

Volume II, Number 5

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## **Moscow Meets the Media**

### **Comparing Coverage of the Moscow and Washington Summits**

How did American television cover the Moscow summit? We examined all summit stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows from May 22 through June 5. The results were compared to network coverage of the Washington summit last December.

The results:

- \*Massive coverage- The network evening news shows ran 174 summit-related stories totalling 7 hours, 22 minutes. The average newscast contained four stories lasting over ten minutes-almost half the newscast. (p.2)
- \*Soviet sources- Soviet citizens were quoted 299 times including 102 statements by Soviet officials (58 by Gorbachev). (p.2)
- \*Gorbachev bests Reagan- Gorbachev received 76% positive source evaluations compared to 46% for Reagan. The Soviet leader bested the President among both Soviet and American sources quoted. (p.3)
- \*Rating the reforms- Over two out of three sources gave positive assessments of the reforms known collectively as glasnost and perestroika. (p.4)

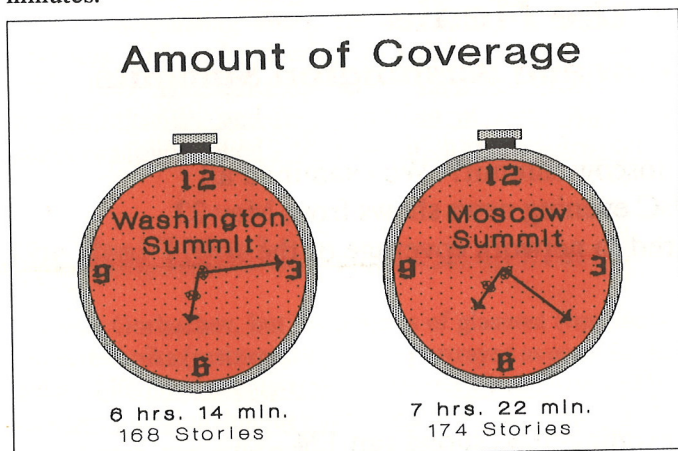
### **Election Update**

- \*Jackson Tops Field- Jesse Jackson received the best press of all major candidates through the end of the primary season on June 7. (p.4)
- \*No Partisan Bias- Democratic and Republican candidates collectively received about equal amounts of good press. (p.4)



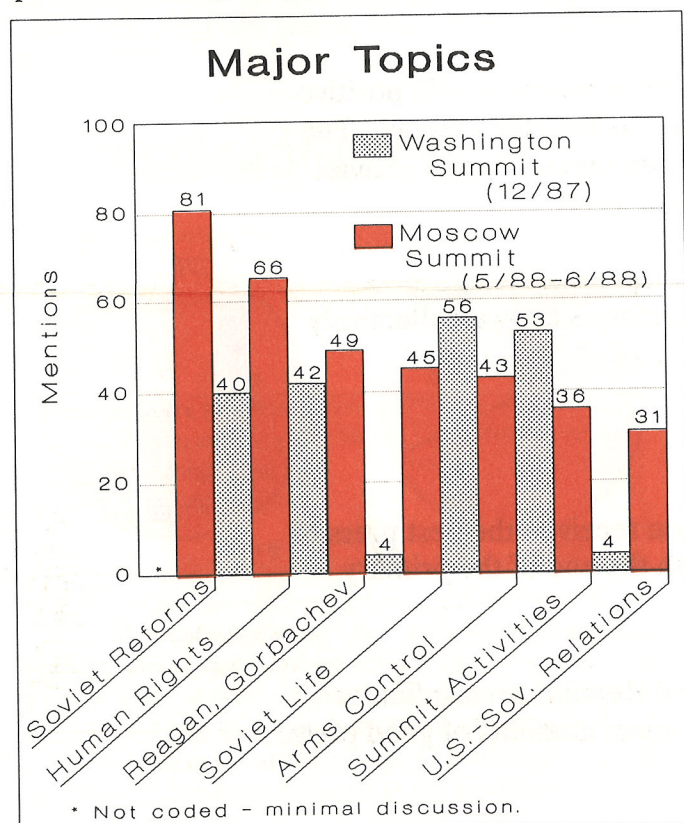
## Summit Saturation

Despite problems of time, distance, and logistics, American television gave the Moscow summit more coverage than the Washington summit last December. From May 22 to June 5 the networks ran 174 summit-related stories with a total airtime of seven hours, twenty-two minutes. Last December in Washington they aired 168 stories lasting six hours, fourteen minutes.



