

PERINA, RUDOLF V.: Files, 1987-1988 – REAGAN LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

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PERINA, RUDOLF V.: Files, 1987-1988

European and Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC

Biography

Rudolf Vilem Perina (Czech: *Rudolf Vilém Peřina*) was an American diplomat who specialized for more than three decades in European East-West relations during and after the Cold War with a particular emphasis on Central and Eastern Europe. He was also part of the United States diplomatic negotiating team at the Dayton Accords following the dissolution of the former Republic of Yugoslavia.

Perina was born on January 3, 1945 in the town of Tabor in what is today part of the Czech Republic. His father's family owned a large lumbermill serving Central Europe. His mother's family included prominent civil servants including mayors and council members. His mother's family was subject to Nazi reprisals after the Germans invaded and occupied the Sudetenland and then all of the Czech Republic. His maternal grandfather and great uncle were executed on June 10, 1942 as part of a coordinated purge of Czech nationalists and public figures that culminated in the razing of the town of Lidice.

Perina and his parents fled Czechoslovakia following the 1948 Communist takeover of the government. Rudolf's mother paid a Croat border smuggler to transport her son in January 1950 to the border into Austria and eventually to Zurich where his father had escaped. The family lived as refugees in Switzerland and Morocco before immigrating to the United States via Le Havre, France in 1951. Perina's family settled in Astoria, New York.

In 1955, the family moved to Cleveland, Ohio and Perina obtained his U.S. citizenship via his parent's naturalizations. Cleveland has a large Czech population making the Perinas feel comfortable and both his father and mother began to achieve better jobs and a more comfortable life.

The toll of family disruption resulted in his parent's divorce in 1961. Perina moved with his

mother to Seattle, Washington where she remarried. Perina attended Franklin High School where he graduated as the valedictorian in 1963. Offering Perina a full tuition scholarship, Perina chose the University of Chicago where he graduated in 1967 with a B.A. degree in history. Perina earned an M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in European history at Columbia University. Perina entered in 1967 and finished his dissertation in 1977 after he already was an active Foreign Service Officer. Perina's university days coincided with the height of the 1960s student protests. While at Columbia, Perina experienced the university shut-down and sit-ins. He also benefited from the world wide youth movements when he was hired by a film production company to consult and interpret for the filming of a documentary about the 1968 reform movement in Czechoslovakia known as the "Prague Spring". This led to the topic of his Ph.D dissertation: "Intellectuals and Political Change in Czechoslovakia: A History of *Literarni noviny* and its Contributors, 1952-1969."

As part of his studies for his dissertation, Perina was awarded a Foreign Area Fellowship to do research in Munich, Germany based at the library of Radio Free Europe, 1970-1972. He was in Munich during the 1972 Olympics and the terrorism incident there.

Returning from Europe to finish his dissertation, Perina found that there were few academic jobs available in the U.S. Encouraged by the example of foreign-born Henry Kissinger, he took the foreign service exam and passed. His first posting was as a consular officer in the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa, Canada, November 1974-1976. At this post, Perina gave Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn his first US visa.

In 1977, Perina was assigned to study Russian which he mastered and was then posted to Moscow from 1978-1980. He experienced the great swing in US-Soviet relations when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Upon witnessing the confrontation with 1st Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Korniyenko, he said later he was "shown for the first time how unashamedly people can lie in diplomacy."

He then worked at the U.S. Mission in West Berlin in 1981. Perina served as interpreter between US/Soviet Ambassadors Arthur Burns and Piotr Abrassimov, then Vyacheslav Kochemasov during their twice-yearly social lunches. He also witnessed the tensions in Poland. The country was moving toward martial law, and Perina describes that by the end of his time in Berlin, he and his colleagues were witnessing six or seven Polish plane hijackings to West Berlin a year.

Perina then worked at the U.S. Mission to NATO in Brussels from 1985-1987, as political officer and deputy US representative to the organization's political committee. The group was handling three simultaneous negotiations, on Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), and Nuclear and Space Talks (SDI issues). During this assignment, Perina first met Reagan and worked on a number of visits by President Reagan to the North Atlantic Council.

From 1987 to 1989, Perina was part of the White House National Security Council (NSC) European and Soviet Affairs Directorate. Just prior to his arrival there had been a purge of NSC staff due to the Iran Contra scandal. Perina was brought in by Colin Powell who had been hired by new National Security Advisor Frank Carlucci to run the NSC differently. Perina had the

Soviet portfolio, which included working on Reagan's Brandenburg Gate speech which included the famous line, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Perina attended the 1988 Moscow summit meeting and served as one of the notetakers for the several "one-on-one" meetings between President Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. Perina also continued his interest in Eastern Europe touring most of the Soviet controlled states at that time. Perina left the NSC in the spring of 1989 as new President George H.W. Bush and his new national security advisor Brent Scowcroft hired new personnel.

