Feature Article

Summit Meetings: Good or Bad for Peace?

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The systematic study of summit diplomacy, its role in international relations, and its contribution to world peace is remarkably scant. The research presented here is a step forward in understanding the significance of direct, personal, face-to-face meetings between top leaders in dominant states. Such summits continue to generate a lot of attention, often preceded with high expectations and leaving in disappointment. This article will present a unique dataset of summit meetings between the United States and its main competitor for global influence, the Soviet Union and modern Russia. We begin with the first meeting ever between Roosevelt and Stalin in 1943 in Tehran, Iran and end with a 2014 meeting between Obama and Putin in Brisbane, Australia. The data are used to evaluate several hypotheses about relationships between summit meetings and armed conflict. Our findings suggest that the summit meetings have been motivated by conflicts but do not contribute to their management. Wars involving Russia also account for the relationship between summit frequency and international cooperation. These results raise questions about the conflict-managing functions of summit meetings.

Setting the Scene

Summit meetings between top leaders in countries that are in conflict with each other regularly attract great interest and extensive media coverage. They do not only take place between major powers, but also between leaders of smaller countries who may interact with those from the major powers. The use of "sauna diplomacy" is an example. The President of Finland Uhro Kekkonen met the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in 1961 to defuse a severe crisis and was apparently successful. Whether the sauna experience was central remains to be understood, but there was some form of rapport between the leaders.

At another time and location, the Camp David meetings between Israel and Egypt were significant. The direct meetings between Begin and Sadat strengthened their dislike for each other. That rising dislike essentially forced U.S. President Carter into a mediation role, dealing separately with the leaders, one at a time (Wright 2014).

There are many examples and some of them can be generalized into firm opinions about the utility of such meetings. These opinions range from those seeing summits as dangerous (a legitimation of a foe or even fearing the capitulation of one side to the other during the talks) to those having high expectations for cooperation and peace (by solving pertinent problems and creating channels for communication in crisis situations). Some of these

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sentiments are colored by historical experience. Thus, it is often stated that the Vienna summit in 1961 between an inexperienced U.S. President John F. Kennedy and the shrewd Soviet Communist leader Nikita Khrushchev was a test of will that was negative for the U.S. President (McDonald 1987). Conversely, the meeting between U.S. President Ronald Regan and Soviet party leader Mikael Gorbachev in Geneva in 1985 changed the direction of U.S.–Soviet relations (Palazchenko 1997; Stanton 2011). The first summit encounter is described as a turning point for the worse; the second meeting as a shift for the better. Either way, the private conversations and the psychological climate between the leaders is regarded as significant for the relationship between the two leading nuclear states at the time. Thus, there is a need to turn to theory about human relations in general, particularly between powerful people.

A direct leader summit encounter is likely to have a positive impact if it manages to solve pressing problems. This is largely an *instrumental* view of the meeting: that there are concrete issues that need to be tackled. The summit meeting serves a specific function.

This can be contrasted with a more *expressive* or symbolic perspective on the relationship. The fact that the leaders meet means that there is no war going on or being planned between them, and confirms a will to cooperate. The leaders, however, are not solving the problems or issues, leaving that for others to do (notably their administrations). The meeting signals to the staff that they are to resolve identified matters.

Between these poles of instrumental and expressive functions there may be a mixture of other functions. The leaders may approve of previously negotiated agreements or initiate processes that lead to such agreements later. The meetings may also provide an opportunity to speak frankly about issues of concern, notably human rights or violations of international law. It is possible to think of a continuum of meeting functions and/or achievements. It is interesting to question whether frankness requires, builds, or erodes trust.

We ask whether summit meetings lead to changes in the relationship between the countries, whose leaders are assembled: are these summit meetings turning points in history (Druckman 2001; Stanton 2011)? In this article we analyze the summits between these two major powers since 1943. Such a longitudinal examination provides more data points to evaluate this issue. For instance, we ask: are the leaders' countries or their allies involved in conflicts, and on different sides at the time before, during, and after the meeting? This is likely to strain relations between the major powers, and thus, initially, result in fewer meetings or meetings where the agenda is dominated by such conflicts. Alternatively, summit meetings may be routine, rendering expectations for each meeting low. This means that their expressive (particularly trust-building) functions are no longer a significant aspect. If so, the number of summit meetings is only an indicator of major power relations, not drivers of such relations.

The fascination with summit diplomacy often rests on the idea that leaders exert considerable influence and are autonomous enough from other forces (e.g., domestic pressure groups) to change the direction of a country's policy. Some may hope for such changes (e.g., away from war), others may fear them (e.g., leading to bad deals). This directs us to general questions about the power and autonomy of national leaders.

We note also that there is a scholarly tradition of discussing particular summits and drawing conclusions from them (e.g., Weilemann 2000; Melissen 2003; Leguey-Feilleux 2009; Reynolds 2013). The purpose of these studies is to draw useful lessons for diplomacy. Often this is done without a systematic look at all summits of specific classes. This is what our contribution hopefully adds. Thus, the literature overview to follow is focused on the few studies that include large datasets of summit meetings in order to provide a basis for generalizations.

Previous Research

The systematic collection of data on summits and the pursuit of a theoretically based analysis of them can be said to begin with the work by Johan Galtung. Galtung's (1964) article is the starting point for our work. It was published more than fifty years ago, and there has been surprisingly little follow-up. The most notable example is the work by Thompson and Modelski (1977) published thirteen years later and providing a rebuff to many of Galtung's propositions. Druckman (1993) used the Galtung framework in designing multilateral simulations and Freeman (2008) returned to this article when addressing questions of learning through meeting.

Galtung's aim was to explain the frequency of summit meetings with changes in great power relations, particularly in terms of polarization and predictability. The focus of Galtung's research was the causes of summit meetings, rather than whether they had an impact on the relationship. In this article, we deal with both these questions. Galtung argued that when relations are highly polarized, the number of meetings with the opponent would go down. Instead, leaders concentrate on meeting within their own alliances. Furthermore, this tendency was expected to be reinforced by the difficulties in determining what result would come from a meeting. In times of tension, the outcome would not be easy to predict. With more predictable outcomes there would a higher frequency of meetings.

Galtung analyzes summit meetings between heads of state or governments and foreign ministers between 1941 and 1961 in all leading countries. This twenty-year period is divided into three almost equally long subperiods. The middle period consists of bloc formation with high polarization and unpredictability (1948–1955) and thus could be expected to have the least summit meetings. This is supported by his analyses.

A question raised about the Galtung study is how the time periods have been delineated. He published this work in 1964 and should have been able to remember this time, particularly the tensions during the period of 1948–1955 (including the Korean War). He would know from the outset that it did not have any inter-bloc meetings. It is remarkable that the period of bloc formation ends in May 1955, whereas the first summit meeting among the major powers took place in July of the same year. The definitions and limitations, in other words, run the risk of being tautological.