## Tales of Two Cities

The summit story shifted dramatically when the cameras moved from Washington to Moscow. The major focus of last December's summit was the arms control agreement that provided its centerpiece (a topic of 56 stories), along with daily



activities associated with the event (53 stories on logistics, human interest sidelights, public relations maneuvers, etc). The only other frequent topics were the motives and prospects of Reagan and Gorbachev (42) and human rights issues, including reports of protests (40).

In Moscow the summit was only the setting. The real story was the Soviet Union. The heaviest coverage focused on the reforms collectively known as glasnost and perestroika (81 stories) followed by human rights questions (66 questions). Another popular topic involved feature pieces on Soviet culture and society (45 stories). Arms control and summit related activities were only the fifth and sixth most frequently reported topics, figuring in 43 and 36 stories respectively.

## Media Glasnost

*Moscow is right now an open city. It is just as open as Washington, D.C. is.*

--William Lord,  
ABC producer

*Soviet rulers are growing in their sophistication about the media. That modifies their behavior...They know the whole world is watching, and they are on their best behavior.*

--Timothy Russert,  
NBC executive

*Summits are perhaps going to be like Super Bowls or political conventions. The event itself becomes merely an excuse for a festival of television.*

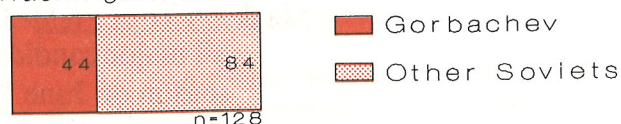
--Tom Shales,  
Washington Post

## Soviet Voices

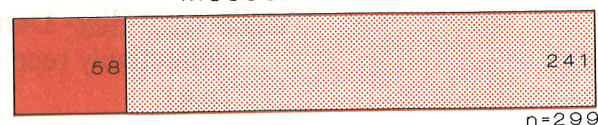
The new Soviet media strategy has opened the airwaves to a profusion of sources from the Soviet Union. During the Moscow summit coverage, 299 Soviet sources appeared or were quoted on the evening news shows--an average of seven Soviet sources per night on each network.

## Soviet Sources Cited

Washington Summit



Moscow Summit





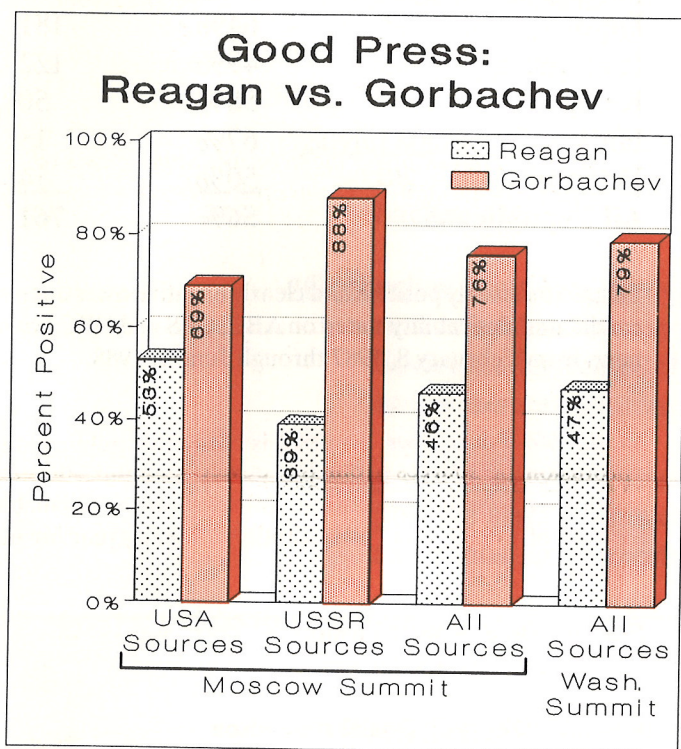
Gorbachev was the leading Soviet source with 58 appearances. Other official spokesmen made 44 additional appearances. That left 197 non-government sources like students, workers, and dissidents.

Not only was the number of Soviet sources more that double the 128 quoted during the Washington summit, but most of those were government or other official spokesmen. The appearance of so many ordinary citizens this spring was unprecedented.

## Gorbachev- TV Star

The geography may have changed, but for Reagan and Gorbachev it was the same old story. During both summits Gorbachev outgunned the Gipper as a media star.

We coded all positive and negative source assessments of both leaders. Last December Gorbachev's assessments were nearly four to one positive (79%). Reagan failed to break even, finishing at 47% positive. This spring the results were almost identical-76% positive for Gorbachev compared to 46% for Reagan.