From 1989 to 1992, Perina was deputy chairman of the U.S. Delegation to the Vienna negotiations on Confidence and Security Building Measures in Europe (CSBM), held under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

From 1993 to 1996, Perina was the Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, serving with the title of Chargé d'Affaires and working with a downsized staff. The country was under UN sanctions and the economy was so burdened that the Embassy handled all matters in cash. Perina worked with fellow State Department diplomat Richard Holbrooke as liaison to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic during the negotiations to end the Yugoslav conflict. They had a dozen meetings with the Serbian ruler and then forced one on one meetings with the Serbian strongman, as "they found more engaging in that capacity."

Perina also participated in the talks held in Dayton, Ohio to try to find a diplomatic solution for the Balkan Wars. Perina met with many of the leaders of the other break-away republics at this time, like Ibrahim Rugova, the elected president of the Republic of Kosovo and Macedonia's Kiro Gligorov.

From 1996-1997, Perina served as Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs. The majority of his time was spent helping to execute the Dayton Accords from Washington, DC while John Kornblum travelled to implement them. This included the outer wall of sanctions that enraged the Serbs and did not satisfy Kosovar Albanians – they would form the Kosovo Liberation Army. Perina also worked with European nations at this time in the expansion of NATO alliances.

Perina was confirmed as Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova, serving from 1998 to 2001. He studied Romanian and reviewed his Russian before starting. His job was to help Moldova develop into a successful, autonomous nation. It was one of the earliest to privatize land, helped by a major USAID project completed under Perina. The US gave over \$50 million in assistance, the third highest amount given to a former Soviet republic, because of its cooperation and its efforts at reform. Several hundred Moldovans were sent to the US every year on exchange programs and a competent Peace Corps contingent was in Moldova.

He was in Moldova during the Transnistria War, and though the US was not one of the three official mediators (those being Russia, the Ukraine, and the OSCE), the heads of the OSCE mission were American because the Moldovan government wanted to counterbalance their former rulers. Perina met with Moldovan Presidents Petru Lucinschi and then Vladimir Voronin on policy toward Transnistria, even initiating dialogue with the breakaway eastern region's so-called president, Igor Smirnov.

Perina became the U.S. Special Negotiator for Nagorno-Karabakh and Eurasian Conflicts in September 2001. The ambassador-level job was Washington D.C.-based but involved a great deal of travel. He was the lead U.S. representative to international efforts to resolve four conflicts in territories of the former Soviet Union: Transnistria (Moldova), Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia/Azerbaijan), Abkhazia (Georgian ethnic minority) and South Ossetia (Georgian break-away republic).

From 2004 to 2006, Perina served as deputy director of the State Department's Policy Planning staff. He worked under both Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. During much of this time he was, as most of the State Department, focused only on Iraq and the Middle East.

Under Powell, Perina went to sub-Saharan Africa with an expert to start policy consultation with the African Union. There he became aware of the spreading Islamic radicalization via madrassas staffed by Middle Eastern teachers. He also became involved in the the Darfur controversy as Secretary Powell was the first to call this a genocide

Perina officially retired on April 30, 2006, after 32 years in the foreign service.

But Perina continued to serve in the State Department becoming the Chargé d'Affaires at U.S. embassies for Armenia (2007), Iceland (2010) the Czech Republic (2013) and Slovakia (2015). Perina was the Scarff Visiting Professor of International Relations at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin in the fall of 2010. He was also on the Council of Advisors of the Wendt Museum, a research institute and archive of the Cold War located in Culver City, California. Perina was fluent in four languages: English, Czech, Russian and French and knew some Romanian.

Perina met his wife, Ethel Ott Hetherington, at an off-campus class while the 1968 Columbia student protests had shut the school down. They married in Salzburg, Austria on May 26, 1972. They have two daughters, Kaja and Alexandra and four grandchildren.

Perina resided in the Washington, DC area until his death on June 14, 2018.

In 2007, Perina completed a long and interesting oral history of his life and career for Frontline Diplomacy: the Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. It is available online through the [Library of Congress](#).

Scope Note

The Rudolf Perina collection consists of two series: SERIES I: Subject File, and SERIES II: Chronological File.

CONTAINER LIST

SERIES I: SUBJECT FILE

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**[American Association for the Advancement of Science – Resolution of
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