The above would not be a problem if the variables of polarization and predictability could explain summit meetings in later periods. This is what the Thompson and Modelski (1977) study sets out to do. They use less subjective measures for polarization, notably data on military expenditure and on East–West tension collected by others. They provide a list of 124 summit meetings between top leaders (not foreign ministers) for the period

1948–1971 involving all five major powers of the era (United States, Soviet Union, France, UK, and China). Still, it was not possible to relate the frequency of meetings to changes in military expenditures or conflict intensity. When the authors divide this twenty-four-year period into two equal twelve-year periods (1948–1959, 1960–1971) there is somewhat more support, but the authors cannot explain why these time periods would have this effect. With respect to polarization, they find that the world has moved from a situation since 1945 "bordering upon unipolarity and has only recently begun to approximate more nearly symmetrical bipolarity" (1977, 367). They stop short of suggesting that this would result in more summit diplomacy.

These authors also raise the question of whether the summit meetings could be an independent variable in world politics. Somewhat disappointingly, they conclude simply that summitry "reflect[s], at least in part, the stresses and strains associated with changes in the nature of the Great Power system" (1977, 368–9). The meetings, in other words, are not independent factors but may only be indicators of the state of international relations. We can only speculate about whether this inconclusive outcome has prevented others from venturing into a systematic study of summits. It has, however, not deterred us.

There is a close connection between international relations in general and summit diplomacy in particular. Clearly, leaders do not meet for pleasure, but rather to carry out some task. Since summit meetings are rare and usually ad hoc, the expectations (both negative and positive ones) increase.[1] There may be considerable sensitivity about who invites whom to what place and with which agenda. Of course, no meeting can take place without mutual agreement, but the perceptions can still play a role: sometimes it is seen as 'bowing to the other side' to accepts its invitation. At other times, however, the same visit can be seen as 'our leader' bravely going into the lion's den to demonstrate 'our' strength. When such perceptions play a role, the solution is often to hold the meeting at a 'neutral' site, such as Geneva, Vienna, Reykjavik, or Malta, and at a time not advocated by either party. This sort of unpredictability makes it difficult to analyze the question of who makes the initial suggestion to meet. As in the earlier research, our analysis begins with the event of the meeting.

The works by Galtung and by Thompson and Modelski deal with a comparatively small number of summit meetings. The largest study to date, however, is by Agnes Simon (2012). In her work, Simon includes more than 2,000 summits in which a U.S. President participated since the end of World War II. This work was completed more than 30 years after the Thompson and Modelski study appeared. It takes a different perspective, not directly relating to the questions raised during the Cold War. Her work focuses on the domestic impact in the United States (presidential approval ratings), particularly the effects of summits on economic relations. She found generally positive effects of the summit meetings. This is the most extensive study on summit meetings, but the focus is limited to U.S. actions.

[1]*There is much to gain from more regularized schedules and meeting places. There is likely always to be a need for interaction on the top level (as recognized by the European Union), and thus having such meetings on published schedules and in the same place (notably Brussels) has many advantages. The summits between the leading nuclear weapons states have, however, not as of yet achieved such uniformity, although they may use meetings of other constellations for contacts, notably G8, G20 and APEC.*

Our project addresses the question: *do summit meetings between contending states have an impact on their bilateral relations that relates to war and peace?* Our interest is geared toward actors that are in conflict or rivalry. This is the arena where there is a strong need for dialogue but at the same time most difficult to achieve. There are expectations that leaders will be more inclined to work toward tension reduction and conflict resolution if they know each other and can establish a degree of trust. However, there is no easy way to systematically measure trust from events data, and, thus, we concentrate on other variables in this article.

Furthermore, as Simon's work makes clear, there are many more summit meetings between states and leaders that are within the same alliance or within shared regional structures, such as the European Union. We are interested in states that find themselves in strained relations. Will such states and their leaders be willing to meet at all? Will the leaders have a similar perspective on the need for a meeting and the types of meetings to arrange? Last, but most importantly, will such meetings have an impact on conflicts and will such matters even be discussed? These are the kinds of questions that are raised in this article. They are addressed with a dataset consisting of summit meetings between the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia from 1943 to the present. Thus, the focus is on this bilateral relationship in the context of armed conflicts in which one or the other nation participated.

The Summitry Dataset

We have compiled a dataset of all Soviet/Russian–U.S. summit meetings from 1943 through 2014. These summits vary considerably in length. For instance, the earliest Tehran 1943 meeting lasted for three days, the most recent meeting between Putin and Obama lasted for about ten minutes.[2] The list of meetings covers seventy-two years and 103 meetings. It is a robust dataset that allows for a variety of statistical analyses to be performed.

Our definition of a summit meeting follows from the definitions provided by Galtung (1964), Thompson and Modelski (1977), Simon (2012), and Weilemann (2000). It consists of a meeting that takes place at the highest executive level, is face-to-face, and where a handshake between the leaders is included. The meeting could be impromptu, occur as part of a larger multilateral meeting or public conference, or be held in an exclusive setting far removed from exposure to the general public. We have not differentiated the meetings in terms of their length. Any bilateral or multilateral meeting involving face-to-face interaction between the leaders has been included.

For the United States, the top executive is clear—it is the President. For the Soviet Union, on the other hand, it has been more difficult to identify the leader. Normally, however, it has been the leader of the Soviet Communist Party, which means the person holding the position as first/general secretary of the organization. In the immediate post-Stalin period, it was more difficult as there was a form of 'collective leadership' where the Prime Minister was also considered to be a de facto leader. In that case, this person

[2]*This is still not complete, of course, as history moves on. There have been more meetings after this, notably in New York, September 28, 2015 on the occasion of the UN General Assembly; in Antalya, Turkey, November 15, 2015; and during the climate negotiations in Paris, November 30, 2015. The leaders have also met in Hangzhou, China, in September 2016. The 2015 and 2016 meetings are not included in our dataset.*

was included. In the Gorbachev era, the party leader position was combined with the role of President of the Soviet Union. In the post-Soviet period, we focused on the Presidency, but even so, at times, the Prime Minister seemed sufficiently significant to be included, due in part to President Boris Yeltsin's weak health. Since 2000, Russia has had two Presidents, Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev, and their respective meetings with their U.S. counterpart have been included in the dataset. It can however be argued that Putin was the actual leader also during Medvedev's presidency, that is, from 2008 to 2012.

