

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

The Reagan Doctrine:

An Analysis of the President's role

in the formulation and execution of American Foreign Policy

vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, 1981-1989.

A dissertation submitted by Ciarán John Ryan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines American foreign policy towards the Soviet Union in the 1980s, and seeks to determine President Ronald Reagan's relationship to the guiding principles of this policy, both in their formulation and execution. It is proposed that America's strategy towards the USSR during this period could be encompassed by five key ideas, which this study names 'The Reagan Doctrine'. These are: 1) Peace through Strength—the need to restore military parity with the Soviets, both in terms of conventional and nuclear power; 2) That the Cold War was a moral struggle, and needed to be articulated as such by the President; 3) That reliance on the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction was not a sound basis for national security, and hence the need to build a missile defense system; 4) That the Superpowers should negotiate not just to limit, but rather reduce extant nuclear stockpiles, with the ultimate goal of total nuclear abolition; and 5) that the Superpowers should diminish reciprocal distrust, and ultimately achieve not a détente, but a lasting peace.

This study, more so than any other to date, has incorporated recently released archival material from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library to help determine Reagan's beliefs relating to and management of American Soviet policy. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with some of the key surviving figures of the Reagan Administration, including former Secretary of State George P. Shultz. Finally, a complete review of published work on this topic, both academic and popular, including books and journal articles, was undertaken by this researcher. The result is an original study on the Reagan Doctrine that cuts across the multi-disciplinary fields of international relations, and presidential and diplomatic history, and provides a revised perspective on both the Reagan presidency, and the end of the Cold War conflict.

Certification of Dissertation

I certify that the ideas, research, analyses and conclusions in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. Furthermore, I certify that the work is original and has not been submitted for any other award.

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Introduction

Topic Statement

The 'Reagan Doctrine' was the fundamental set of principles guiding American foreign policy towards the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the 1980s. Traditionally limited to the definition: 'that the United States would help anticommunist counterinsurgencies wrest their respective countries out of the Soviet sphere of influence',¹ this study expands the classification to encompass the entire Reagan foreign policy towards the USSR, in all its aspects.² The central focus of this dissertation is an analysis of the origins and implementation of that doctrine, which derives its name from the 40th President of the United States of America (USA), Ronald Wilson Reagan, whose presidency from 1981-1989 saw a seismic change of course in Superpower relations.

When Reagan was inaugurated President in 1981, the prospects for ending the perilous nuclear standoff between the USA and the USSR seemed bleak. Reagan inherited from President Jimmy Carter a policy of 'détente' that was in tatters. Carter had attempted to replicate the success of President Richard Nixon's record of détente by meeting with Soviet leader Leonid

¹ As defined in Henry Kissinger's *Diplomacy*, (New York: Touchstone, 1994), p. 774.

²As Chester Pach describes in his article 'The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism and Policy' a broader interpretation of the term is permissible, because the doctrine 'was discovered, rather than proclaimed'. The 'discovery' was made by Charles Krauthammer, of *Time Magazine*, who first coined the term in an 1 April 1985 piece based on Reagan's State of the Union address that year. Krauthammer honed in on Reagan's call for support of anti-communist resistance fighters, but as Pach argues, the Reagan Administration's goals were far more extensive than this. See *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington, March 2006), Vol. 36, Iss. 1, p. 75. For a review of Reagan's role in aiding counter insurgencies in Afghanistan, Nicaragua and Angola see James Scott's 'Reagan's Doctrine? The Formulation of an American Foreign Policy Strategy', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: Fall, 1996) Vol. 26, Iss. 4, p. 1047. In this article, Scott argues: 'The Reagan Doctrine was "Reagan's" in the sense that the President's strategic "vision" was its foundation and because he selected key upper-level officials who shared his outlook and more directly produced the initiative. Moreover, President Reagan clearly made some key decisions, (e.g., to start the Nicaragua policy in 1981, to expand the Afghanistan operation in 1985 and 1986, and to provide covert aid to the Angolan rebels in 1985). However, the foreign policy bureaucracy and Congress were equally critical in each case.'

