read."—Raymond L. Garthoff, The Brookings Institution