The meetings were identified by doing extensive searches, using government websites, historical records, biographical materials, and media outlets. For instance, the U.S. Office of the Historian, in the Department of State, has information on visits by leading foreign leaders since 1990 which makes this a valuable source. As summit meetings were much rarer during the Cold War, there are more detailed accounts of most of them, in special volumes on summit diplomacy—for instance Stanton (2011) — in addition to the lists provided by Galtung (1964) and Thompson and Modelski (1977). The leaders have often met at major international gatherings such as the UN General Assembly, G20, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), or G8. There is sufficient attention to the leaders of the two major powers to strongly imply that they met on these occasions. They certainly were unlikely to be able to sneak away in a corner of a conference venue without the media or other participants noticing this. To be safe, information has been cross-checked with independent sources, notably government sources and academics commenting on the meetings. The summit meetings were aggregated by year to provide an index of the frequency of summits.

The dataset consists of fifteen variables:

- Soviet/Russia armed conflicts before, during, and after each year of summit meetings, similarly for U.S. armed conflicts;
- one-year lags for the six war variables;
- the number of summit meetings per year;
- types of topics discussed at the summits; and
- the number of resolutions in the UN Security Council.

These variables were repeated for a reduced dataset of the post–Cold War summits.[3]

Variables

The key variables are described in more detail in this section.

Frequency of Summit Meetings

This variable consists of the number of summit meetings held each year from 1943 through 2014 The average number of summits for years with a meeting was 2.51 with a standard deviation of 1.47 and a range from 1 to 8. The average across all years was 1.43 with a standard deviation of 1.67. The peak year was in 2010 with eight summit meetings between the President Obama and President Medvedev. The trend is shown as a descriptive

[3]*The complete dataset is a presented in a Supplementary Appendix available at http://www.pcr.uu.se/about/staff/wallensteen_p/.*

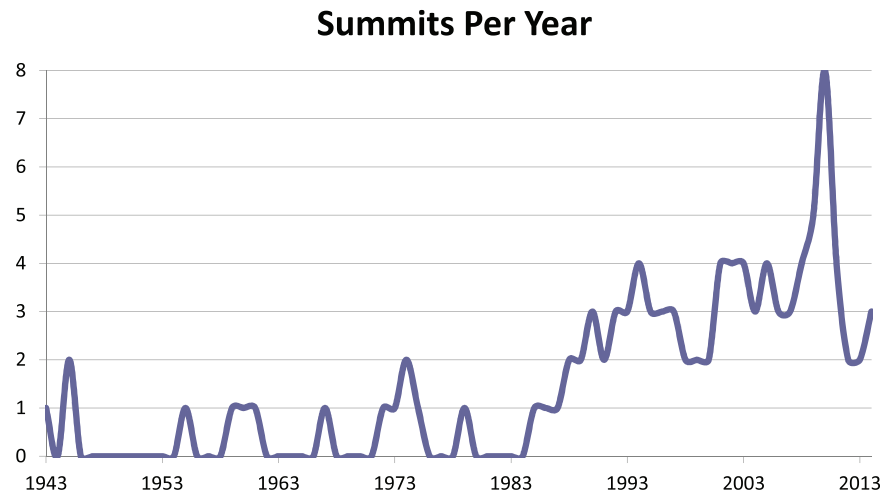

Figure 1 Summit meetings by year

pattern in figure 1 above. The frequency of meetings is used as a dependent variable in the analyses that evaluated the set of hypotheses discussed in the section to follow, 'Descriptive Patterns'.

Armed Conflicts

The data on armed conflicts are drawn from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), www.ucdp.uu.se, which records annual information on armed conflicts. It defines an armed conflict as a "contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year." When more than 1,000 are killed in a year, it is described as a war. UCDP covers the period since 1946.[4] There is no question that there was a war going on during the period 1943–1945. War frequency is coded for the year before, during, and after each summit meeting, which is straightforward since UCDP data are yearly. The frequency measure was divided into two parts: a count of the number of wars in which the Soviet Union or Russia participated and a count of wars in which the United States was involved. Although these two powers came close to war, particularly during the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962 and in Kosovo in 1999, there were no direct confrontations that could be considered as a war or an armed conflict between them. Thus, higher war counts indicate more intense conflicts, and we single out those where either of the two powers participated.

Summit Topics

Distinctions among the topics discussed were identified and gathered into three categories: symbolic, trade/economics or humanitarian, and security.

[4]*For more on this, see the website of the UCDP: www.ucdp.uu.se.*

Symbolic summits were those whose primary purpose was to sign treaties or other agreements that had been previously negotiated. This category also included meetings that were convened primarily to reaffirm the relationship between these countries. The other categories were more substantive. One consisted of meetings that focused attention largely on economic or trade issues. The category also included discussions about cooperation on humanitarian crises or natural disasters. The small number of meetings in this category led us to include these topics with summits on trade matters.

The third category, security, consisted of meetings that focused primarily on matters of arms and troops and included discussions about managing conflicts that were ongoing or on the verge of escalating. These categories are not mutually exclusive. A number of meetings could be regarded as mixed, where several issues were discussed. Rather than to include a hybrid category, we decided to distinguish summits in terms of their primary, rather than exclusive, function. Only rarely was a summit difficult to place in one of the three categories. The authors calibrated their decisions by independent coding. Disagreements about category placement were resolved through discussion.

What follows are examples of statements in each of the categories accompanied by the sources.

Symbolic

- Gorbachev and Reagan were able to sign an agreement toward eliminating short- and mid-range missiles. Not only was the agreement signed, but it appeared that the two leaders' relationship had also improved greatly (1987 Washington DC summit).[5]
- Nixon and Brezhnev issued a joint communiqué to declare that the two sides had agreed to build on the existing relationship between them toward a more cooperative one. There were also agreements for the curbing of the eventual ending of the arms race. In addition, the two sides signed agreements to further cooperate on issues of health and the environment (1972 Moscow summit).[6]

Economics and trade

- President Bush promised to seek Congressional affirmation for a trade agreement (and most favored nation status) signed between the parties. Some, in fact, believed that the Summit was really about using trade to de-escalate the Cold War and Arms Race (1991 Moscow summit).[7]
- The United States and Russia pledged further cooperation to promote democracy, security, and peace. The United State pledges to give $1.6bn in aid to Russia for humanitarian aid, to protect the environment, and to promote trade (1993 Vancouver summit).[8]

[5]*Source: http://www.upi.com/Archives/Audio/Events-of-1987/Reagan-Gorbachev-Summit/.*
[6]*Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/summit/archive/com1972-1.htm*
[7]*Sources: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/31/newsid_4582000/4582773.stm; http://www.csmonitor.com/1991/0729/29012.html; and http://2001urity-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/85962.htm.*
[8]*Sources: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/summit/archive/april93.htm and http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/85962.htm.*