Brezhnev and negotiating an arms control agreement—the SALT II Treaty. However, the treaty was to be left unratified by the US Senate, as Carter was forced to withdraw it from consideration following a return to Cold War hostilities by the USSR. Beginning with the 1977 Soviet deployment of the deadly accurate ‘SS-20’ nuclear missile aimed at Western Europe and culminating with its 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, the USSR’s aggressive policies of intimidation and subversion meant that Superpower relations were practically non-existent when Reagan became ‘leader of the Free World’ in 1981.

While the Reagan presidency has ultimately received a ‘mixed report card’ when it comes to an evaluation of its performance on domestic and foreign policy issues, there is a growing consensus that when it comes to US/Soviet relations, the administration deserves high marks.³ After all, from 1985-1988, Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev met annually, renouncing nuclear war and signing the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 1987; an agreement that saw for the first time in history the standing down and destruction of thousands of nuclear weapons. An arms-race had been replaced with arms-reduction; a policy of confrontation with co-operation; and instead of the Superpower leaders attacking each other with harsh rhetoric, the two seemed to have become good friends. The entire world breathed a collective sigh of relief as the threat of a ‘Nuclear Armageddon’ seemed ever more remote as the decade of the 1980s came to a close.

³ See Hugh Heclo, ‘The Mixed Legacies of Ronald Reagan’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: December 2008), Vo. 38. Iss. 4, p.555; Alan P. Dobson, ‘The Reagan Administration, economic warfare, and starting to close down the Cold War’, *Diplomatic History*, (June 2005), Vol. 29, Iss.3, pp. 531-556; Joyce Barnathan, ‘The Cowboy Who Roped In Russia’, *Business Week*, 13888 (21 June 2004), p. 39; Anne R. Pierce ‘The American Foreign Policy Tradition: Inspiration for Troubled Times’, *World and I*,(April 2004), Vol. 19, Iss. 4.p. 284.

Thesis

Ronald Reagan: actor, union leader, corporate spokesman, governor, candidate, President—enigma. Just who was America's 40th President? In the 1980s he was probably the most recognizable person on the face of the Earth; show a picture of him from the First World to the Third, and people could identify him as the leader of the United States. Yet, this man who was known to billions remained something of a mystery to those closest to him. Even those who had worked side-by-side with him for years were puzzled by the personality of one who was so warm and gregarious, yet also so aloof. His own children struggled with trying to understand just who their father was, and even his wife Nancy—the closest person to him in his life—wrote of a 'wall' that she herself was unable to penetrate.⁴ The contradictions and paradoxes of the man make the study of Reagan and his presidency a difficult task indeed.

Firstly, one must deal with the popular image of Reagan as a lazy, somewhat dim-witted actor who was probably struggling with the onset of dementia. Evidence to support this view is not in short supply. Throughout the 1980s public gaffes and the 'tell all' accounts of former staffers painted an unflattering picture.⁵ Reagan, according to this view, knew 'next to nothing' about policy details, preferred to watch *The Sound of Music* instead of reading his briefing book,⁶

⁴ 'Ronnie', Nancy wrote, was a 'loner. Although he loves people, he often seems remote, and he doesn't let anybody get close. There's a wall around him. He lets me come closer than anyone else, but there are times when even I feel that barrier'. Nancy Reagan, *My Turn: The Memoirs of Nancy Reagan*, (New York: Random House, 1989), p.106.

⁵ For a summary of these books see Gerald F. Seib and Alan Murry, 'Portrait of Reagan Painted by Kiss-and-Tell Books Shows a Commander Who Rarely Takes Command', *Wall Street Journal*, (New York: 13 May 1988),p.1.

