

BOOK REVIEW

Transcending the Cold War: Summits, Statecraft, and the Dissolution of Bipolarity in Europe, 1970–1990, ed. Kristina Spohr and David Reynolds (New York: Oxford U.P., 2016; pp. 274. £35).

In their edited collection, international historians Kristina Spohr and David Reynolds have produced a volume of great use to scholars and students of the late Cold War. The chapters in the book introduce readers to summits as historic moments that either create or respond to significant events; summits as facilitators of personal contacts between leaders; and summits as progenitors of treaties or other agreements. Examining fifteen summits between 1970 and 1990, the authors show that these high-level meetings can be substantive or symbolic. They can transform or solidify the status quo, leading to diplomatic breakthroughs in the case of the Caucasus in 1990 or sullen faces in Reykjavik in 1986.

With this book, Spohr and Reynolds have taken one approach to writing an international history of the late Cold War. In their chapters, the authors implicitly raise an important question: to what extent can we attribute the end of the Cold War to summitry? As their research shows, however, assessing the success and failure of summits is challenging, as those assessments have shifted, and will continue to shift, over time.

The collection examines the summitry of the late Cold War in connection with three themes: efforts to advance nuclear arms control; initiatives to address the German question; and finally the shift from a bipolar to a triangular system. Overall, the summits analysed offered opportunities to seek accommodation in a world divided into East and West. In each chapter, summits are treated as both individual events that have significance in their own right and as elements of broader international, multilateral or bilateral processes. For example, Benedikt Schoenborn and Gottfried Niedhart show how West German Chancellor Willy Brandt and East German Prime Minister Willi Stoph's meetings in Erfurt and Kassel initiated a diplomatic process rather than reached conclusive or significant agreements.

The collection demonstrates the details, small and large, that are significant to the course and outcome of high-level summitry. In their chapters, the authors explore the use of formal versus informal settings for summits, based on what the leaders hoped to accomplish. The chapters highlight the significance of personal gestures, such as Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai calling on National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger at his guest house in Beijing despite their differences in diplomatic rank and US President Richard Nixon shaking Zhou Enlai's hand when he deplaned in China. The chapters also demonstrate the contributions of lower-level aides such as Kissinger and US Secretary of State George Shultz in facilitating productive summit meetings as well as the significance of actors outside the summits, whether East German citizens in Erfurt or Chinese students in Beijing. Finally, the volume's authors show the challenges leaders have in communicating, both literally and figuratively, although Spohr and Reynolds point out how the advent of simultaneous

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translation sped up the pace of conversations, potentially enabling greater progress in these short, high-level meetings.

Spohr and Reynolds have brought together a range of scholars diverse in geographic location (the collected authors are based in North America, Europe, Asia and Latin America) if not in gender (of the twelve authors, only one is a woman). It is notable that for a project about meetings of major historical figures, the co-editors have been able to encourage so much co-authoring. Of the seven chapters, including the conclusion, only two were written by a single author. Co-authorship has clearly enriched these chapters, often marrying regional and linguistic expertise to the readers' benefit.

Despite the volume's many strengths, and although the chapters are uniformly well written, the background discussion about the negotiations that preceded the spotlighted summit could have been trimmed in each chapter. This is particularly the case with the chapter on Helsinki—readers have to wait sixteen pages for the leaders of thirty-five countries to convene in Finland. In addition, I wondered why the title focused on the dissolution of bipolarity in Europe, because the authors' ambitions in a number of chapters seemed to address much larger questions about the end of the Cold War and the nature of the international system at the end of the twentieth century. In particular, the two Beijing summits examined seem tangential to events in Europe but significant to contemporaneous shifts in international relations. More discussion about the selection of summits would have been beneficial to clarify the place of those two chapters within the collection because they certainly warranted inclusion; in particular, the chapter on the 1989 Beijing and Malta summits by Jeffrey A. Engel and Sergey Radchenko offered readers the greatest new insight (in particular into US President George H.W. Bush's relationship with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping) of the entire collection.

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