Security

- The United States had high hopes for the summit but failed to reach an agreement with the USSR due to differences regarding the two sides' view of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program. While the missile reduction had been agreed to by both sides, the Summit failed to generate an agreement and was regarded as a disappointment and the miss of a historic chance (1986 Reykjavik summit).[9]
- Ford and Brezhnev worked toward and reached agreements on Missile Reductions. It appears that the United States got a better deal than they expected but the Russians also felt the deal was to their advantage. More hawkish U.S. Representatives declared that the Summit was good for National Security, which was their priority (1994 Vladivostok summit).[10]

More broadly, information about topics discussed at the summits came from a variety of sources. They included books and memoirs, encyclopedias, public archives, and media sources.[11]

UN Security Council Resolutions

UN Security Council resolutions are used to assess the degree of cooperation in the relations between major powers. The passing of a resolution in the UN Security Council requires the support of both the United States and Soviet Union/Russia. Both have the right to cast a negative vote ('the veto'), which means that no decision can be made without their support or acquiescence. Thus, the number of resolutions is an indication of their willingness to cooperate. Furthermore, the issues brought to the UN Security Council deal entirely with matters of international peace and security, thus being highly relevant for the state of the relations between these two leading states. This information is drawn from public UN sources and organized by Johansson in the form of a dataset used in our analyses (see Wallensteen and Johansson 2014, 2015).

Bilateral and Multilateral Summits

The 104 meetings are also separated in terms of the format. The meetings are categorized primarily as to whether they are bilateral (i.e., involving only the two major powers) or whether there are also others present. Thirty-eight of all the meetings are bilateral, with a marked difference between the Cold War and post–Cold War periods. In the first period, three-quarters of all meeting were bilateral, in the second only just about one quarter. Multilateral meetings during the Cold War were largely ad hoc, whereas in the post–Cold War period they took place within the UN, G8, G20, or APEC. The latter meetings are usually set by a timetable and can be considered institutionalized.

We turn now to two sets of analyses performed with these variables. The first set consists of descriptive patterns as seen in the data. The second consists of a set of five hypotheses about relationships among the coded variables.

[9] *Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/12/newsid_3732000/3732902.stm*
[10] *Source: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v16/d95*
[11] *These sources, including those used for particular summit meetings, are available and can be obtained by contacting the authors.*

Descriptive Patterns

The figures below show the number of U.S.–Soviet/Russia summits since 1943. There are stark variations over time, but at no time were there more than eight summits in a year (2010 being the peak year). Since 1985, there has been no year without at least one summit. This contrasts to the previous four decades when there were only two years with as many as two meetings (1945 and 1974) and many years without any meetings. It suggests that summit meetings have different origins and effects at different times in the relationship between the two nuclear superpowers.

The temporal dimension has been important in previous research. Both Galtung and Thompson and Modelski divide their time span into different periods. The changes in the international system sparked that differentiation, but in retrospect the differences they observed may not have been particularly sharp, as their datasets ended in 1971. Figure 1 shows that the variation in frequency of summits was minimal. This contrasts with the frequencies at the end of the Cold War.

The year 1989 is often seen as a watershed year. However, changes in the frequency of summits were apparent in the mid-1980s (see figure 1). Until that time, it was normal that there were no meetings between the leaders. In fact, during the forty-seven-year period of the Cold War, there were thirty years without any meeting whatsoever. Of the 104 meetings in our dataset, only 19 percent occurred prior to the end of the Cold War. In contrast, the post–Cold War period ushered in an 'era of summitry'. Since 1990, meetings occurred roughly every four months. There is no year without a meeting since then. In fact, there has been at least one meeting every year since 1985.

This change in summit frequency may reflect the order-changing characteristics of international relations. The reduction in global rivalry following the end of the Cold War also provided for more regular consultations among the major powers. In principle, that would contribute to creating a climate for negotiations and resolution both of bilateral issues between the two leading nuclear states and for joint global initiatives. A sharp reduction in such meetings, as has occurred recently, may be a sign of the difficulties that we currently observe in the bilateral relationship.

The first summit meeting was held in 1943 at Teheran; the last one held in the Cold War period occurred in 1989 between George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev. Meetings between a Soviet leader and a U.S. president were sporadic, with large gaps between 1945 and 1955 (i.e., the entire post–World War II period through the Korean War) and again between 1979 and 1985, a period that many at the time called the Second Cold War (see Halliday 1993). This means that 81 percent of the summits have been held since 1990, between the Russian president (sometimes the prime minister) and the U.S. presidents, beginning with George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev in May 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the related changes of regimes in Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, and Romania. Thus, summitry became a popular means of communication after the end of the Cold War and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

The upper trend in figure 2 shows the number of armed conflicts (from the UCDP) and the lower one shows the summit meetings by year. Clearly, there are many more armed conflicts than summit meetings. From an instrumental view of summits, the meeting agendas would be full if the

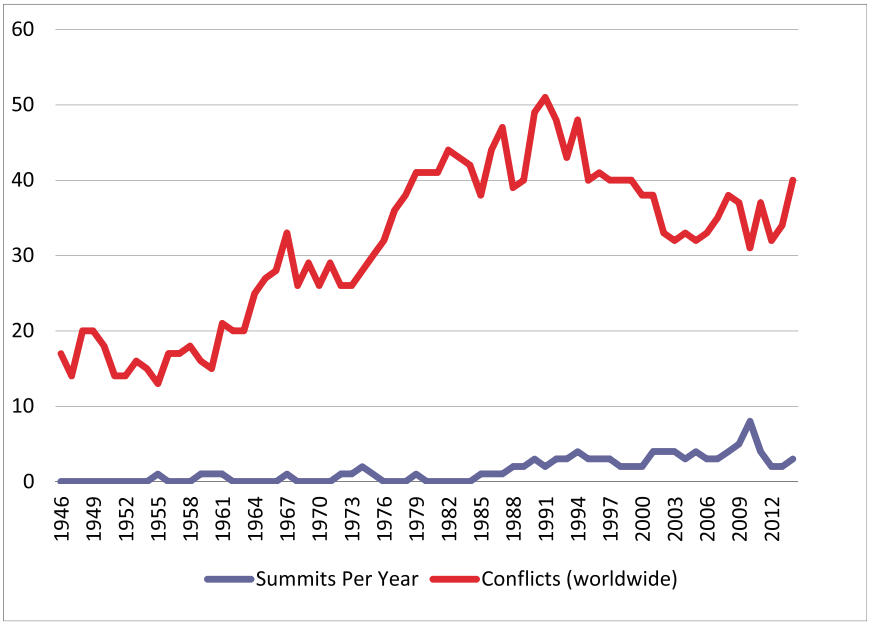

Figure 2 Summit meetings and total number of armed conflicts

protagonists engaged in managing all or many of the ongoing conflicts. And, indeed, summit meetings occurred more frequently when there were more armed conflicts: the correlation between armed conflicts and summit meeting is 0.49 ($p < 0.001$). It is unlikely however that the leaders used the summits to manage many of these conflicts.