Sample positive assessment: Dissident Andre Sakharov's endorsement, reported on ABC, "I think Mikhail Gorbachev is an outstanding statesman." Sample negative assessment: Brookings Institution scholar Jerry Hough's criticism of Reagan on CBS, "Either he's naive about Mr. Gorbachev, which I suspect is the case, or he's naive about the likelihood of the Soviet Union moving towards full democracy in a fairly short period of time."

## Moscow Spring

### The Good...

*Gorbachev is the only chance for us to save our Russia.*

--Nicolai Gabenko  
CBS, 5/31

*Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for the summit. Thank you for your presidency. Thank you for your testament of belief. And God bless America.*

--Margaret Thatcher  
ABC, 6/3

*This is our first real hope to start coexisting on this planet together.*

--man on the street (USA)  
CBS, 5/29

### The Bad...

*The three images (of Reagan) are: he's an actor; he's a cowboy, and... he's a Rambo. some sort of wild man.*

--British professor  
CBS, 6/3

*(Gorbachev) can paint himself as looking like the young aggressive winner, but... that paint is one layer deep.*

--Barry Peterson  
CBS, 6/1

*The average Soviet citizen has seen a change for the worse.... Even something as fundamental as food is worse than before.*

--American professor  
ABC, 5/25

### And the TV...

*In Moscow, the media were largely the event, the coverage was the news and images the substance.*

--Tom Shales  
The Washington Post, 6/3

*The Soviets have clearly learned a great deal about press relations and, if you will, press manipulation.*

--Dan Rather  
Washington Post interview

*It is better to see once than to hear a hundred times.*

--Russian proverb



The only notable addition this year was that Gorbachev bested Reagan among both Soviet and American sources. Eighty-eight percent of Soviet citizens who were quoted praised Gorbachev, compared to only thirty-nine percent of those who evaluated Reagan. The president closed the gap only partially among American citizens. His bare majority of 53% positive assessments here was well behind the Soviet leader's 69% positive rating.

## Update - TV Election Coverage

### Candidate Evaluations -- TV News\* Through June 7, 1988

Reagan was caught in a crossfire between Soviet sources complaining about his human rights stance and American critics who decried his naivete in cozying up to Gorbachev. The Soviet leader was subjected to almost no internal criticism, and the skepticism of some American sources was outweighed by the admiration expressed by others.

### The Real Thing?

Not only Gorbachev, but his policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) were portrayed as genuine this spring. Fifteen of twenty-two sources (68%) who assessed his policies concluded that they either made a real break with the past or were successful policies in their own right.

Sample positive assessment of Gorbachev's reforms: Filmmaker Nicolai Gobenko's peroration on CBS, "Freedom, real freedom. Not freedom for propaganda, but real freedom. Now we have no closed scenes in our life. Everything is open-everything." Sample negative assessment: A Soviet engineering student declares on ABC, "We can see that perestroika is going badly, very badly indeed...The situation is a catastrophe."

	Percent <u>Positive</u>	Total <u>Assessments</u>
<i><b>Democrats</b></i>		
Jackson	74%	249
Dukakis	55%	249
Gephardt	48%	164
Gore	54%	56
Simon	53%	57
Babbitt	89%	37
Biden	54%	61
<u>Hart</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>188</u>
<b>All Democrats</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>1061</b>
<i><b>Republicans</b></i>		
Bush	50%	379
Dole	64%	181
Robertson	49%	122
Kemp	58%	50
Haig	67%	15
<u>DuPont</u>	<u>50%</u>	<u>14</u>
<b>All Republicans</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>761</b>

\* Based on clearly positive and clearly negative assessments of candidates' desirability stated on ABC, CBS and NBC evening news from February 8, 1987 through June 7, 1988.

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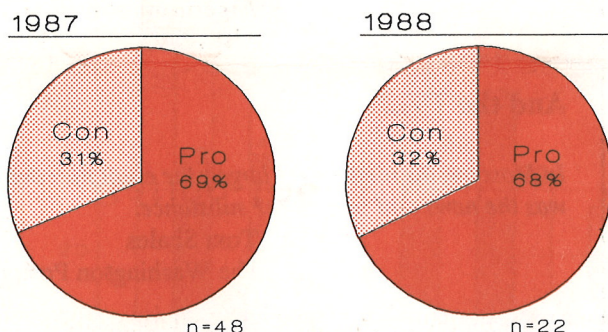
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### Rating the Reforms



This question wasn't directly addressed during the Washington summit. So we compared the results to our previous study of Soviet-related news from January through May 1987 (*Media Monitor*, June 1987). The results for that period were almost exactly the same, with 69% concluding that the reforms were the real thing (33 out of 48 stories).