

plication of some of his results [is] still on the rise,” even though he was not on a par with the great geniuses of his time. Teller is also remembered as a great educator who reveled in the popularization of science.

Hargittai’s magnum opus is more than a biography or a history of science or thermonuclear weapons. The book is a fascinating history of an individual caught in the upheavals of the twentieth century.



Pavel Stroilov, *Behind the Desert Storm: A Secret Archive Stolen from the Kremlin That Sheds New Light on the Arab Revolutions in the Middle East*. Chicago: Price World Publishing, 2011.

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I first heard of Pavel Stroilov in an article published by Claire Berlinski in the spring 2010 issue of *The City Journal* titled “A Hidden History of Evil: Why Doesn’t Anyone Care about the Unread Soviet Archives?” The article describes Stroilov’s claim that he had exploited a computer flaw and stolen thousands of pages of documents from the archive of the Gorbachev Foundation. These documents, the article claims, portrayed Mikhail Gorbachev as an evil and menacing manipulator and shed light on unsavory aspects of the end of the Cold War that allegedly would be highly embarrassing for many a retired statesman. Berlinski, who seemed unaware of the vast amount of scholarship that has been published based on research in the Russian archives, also maintained that Stroilov had approached Yale University Press to publish a book about the First Gulf War but that something supposedly “frightened” then-editor Jonathan Brent so that Stroilov “never heard from Brent again.”

Stroilov later shared his manuscript with me. I could immediately see why Yale University Press would not want to publish it, though I kept my reservations to myself out of politeness. Subsequently, Stroilov’s book came out with Price World Publishing, a low-budget press that specializes in weight-training and fitness books published under titles like *6 Weeks to 6-Pack Abs*, *Gluteus to the Maximus*, and *Muscle Explosion*. This is Price World’s first foray into history. My impression after reading the final product is that the publisher would have done well to stick with its usual fare. Stroilov’s book, despite its outstanding documentary base (of which I will say more below), is a disaster.

Stroilov believes he has uncovered an international conspiracy—chiefly directed by Gorbachev, but with the assistance of U.S. President George H. W. Bush—aimed at returning Israel to its 1947 borders as a quid pro quo for Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait. Gorbachev’s anti-Jewish “socialist jihad” was part and parcel of his mission of “conquering the world” by using the “Red Arabs” of the Middle East, especially the Iraqis, Syrians, Libyans, and Egyptians, as his proxies. Bush (who, Stroilov suggests at one point, was Gorbachev’s “agent”) was duped into playing along because he was so heavily invested in building a “new world order” (p. 167). To this end, Bush bartered

away “common sense, decency, and national interest,” falling into Gorbachev’s hideous trap and incurring “debts,” which the United States subsequently tried to repay by bolstering the remaining “Red Arabs” at the expense of Muslim democrats, Egyptian Christians, and, needless to say, the Israelis, whom Washington repeatedly “betrayed” (e.g., pp. 223, 323, 345). A Masonic conspiracy (p. 60) also factors into the story.

Devoid of any scholarly analysis, the book is full of nonsense, some of it derived from far-fetched interpretations of Stroilov’s source material and some borrowed from popular conspiracy theories. Fortunately, Stroilov is relatively brief with his own comments. Most of the book is made up of verbatim transcripts of documents, including memoranda of Gorbachev’s conversations with foreign leaders, Politburo transcripts, and various enlightening notes penned by Gorbachev’s chief foreign policy aide, Anatolii Chernyaev, and by other officials. Although excerpted and often cited out of context, these documents offer an interesting glimpse into the dynamic of Gorbachev’s policymaking and disclose hitherto unknown aspects of Soviet diplomacy during the first Gulf War.

Perhaps the most interesting documents are those that show Gorbachev’s eleventh-hour efforts to broker Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait, especially his memoranda of conversations with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in September 1990 and February 1991. Gorbachev comes across as deeply hostile to the expanding U.S. presence in the Gulf, as he pleads with Aziz not to give the Americans a pretext for launching a ground offensive: “If . . . the Americans get very deeply involved in the military action, including on the ground, it will not be so easy to take a course in the interests of Arabs and the world community” (p. 285). The documents suggest that Gorbachev was genuinely concerned that Saddam Hussein’s defiance would end in Iraq’s complete collapse and the resultant expansion of U.S. influence in the Middle East. Gorbachev’s well-known mediation in the conflict therefore aimed not so much at achieving a peaceful solution as at maintaining Soviet regional influence.

In general, Stroilov’s documents show Gorbachev to be a strategic thinker, concerned with the preservation of Soviet interests in the Middle East and consistently suspicious of U.S. policy in the region. Thus, we see Gorbachev argue at a Soviet Politburo meeting on 12 February 1987 regarding South Yemen: “We have little interest in that country itself. But the most important thing for us is *the place* where it is situated” (p. 93; emphasis in original). We also see Gorbachev working hard to expand Soviet influence in the region by selling weapons to the Egyptians, the Iranians, and the Yemenis who would “otherwise . . . take them from the USA” (p. 94). Predictably, most of Gorbachev’s anti-American rhetoric dates from the early years of his rule, something that Stroilov fails to note. Nonetheless, some of the documentary evidence presented here tallies with the excellent studies by historians like Artemy Kalinovsky and Svetlana Savranskaya. The evidence suggests there was more to Gorbachev than his myth would allow, with considerable continuity between pre-1985 and post-1985 Soviet policies toward the Middle East and other parts of the world.

How new and how reliable are Stroilov’s documents? As for the novelty, most of the “top-secret” documents cited in the book have long been available to historians.

This includes, in particular, Chernyaev's diary, an immensely valuable resource. Whatever one can say about the other documents cited here, it was completely unethical for Stroilov to steal a person's private diary. Fortunately Chernyaev over the past twelve years has published almost all of his diary in Russia, and the National Security Archive has posted translations of the sections pertaining to 1985–1991. The Gorbachev Foundation also has published many of the Soviet Politburo records and some of the memoranda of conversations cited by Stroilov. Other records are freely available at the Foundation's archive in Moscow to anyone interested. Nevertheless, some of the presented material is clearly new and has not been published before. Although it is impossible to say with complete certainty until Stroilov releases the original documents, they also appear authentic.

A comparison between Stroilov's documents and those that have been released by the Gorbachev Foundation in published volumes reveals a disturbing tendency by the Foundation to omit inconvenient evidence. This can be said, for example, of the aforementioned reference to South Yemen, which is absent from the published transcript of that Politburo meeting. There are dozens of similar examples. Thus, even though Stroilov's book is analytically worthless, it is helpful to scholars in pointing to instances of falsification of the historical record. The Gorbachev Foundation has clearly tried to put the best "spin" on Gorbachev, but it has done so in ways that undermine its own credibility. The most important lesson of this book, therefore, is that unless Gorbachev prefers to have his legacy interpreted by Masonic conspiracy theorists on the basis of stolen documents, he should embrace Chernyaev's proposal to release the full treasure-trove of documents still tightly held by the Foundation.

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