Table 1 shows the frequency of summits attended by U.S. presidents from Truman to Obama. The key change occurred between Reagan, the last Cold War president, and George H.W. Bush, the first post–Cold War president. Bush had a stronger preference for summits than all his predecessors, but the pattern he inaugurated has continued since then suggesting it corresponds, it seems, to an underlying need for meeting. Thus, summit frequency is due more to historical periods than presidential preferences.[12]

Table 2 shows the number of summits attended by Soviet and Russian leaders. As with the U.S. presidents, the key change is between Cold War and post–Cold War leaders. The last Cold War Soviet leader, Gorbachev, attended more meetings than any of his predecessors. This probably reflects events of the time, particularly, his many initiatives on nuclear and conventional disarmament. Taken together, the data on leader's behavior on both sides suggests that summits are more likely to be driven by events and agendas than by personalities. Our results in the following section support that observation.

Summit meetings differ as well on their issue focus. In some meetings, primary attention is paid to the 'high politics' security issues, whereas in others the focus is on the 'low politics' non-security issues. We suggest that security

[12] *A common thought is that there is a difference between the first and second U.S. presidential administrations. The data give no support to that idea. For instance, Truman had only one encounter with Stalin and that was in his first term; Eisenhower had one in his first term, two in his second; Reagan participated in five summits during his second term, none in his first; his successor George H.W. Bush participated in ten meetings during his first term, but did not have an opportunity for a second term* [sic!].

Table 1 Number of summits by U.S. administrations, 1943–2014

Leader(s)	Length of rule, years	Number of summits	Summits per year
Roosevelt/Truman	10	3	0.3
Eisenhower	8	3	0.4
Kennedy/Johnson	8	2	0.2
Nixon/Ford	8	5	0.6
Carter	4	1	0.25
Reagan/Bush	12	15	1.25
Clinton	8	22	2.75
Bush	8	29	3.6
Obama, until 2014	6	24	4.0
Total	72	104	1.4

Table 2 Number of summits by Soviet/Russian regimes, 1943–2014

Leader(s)	Length of rule, Years	Number of summits	Summits per year
Stalin	10	3	0.3
Post-Stalin/Khrushchev	12	4	0.3
Brezhnev	15	7	0.5
Two leaders	5	0	0
Gorbachev	7	12	1.7
Yeltsin	8	23	2.9
Putin/Medvedev	15	55	3.7
Total	72	104	1.4

matters monopolize the discussions during periods of intense conflicts involving the superpowers. Non-security matters, primarily economic or trade issues, may be the dominant concern during periods of less intense conflict. Thus, the type of issue discussed may depend on the intensity of the conflict prior to the meeting.

As shown in figure 3, security issues were more frequently on the agenda than either symbolic or economic issues in the post–Cold War summits. There is comparatively little variation among the topics for the Cold War summits. Across the dataset, we obtain a moderately strong correlation between summit frequency and type of issue discussed ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.016$): more frequent summits occur on security than economic or symbolic issues. A comparison between frequency of security and non-security issues is near significant with means of 1.1 (security) and 0.84 (non-security) ($t = 1.68$, $p < 0.10$). There is a tendency to emphasize security issues when the Soviet Union/Russia is engaged in war prior to the summits ($r = 0.26$, $p < 0.024$; r (lagged) $= 0.28$, $p < 0.018$). This is not the case for this variable during or after the summits; nor are there relationships between type of issue and U.S. wars before, during, or after the summits.

It may not be surprising that security issues were this dominant at the summit agendas during the post–Cold War period. These topics were less sensitive as the parties transitioned from being adversaries to partners. They shared an interest in reducing expenditures on nuclear weapons, which posed a threat to their national economies and their needs to generate

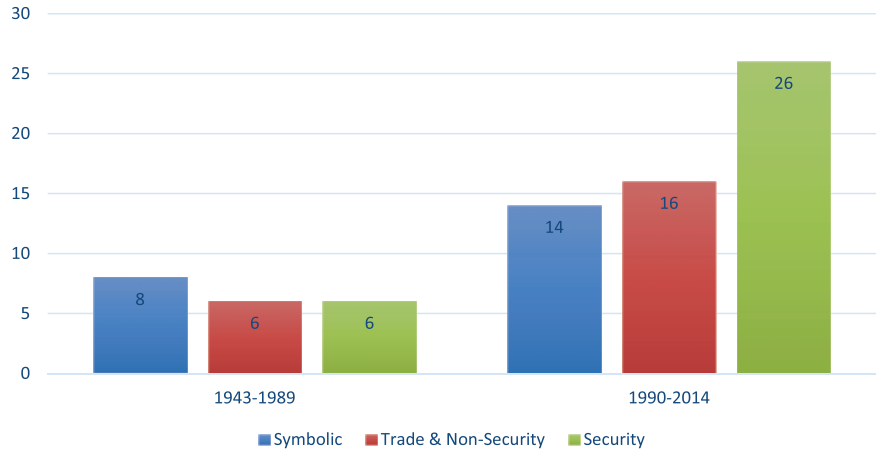

Figure 3 Frequency of types of issues, pre– and post–Cold War summits

more welfare for their citizens. They also shared an interest in reducing the existential threat posed by their nuclear arsenals.

During the Cold War period, however, they were strong adversaries. Dealing directly with security issues may well have been seen as a sign of weakness. Each party believed it faced the possibility of being exploited by the other. Thus, other issues were needed to contribute to a dialogue and reduction in tension when the leaders of these nuclear superpowers met.

Hypotheses and Results

In this section we address a set of themes about summitry. The themes we explore are presented as hypotheses. This approach in using hypotheses has the advantage of organizing our analyses in terms of proposed statistical relationships among key variables in the summit dataset. Realizing that theory on this topic is undeveloped, we offer the hypotheses as heuristic suppositions intended to stimulate further investigation. They may also contribute to the development of theories that relate summit behavior to changes in international conflict.

We begin with hypotheses about conditions for going to the summit. Then we propose hypotheses about the relationship between summits and conflict, motivations for the summit decision, and differences between bilateral and multilateral formats. For each of these themes we present the hypotheses as alternatives to a null hypothesis. The time-lagged feature of the data—conflict before, during, and after the meetings—enables us to state some hypotheses in the form of causal relationships (e.g., frequency of summits as a function of the extent of armed conflict prior to the meeting). These are analyzed with regression methods, including regression-based mediation. Others are stated as relationships between variables at the same point in time (e.g., frequency of summits as a function of the extent of armed conflict during the meeting).

