

**AGE OF THE OFFERED HAND: THE CROSS-BORDER PARTNERSHIP OF PRESIDENT GEORGE H. W. BUSH AND PRIME MINISTER BRIAN MULRONEY (McGILL-QUEENS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009)**

*McGrath worked with Canadian journalist Arthur Milnes, a fellow at the Queen's University Centre for the Study of Democracy who also worked on Prime Minister Mulroney's recently released Memoirs, to produce a special collection of speeches examining the uniquely close and productive relationship between George Bush and Brian Mulroney.*

**1989: McGRATH-MILNES INTRODUCTION** | The groundwork for the Bush-Mulroney partnership was laid during the first Mandate of the Mulroney Government between 1984 and 1988, when Bush served as Ronald Reagan's Vice President. During this time, the two leaders would consult often but away from the prying eyes of the news media and over-protective officials.

As the Prime Minister later disclosed to Doro Bush Koch in an interview for her book, *My Father, My President*: "When I became leader of the Conservative Party in Canada in 1983, I went down to see President Reagan before the '84 Election—and I privately went out to the Naval Observatory (the vice president's official residence) to see your father. It was a tradition I maintained throughout the second Reagan term. From the very beginning of our relationship, I found him to be a very interested and interesting personality."

"I found him easy to talk to, gregarious and possessed of a great sense of humor..." Bush observed of the Canadian leader as their friendship developed. "Brian demonstrated that it was possible to be both a strong leader for Canada and a true friend of the United States. When we had disputes on trade or environmental issues, he never backed away from placing Canada's interests first. But even when we had differences over policy, our personal relationship helped us talk about them frankly, and allowed us to try to solve them privately, without public posturing." [1]

Their friendship deepened throughout the second Reagan term to the point that Mulroney was among the very first foreign leaders to track President-elect Bush down at the Houstonian Hotel the night of his White House victory on November 8, 1988. "I was in the middle of my own election campaign, which was held on the 21st of November that year. We had a long and detailed talk that night about what we'd do together if I won my second term—which, happily, I did."

Accordingly, shortly after his Inauguration on January 20, 1989, the 41st President made Ottawa the site of his first foreign visit—flying to Canada on February 11th for what he called a "typical brainstorming session" with Mulroney and his team. During that round of consultations, the Prime Minister made a particularly noteworthy suggestion regarding policy towards the Soviet Union. "Brian asked whether, as part of an effort to counter Gorbachev's public relations offensive, a presidential trip to Eastern Europe might help," Bush recalled. "If I went armed with a comprehensive plan for dealing with the area, and a sense of how to use the symbolism involved, it could be quite a public relations coup of our own—and not necessarily bad for Gorbachev. I thought the trip was a great idea." [2]

In the privacy of his personal journey, Mulroney was himself putting similar thoughts to paper after the Bush visit to Ottawa. "President Bush made a very favourable impression on his first trip here," Mulroney

P.O. Box 27701-516  
Houston, Texas 77227

(Office) 713.660.0982  
(Cell) 713.240.6260

jim@mcgrathbegala.com  
www.mcgrathbegala.com

"The substantive discussions with President Bush took place over breakfast—bacon, eggs, and coffee—on the outdoor terrace beginning about 7:30 a.m. They broke up some four hours later, interrupted only by appearances by National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and Chief of Staff John Sununu. We covered the waterfront: bilateral matters—acid rain, trade irritants, FTA application problems, etc.—and international affairs, where the president was eager to review events in Colombia; how Canada would cooperate in certain aspects of the national strategy to be announced a few days later; our recent rebuff of Panamanian President Noriega; Canada's intention to seek membership in the Organization of American States (which I had not mentioned publicly in Canada); and a follow-up of his major issues flowing from the Paris Summit."<sup>[4]</sup>

As readers will see, the most crucial matters on the bilateral agenda for the two leaders were the battle against acid rain and the implementation of the Canada-U.S. FTA. In his first speech to Congress, delivered the night before his arrival in Ottawa, Bush had already signaled the willingness of his new Administration to go farther than the previous President and Administration in moving towards an effective treaty on acid rain between Canada and the U.S.

On the global agenda, the new U.S. administration was still preparing their approach to the Soviet Union, which formed the basis for most of the talks between Bush and Mulroney in 1989 in the field of international affairs.<sup>[5]</sup> During a late Spring conversation between the two men, in fact, Mulroney suggested that the United States revisit the "Open Skies" proposal first introduced some 30 years before during the Eisenhower administration. Some administration advisors fought the concept, which would offer both countries aerial inspection rights at each other's military installations, as "old hat," but Bush overruled them and embraced the idea. "I didn't feel that Open Skies was such a bad idea—it looked like a no-lose proposition from our side," he later confided. "Gorbachev, committed to glasnost, would find it hard from a public-relations standpoint to reject it...I thought we had a lot to gain."<sup>[6]</sup>

While no one could have predicted it at the time, the Berlin Wall would itself crumble by the time 1989 was over. In the aftermath of this dramatic and earth-shattering event, the President sent a private message to Gorbachev through Mulroney when the latter visited the Kremlin for talks with Gorbachev in late November. "Tell him Brian, I will not posture on the Wall," Bush said.<sup>[7]</sup>

Mulroney himself has written that Bush's actions—the President's refusal to rhetorically strut triumphantly on the ruins of the Berlin Wall while facing Moscow—was arguably the 41st President's finest moment.<sup>[8]</sup> More objective voices from the academic arena agree with the former prime minister's assessment. "While his (Bush's) choice to speak only ceremonially on the German question raised objections from some," Professor William Forrest Harlow of Texas Tech University concludes, "Bush's lack of policy-making speech ultimately helped to make sure that Germany was not pulled from the path of democracy. This deliberate silence helped coordinate the efforts of U.S. allies and foes alike, and ultimately proved the correct choice in Bush's rhetorical management of the fall of the Berlin Wall and eventual German reunification. The Cold War ended without its final battle having to be fought."<sup>[9]</sup>

Upon his return from Moscow, Mulroney and Bush dined together November 29th as part of the President's consultations for his historic Malta summit with Gorbachev just a few days following. With the dramatic events in Berlin still playing out, the question of what would become of Germany was very much front and center on everyone's mind. "(Brian) told me that Gorbachev was concerned that (German Chancellor Helmut) Kohl was trying to make 'end runs' around the allies," Bush later observed. "His sense of Gorbachev's view was that 'the Germans could forget about unification'... 'People have died eating

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Houston, Texas 77227

(Office) 713.660.0982  
(Cell) 713.240.6260

jim@mcgrathbegala.com  
www.mcgrathbegala.com

MCGRATH BEGALA

unripened fruit,' (Gorbachev) warned."<sup>[10]</sup>

—McGRATH, MILNES

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Houston, Texas 77227

(Office) 713.660.0982  
(Cell) 713.240.6260

jim@mcgrathbegala.com  
www.mcgrathbegala.com