⁶ This anecdote was related by James Baker, who had prepared a substantive briefing book for the Williamsburg Economic Summit held in 1983. When Baker, the following morning, found that his book had been left untouched by Reagan, he was astounded. Reagan explained, 'Well, Jim, the *Sound of Music* was on last night'. This anecdote, as cited in Lou Cannon's *Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1990), p. 56-57, received wide circulation and helped to characterize Reagan as an out of touch leader. However, the historical record shows that Reagan had been thoroughly briefed, with the President recording in his diary 'another hour briefing on the Summit. Enough already!' (Entry for 26 May 1983). Furthermore, Reagan's performance at the Summit showed a mastery of detail that impressed those gathered, with Margaret Thatcher describing him as being in 'radiant form', as quoted in Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), p.485.

napped during Cabinet meetings, confused historical events with Hollywood movies, did not know staffers names,⁷ and treated his job as though it were a ‘perpetual performance’, even in private. The ‘happy-go-lucky’ President, according to this view, merely coasted along, telling jokes, and reading his lines: a triumph of style and acting over substance and ability. But how could this ‘amiable dunce’, as diplomat Clark Clifford derided him,⁸ have been such a seeming success?

Reagan’s life was truly an extraordinary journey of drama and achievement, an embodiment of the ‘American century’⁹. Born into poverty in Middle America in 1911, the son of an unemployed alcoholic worked his way through college, achieved his dream of becoming a sports radio announcer, and wound up signed to Warner Brothers as a Hollywood star. After many years on the silver screen, Reagan became the six-term President of the Screen Actors Guild, negotiating with the studio heavy-weights agreements on wages and working conditions that remain in force to this day. A corporate spokesman for General Electric throughout the 1950s, Reagan became a sought after speaker across the country, who warned about the evils of high taxes and ‘red tape’, as well as the growing menace of communism. Elected Governor of California in 1966, he served two terms, overseeing a complete overhaul of the state’s welfare system, and turning record deficits into surpluses. From there, he was elected President of the United States in 1980, and was re-elected in 1984 winning 49 out of the 50 states. When he left

⁷ Reagan generally did not use peoples’ names with whom he worked, preferring to call them ‘you fellas’. This led to them feeling that they were merely the ‘hired help’ and were dispensable. Some theorize that Reagan’s background of working on movie sets, with ever changing casts and crews, made him not get too attached to people.

⁸ Clifford’s remark was said at a Washington cocktail party, and stuck when it was published in James M. Perry’s article ‘For the Democrats, Pam’s Is the Place for the Elite to meet,’ *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 October, 1981.

⁹ Dan Rather, *Ronald Reagan Remembered*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2004), p. xi.

office in 1989, he had the highest approval rating of any outgoing President. Just how did he do it?

Reagan's critics would charge that he was a talented actor, and in a country where 'image is everything', being a skillful speaker and looking good on the screen can take you anywhere, including the White House. Reagan's craft was acting: he was handed a script, memorized his lines, and then performed them. The key to being a good actor is delivering those lines so convincingly that the audience accepts the fantasy before them, and forgets that what they are watching is, in fact, an 'act'. Reagan's acting skills continued to be employed when his movie career came to an end: as the chief spokesman for General Electric, Reagan personified the interests of American business, and repeated their motto, "Progress is our most important product" thousands of times over the years. It was rich businessmen who largely funded Reagan's 1966 campaign for Governor, and in a system of government where someone with no legislative experience can immediately become the Chief Executive, Reagan's electoral success was due, in large part, to pulling off a well rehearsed performance. Once in office, so the theory goes, the acting did not stop: Reagan was handed his script to read on television, and memorized clever one-liners prior going before the press. Repeat the successful formula for a Presidential campaign and take the hands-off management style from Sacramento to Washington and in this way, the White House years are a re-run of the California years—albeit before a much larger audience. But is this theory valid?