The measure of armed conflicts is used as both an independent (determinant of summit frequency) and dependent (effect of summit frequency) variable. Our analyses are calculated both in the direction of "going in" (armed conflicts → summit frequency) and "coming out" (summit frequency → armed conflicts) of summit meetings. In concept, we analyze triads of

before, during, and after summit events on a yearly basis. This concept is captured in the regression and regression-based mediation analyses reported in this section. Although posing challenges for making causal inferences in the form of relationships between independent and dependent variables, the analyses capture the data and provide heuristics that suggest possibilities for inferring causal relations.[13]

When do Summits Occur?

Galtung's (1964) work suggests that the frequency of summit meetings will depend on the overall relationship between the major powers: summit meetings were more likely to occur during periods of low conflict. This finding was not supported by the Thompson and Modelski (1977) analyses: their results support the null hypothesis of no relationship between conflict and summit meetings. Thus, we put forth the following contending hypotheses.

H1a: Summit meetings occur during periods of low armed conflict for the Soviet Union/Russia and the U.S. (peace).

H1b: Summit meetings occur during periods of high armed conflict for the Soviet Union/Russia and the U.S. (war).

H1c: There is no difference between the frequency of summit meetings and amount of armed conflict for the Soviet Union/Russia and the United States.

Correlations were calculated between the frequency of summits by year and wars for the Soviets/Russians and the United States. Both variables were measured as yearly aggregates. Moderate correlations occur between these three variables for *Soviet Union/Russia* before (0.42), during (0.44), and after (0.37) the summit meetings. Similarly, moderate correlations were obtained for the United States before (0.39), during (0.37), and after (0.42) the summit meeting. When the dataset is divided into pre– and post–Cold War summits, a contrasting pattern of correlations obtains: Cold War summit correlations range from −0.02 (frequency of summits and U.S. wars after the summits) to 0.39 (frequency of summits and Soviet wars during the summits). Post–Cold War summits range from 0.65 (frequency of summits and Russian wars before the summits) to 0.80 (frequency of summits and U.S. wars after the summits). Thus, the moderate correlations obtained for the entire set of summits are accounted for by the subset of summits occurring during the Cold War. The patterns for the post–Cold War summits confirm hypothesis H1b. More summit meetings occur during periods of high armed conflict that existed before, during, and after the summit meetings.

Armed conflict is, however, only one measure of the bilateral relationship. Another variable is based on indicators of international cooperation. We are suggesting that the existence of armed conflict does not necessarily prevent simultaneous cooperation (or the other way around) as summits may have a conflict management function. In addition to the relational context described in our first set of hypotheses, the general conditions of the

[13]*An alternative would be to perform regression-discontinuity analyses. However, these analyses are problematic given the short time periods between the post-Cold War summits. They are also more suitable to experimental and quasi-experimental designs and thus present challenges to analyses of the dataset assembled for this project (see Green et al. 2009).*

international system may affect the intensity of summit diplomacy. A way to capture this relationship is to examine cooperation in the UN Security Council. As we explained above, both powers are key actors in the Council. Thus, the degree of agreement can be measured with data on agreed resolutions in the Council.

This gives us a second set of hypotheses as follows:

H2a: Summits occur in the context of international cooperation (many UN resolutions).

H2b: Summits occur in the context of international conflict (few UN resolutions).

A strong correlation occurred between the number of UN resolutions and the frequency of summit meetings (0.67). This correlation suggests that summits are held more often during periods of international cooperation, supporting H2a. However, a closer look at the data raises several questions. Both the frequency of summits and number of UN resolutions are strong predictors of *Soviet Union/Russia* wars before, during, and after the summit meetings: both variables (summit frequency and number of UN resolutions) regress significantly on an aggregate measure of Soviet Union/Russia wars (combined wars before, during, and after summits).[14] This suggests that the strong positive relationship between summits and resolutions may be accounted for by their common relationship with Soviet/Russian wars. This was evaluated with a regression-based mediation analysis (Sobel 1982). The results show that Soviet/Russian wars account for the relationship between frequency of summits and number of UN resolution (Sobel's $z = 1.47$, $p < 0.07$, one-tailed).

The mediation path is shown in figure 4.[15]

Thus, periods of war involving the Soviet Union/Russia spur summits and UN resolutions. Although summits occur more frequently during cooperative periods, as suggested by H2a, they occur also in the context of wars involving the Soviet Union/Russia, providing support for an argument suggested by H2b.

What is the Relationship between Summits and Armed Conflict?

Furthermore, and going beyond previous work, we are interested in the impact of these meetings on the conflict situations. That impact can be evaluated with our data in terms of the following set of hypotheses:

H3a: The intensity of conflict decreases from before to after the summit meetings (de-escalatory hypothesis).

H3b: The intensity of the conflict increases from before to after summit meetings (escalatory hypothesis).

H3c: The intensity of the conflict does not change from before to after the summit meetings (stability hypothesis).

Correlations between the post–Cold War frequencies of summits are comparable for the three time periods, before, during, and after the summits for

[14] *A strong correlation is obtained between number of UN resolutions and Soviet/Russian wars* ($r = 0.66$, $p < 0.0001$). *The correlation changes only slightly when controlling for U.S. wars* ($r = 0.61$). *More UN resolutions occur when the Soviets or Russians are engaged in wars.*

[15] *This single mediation model is adapted from Hayes (2013, PROCESS Model 4) and defined by two equations, one estimating Soviet/Russian wars (mediator) from number of UN resolutions (independent variable) and another estimating frequency of summits (dependent variable) from Soviet/Russian wars.*

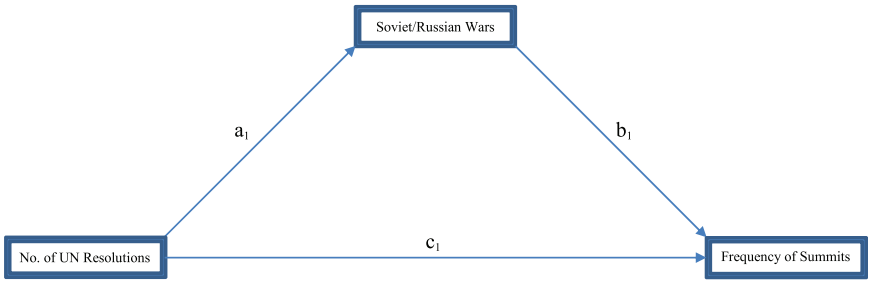

Figure 4 Mediated effects of wars involving the Soviet Union/Russia

both Russia and U.S. wars. The correlations range from 0.67 to 0.82, suggesting that levels of conflict intensity do not change from before to after the meeting. Regression analyses show that summit frequency is a strong predictor of war for the three periods. This finding supports H3c. Further, it is shown to mediate the relationship between before to after wars, suggesting that summits maintain the level of conflict intensity from before to after the meetings. There is however a relatively small difference between the parties in summit frequency and overall wars (aggregate of before, during, and after summits) with a stronger correlation for Russian wars (0.74) than for the U.S. wars (0.56). The difference between these coefficients is not significant ($p > 0.10$).

