

“What We Sought in Eastern Europe”

Interviewee: Brent Scowcroft

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Brent Scowcroft was President George H. W. Bush’s national security advisor. He discusses his strategic thinking about Mikhail Gorbachev’s Soviet Union as the Bush administration started work at the end of the Cold War.

Brent Scowcroft: In terms of substance of policy and the world we were facing during the transition, yes, I’d thought about it a lot—especially about this issue: Is [Mikhail] Gorbachev for real? Does he really want to transform things? Or did the old men of the Kremlin—who certainly didn’t think they were putting somebody in who would overturn the system—were they right? Was this a man who was going to make the system run more efficiently so that they could compete in a better manner?

I had the sense at the end of the [Ronald] Reagan administration that they had come to the conclusion, *It’s all over*. I wasn’t at all sure that was the case, principally because there had been zero movement about Eastern Europe. So I came in with a fairly specific notion of what to do about U.S.-Soviet relations, which are the key to it all. That was to change our policy toward the Soviet Union—which had been one based on arms control directly—to a policy focused primarily on Eastern Europe, and changing what we sought in Eastern Europe.

Our policy toward Eastern Europe had always been to encourage those states in Eastern Europe that caused the most trouble for the Soviet Union, so Romania was at the top of the list. I said, What we ought to do is focus and give the most help and encouragement to those who are trying most to liberalize their internal systems. So Romania goes to the bottom of the list, Poland goes to the top of the list.

End of excerpt.

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