Further analyses examined the effects of summit frequency on armed conflict over time. One-year lags for post–Cold War summit frequency/wars correlations were computed: The lag was from summit frequency at time t to armed conflicts at $t+1$ year. The results show a decrease in the strength of the relationship for both parties: for Russia 43 (before), 0.50 (during), and 0.40 (after) for the lagged correlations versus 0.65, 0.70, and 0.68 for the contemporaneous correlations; for the United States 29 (before), 0.30 (during), 0.40 (after) for the lagged correlations versus 0.77, 0.77, and 0.80 for the contemporaneous correlations. All of the differences between the lagged and contemporaneous correlations for each nation are statistically significant. However, the decrease is larger for the United States than for Russia. Thus, conflict intensity decreases over time.

Are There Differences between the Soviet Union/Russia and the United States in Their Summit-Seeking Behavior?

Most of the established thinking about summit meetings has dealt with the two powers as equals. However, much Soviet and Russian thinking on international affairs points to an asymmetry between the two nations.[16] There is an often-expressed concern that the West (and in this case the United States) does not respect its counterpart (in this case Russia).[17] The summit

[16] *A typical modern example is the statement by Vladimir Putin on New Year 2014: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/11319755/Vladimir-Putins-Happy-New-Year-message-to-US-calls-for-equality.html. It is a point habitually picked up also on the Western side: http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/02/11/how-the-west-misjudged-russia-part-5-peaceful-coexistence-round-two/*

[17] *There is a literature on status anxiety among major powers that is relevant in this context. We thank Nimet Beriker for calling this to our attention. An article of relevance is Tudor (2014). The asymmetry is possibly reinforced by the ability to forum shop by the Western world. These nations may have an easier access to multilateral organizations, for instance.*

meeting is a way of achieving such respect. The respect gained may also translate into enhanced leverage within the Soviet/Russian alliances or blocs. (See Cha, 2010, for a similar observation with regard to the U.S. alliance system.) We would therefore expect that the Soviet Union/Russia would be more eager to seek summit diplomacy with the United States, under strained conditions. Our contending hypotheses are as follows:

H4a: The US seeks summits during periods of high conflict intensity (heated periods).

H4b: The Soviet Union/Russia seeks summits during periods of high conflict intensity (heated periods).

H4c: There is no difference between the Soviet Union/Russia and the US in the frequency with which they seek summits during high conflict periods.

These hypotheses were evaluated with post–Cold War data on Soviet/Russian and U.S. participation in wars. Both sets of correlations were very strong: for the relationships between Soviet/Russian wars and summit frequency, the correlations are 0.65 (conflicts before), 0.70 (during), and 0.68 (after the summit). The correlations between U.S. participation in wars and summit frequency are 0.77 (before), 0.77 (during), and 0.80 (after the summit). The correlations between these variables for the Cold War data were considerably lower, but similar for the two nations. These results support H4c: there is no difference between the Soviet/Russian leaders and U.S. leaders on seeking summits during periods of high conflict. However, differences were found between the two nations on the preferred forum as shown in the results to be reported next.

Does the Summit Format Matter?

The research on negotiating format suggests that size matters. Different effects have been shown to occur for small (bilateral) versus large (multilateral) negotiations (Druckman 1997). Direct meetings between the leaders of contending powers may increase the chance that they have time to work out matters among themselves. Preparations and discussions are more focused on achieving realizable goals. As a result, they are more likely to be sought than larger forums in times of war. On the other hand, meeting in multilateral contexts may have the effect of providing broader support for any agreements reached or new policies considered. Further, the larger consensus may motivate the leaders to ensure that implementation of any agreements is effective, thereby serving to reduce the intensity of the conflict. Thus, multilateral formats may be sought more often during periods of war. These competing arguments suggest another set of hypotheses.

H5a: Bilateral summits occur more often during periods of war than multilateral summits.

H5b: Multilateral summits occur more often during periods of war than bilateral summits.

H5c: There is no difference between the frequency of bilateral or multilateral formats during periods of war.

The dataset consists of more multilateral (65) than bilateral (39) summits. Separate analyses conducted for both types of summits show differences for the U.S. and Soviet/Russian wars. Moderately strong correlations between summit frequency and war occur for the U.S. but not for the *Soviet/Russian* wars in the multilateral cases. The frequency of summits/armed conflict

correlations for the United States are 0.62, 0.62, and 0.61 for before, during, and after the summit, respectively. Comparable correlations for Soviet/Russia are 0.05, 0.09, and 0, respectively. The correlations between bilateral summit frequency and war do not differ between the United States and Soviet Union/Russia with correlations ranging from −0.27 to 37. These findings provide partial support for H5b: multilateral summits are sought during periods when the United States but not Soviet Union/Russia is in war.

Taken together, the results suggest that summits are motivated by wars but do not reduce those wars. This relationship is based on post–Cold War summits, where summits and wars occurred much more frequently than during the Cold War. The relationship decreases over time for both nations. A preference is shown for multilateral summits during periods when the United States engages in armed conflicts. Security issues are high on the summit agenda in post–Cold War summits, particularly when Russia is at war prior to the meeting (see the descriptive patterns above). Russian wars also account for the relationship between summit frequency and international cooperation: both summits and cooperation are related to Russian wars. This pattern of results raises questions about the conflict-managing functions of summitry.

Discussion

The findings suggest that summit meetings are sought by the leaders of the two countries primarily in periods of war but do not serve to manage those conflicts. Rather they may be regarded as events that perpetuate armed conflicts, neither reducing nor increasing their intensity. As such, they are not turning points in the history of the relationship between these powerful adversaries. This supports Thompson and Modelski's conclusion that summit meetings "reflect … the stresses and strains associated with changes in the nature of the Great Power system" (1977, 368–9). They are not drivers of world politics in the sense of altering the course of conflicts. They are better construed as indicators of the state of play. The meetings are motivated by the conflicts and have little impact on those conflicts.

It is also the case that the correlations between summit frequency and wars decrease over time, particularly for the United States. This suggests the possibility for a sleeper effect of summit meetings: the short-term response to summit meetings of no change in conflict intensity diminishes over time.[18] The one-year lag covered a period with few summit meetings. The frequency of wars increased by the time that the next summit occurred. Thus, the dampening effect on conflict intensity was relatively short lived. Nonetheless, it would be intriguing to delve further into time-related effects of summits. This includes addressing the counterfactual question of what would have happened in the absence of summits? Would the conflict between these nations have entered a phase of further escalation? These questions were addressed with data collected at both the global (armed conflicts) and dyadic (summits) levels of analysis. Further work could explore the changing pattern of relationships between two sets of dyadic indicators, conflicts involving these two countries and the frequency of their summit meetings.

[18]*The sleeper effect is prominent in research on attitude change and persuasion. It is a psychological phenomenon where individuals become more persuaded by a message over time. (For a review of the research, see Kumkale and Albarracín, 2004.) This concept is relevant to summits to the extent that they are regarded as interventions that may change attitudes.*

A question of interest is why summits have virtually no impact on the short-term prosecution of wars by the Soviet Union/Russia or the United States. Three possible explanations can be suggested. One is the need for caution. Many of the diplomats writing in a book titled "US-Soviet Summitry: Roosevelt through Carter" (McDonald 1987) comment on the anxiety surrounding planning and preparation for a summit meeting. The fear was that small mistakes, or unexpected rampages from the other leader, notably Khrushchev in this case, could have tipped the tensions in the direction of the nuclear-use option. This explanation seems plausible for the Cold War summits, which were infrequent and fraught with the anxiety that accompanies risk taking in a nuclear age. It is relevant to note the nervousness surrounding the Reagan–Gorbachev summit at Reykjavik in 1986. The leaders were on their own most of the time. A result was an "outrageous" double zero proposal made by Reagan and accepted in principle by Gorbachev. Reagan was encouraged to retract or modify it. Following the meetings, bureaucrats in the Ministries of defense, foreign affairs, and intelligence, took over, leading to the successful Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement. Summits are not well-suited for negotiating details but do on occasion trigger turning points in relationships between adversaries (Druckman, Husbands, and Johnston 1991).

Anxieties may be somewhat less intense for the post–Cold War summits, although somewhat similar pressures existed. Many more summits occurred after the Cold War as the leaders of these countries attempted to adjust their relationship from Cold War enemies to post–Cold War partners in the midst of involvement in a variety of armed conflicts. Clearly the relationship between these nations changed with the end of the Cold War. This was an important discontinuity in their strategic rivalry. It was also a discontinuity in their relative status as world and regional powers. These changes are also reflected in the abrupt change in frequency of summit meetings and may have implications for the way that time series analyses are performed.

A second explanation is that summits are largely symbolic exercises. They may galvanize the bureaucracies to speed up a negotiating process conducted by diplomats at lower levels. As Weihmiller (1987) notes, they may be action-forcing events. This happened following the Reykjavik summit (see also Weihmiller and Doder 1986). Thus, little is likely to change around the summit meeting, as our analyses show. Changes in conflict-related behavior may, however, occur later. This is suggested to some extent by our findings on lagged effects. The correlations between summit frequency and participation in war decreased over time. Thus, as noted above, summit impacts may take some time to manifest. It would be interesting to trace the path of conflict-related activities that occur from one summit meeting to the next.

A third explanation is that summits provide opportunities for leaders to get to know one another. The gradual building of good will is likely to improve relationships between the leaders and the nations they represent. An increased willingness to compromise in negotiation was shown to result from enhanced liking and familiarity among role players in a simulated conflict (Druckman and Broome 1991). But, of course, these face-to-face meetings can also backfire. Familiarity is a two-edged sword. Getting to know an adversary better may have positive or negative effects; it may counter preconceptions or reinforce them. Our finding showing that post–Cold War summits were motivated by war suggests that many (but not all) of the meetings may have reinforced negative perceptions of each leader's

counterpart.[19] Thus, it is not surprising to find that the intensity of the conflicts remained the same for the leaders of both nations from before to during to after the meetings. Each of these explanations remains to be explored in further research on summitry.

Our findings about differences between Soviet/Russian and U.S. behavior around the summits are also interesting. Soviet/Russian participation in wars accounted for the relationship found between international cooperation and summit frequency. This suggests that summits do not occur in cooperative periods, as would be suggested by the bivariate correlation between cooperation and summitry. Both cooperation and summitry were motivated by Soviet/Russian participation in wars. This finding is consistent with the more general relationship found between frequency of summits and conflict intensity. Such an outcome qualifies that finding by showing that Soviet/Russian participation in wars had more influence on summit-seeking behavior than U.S. participation in wars.

Further, we found that the Soviet/Russian leaders paid more attention to security issues than did the U.S. leaders when conflicts were intense prior to the summit meetings. These leaders sought and prepared for summit meetings during periods of more intense conflict, particularly after the Cold War. These were also periods during which they promoted, along with other national leaders, international cooperation. Thus, the dual motives of seeking international respect and prosecuting wars were a hallmark of their approach to foreign policy.

For the U.S. leaders, a preference was shown for multilateral fora when conflict was more intense. For these leaders perhaps, the expected gains of multilateral participation outweighed the costs of the less binding results compared to bilateral meetings (Druckman 1997). Seeking alliance coordination and legitimacy during periods of conflict, U.S. leaders may have been eager to forego the risks of bilateral confrontations with Russian leaders. The larger fora may ameliorate the criticisms for instigating conflict likely to be hurled at them from their Russian counterparts at the summit meetings. These motives remain to be investigated with data from interviews conducted with U.S. foreign policy decision makers.

Finally, we have also observed that there is a fear in bureaucracies that summit meetings will get out of hand. During the Cold War that was connected to the nuclear dangers, but even today there are accounts of reluctance on the part of foreign policy establishments for engaging in summit diplomacy. This is something worth exploring. It would suggest, for instance, the meetings between leaders in smaller countries could have a strong impact on the future of their relations. These leaders are less influenced by major powers when they meet with each other and thus have more room for maneuver. An example is given by the summit meeting between the presidents of Ecuador and Peru starting a process that eventually led to a solution of the century-old border conflict between the two countries (Palmer 2001). In other words, when there are considerable interactions going on over many levels and dimensions, the summit meetings become less important, but at times when interaction is restricted (as was deliberately the policy during the Cold War) the attention to them becomes more important. This observation suggests that it would be useful to specify the

[19] *Some summits may have the opposite effect such as those between Yeltsin and Clinton and between Gorbachev and Reagan.*

conditions under which summit meetings play an important role in international relations.

Returning to the question posed in the title, "Summit Meetings: Good or Bad for Peace?, we now have an answer: summits are neither good nor bad but the conditions under which they could be construed as good or bad needs to be specified by further research.

A number of other questions for further research emerge from these results. One is to examine the intensity of armed conflicts in terms of the number of casualties. In this study, we focused only on the frequency of these conflicts. Another question concerns the relationship between summit frequency and arms control treaties: are summit meetings instrumental in leading to negotiations between Russia and the United States on controlling arms? A third is whether similar results would be obtained with other pairings of nations such as China and the United States or China and Russia? And, fourth, the focus of this study on the conflict-managing functions of summits may be extended to issues of conflict resolution: what role do summits play in long-term relationships between adversaries? These questions can be addressed with new variables (i.e., conflict intensity, treaties, and relationships) and datasets (i.e., summit meetings with China).

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