That Reagan was an actor and used those skills as a politician cannot be doubted. That Reagan was far better delivering a speech than he was holding a press conference or conversing one-on-one, also cannot be doubted. But the underlying assumption of this theory—that Reagan was a mere a mouthpiece for others who behind the scenes were running the show—warrants

investigation. ‘When you talk to Reagan’, Henry Kissinger once said to a group of historians, ‘you sometimes wonder why it occurred to anyone that he should be President, or even Governor. But what you historians have to explain is how so unintellectual a man could have dominated California for eight years, and Washington already for nearly seven’.¹⁰ An explanation of Reagan’s role as President is indeed necessary, and no more so than when it comes to evaluating his role in the formulation and execution of American foreign policy towards the USSR; for as the passage of two decades demonstrates, it is this aspect of his presidency, more so than any other, that stands out as being of the greatest historic significance.

This dissertation, therefore, investigates Ronald Reagan’s relationship to the key ideas that guided America’s defense and foreign policy towards the USSR during his presidency. Having studied American—Soviet policy of the 1980s for the past nine years, it is the author’s belief that the ‘Reagan Doctrine’ was composed of five key ideas that guided the Reagan Administration in its dealings with the USSR. These were:

- 1) That ‘Peace comes through Strength’, and deterring Soviet aggression required not just aiding counterinsurgencies around the globe, but also rebuilding America’s military, both in terms of its conventional and nuclear capabilities;
- 2) That the Cold War was a ‘moral struggle’, and needed to be articulated by the President in such terms;
- 3) That the theory of ‘Mutual Assured Destruction’ was a deficient guarantee for international security, and hence the need for Missile Defense Technology;

¹⁰ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 765.

- 4) That nuclear weapons should be abolished, and the process should begin by replacing arms limitation treaties with ones that actually reduced nuclear stockpiles; and
- 5) That a nuclear standoff between the Superpowers was keeping the world on the precipice of disaster, and mutual mistrust needed to give way to dialogue and cooperation between Moscow and Washington in the cause of peace.

Central Questions and Propositions

Leaving aside the controversial questions surrounding the ending of the Cold War—who ‘won it’ (or deserves the most credit)—this thesis will focus solely on the key ideas of America’s Soviet policy of the 1980s, as framed by the ‘Reagan Doctrine’. The key questions of this dissertation are as follows:

- 1) What was Reagan’s relationship to the five ideas (mentioned above) that guided American--Soviet policy?
- 2) Whose ideas were they? Did Reagan author any of them, and if so, who influenced him?
- 3) Were these ideas present during the previous Cold War administrations?
- 4) When it came to the implementation of these ideas during his presidency, did Reagan sit back and allow his subordinates to implement them, or was he involved in their execution?
- 5) Did Reagan direct the apparatus of government to pursue his agenda?

- 6) Did Reagan intervene at pivotal moments to see that the goals that he articulated were implemented as he wished?
- 7) And, in the final analysis, who was the driver of US--Soviet policy: Reagan, or his team of foreign policy experts?

The Need for a Revisionist Reagan Study

What originally prompted this investigation is the fact that Reagan was, according to former Secretary of the Treasury Donald Regan, completely disengaged from the other great passion of his presidency—reforming the tax code and cutting back on ‘big government’. Regan, who wrote of his experiences in his tell-all book *For the Record*,¹¹ portrayed a President who could not have been more ‘hands off’ in his approach. As Regan records, upon being named over the telephone Secretary of the Treasury by then President-Elect Reagan in 1980, Regan did not see his new boss until his inauguration—over two months later. Even after taking the helm at the Treasury, Regan received no one-on-one talk with the President, leaving the new Secretary in the dark as to what he was supposed to accomplish. Terming it a ‘guesswork Presidency’, Regan said: ‘From the first day to the last at Treasury, I was flying by the seat of my pants. The President never told me what he believed or what he wanted to accomplish in the field of economics. I had to figure these things out like any other American, by studying his speeches and reading the newspapers.’¹² When Regan moved to the closest position to the President—that of Chief-of-

¹¹ Donald Regan, *For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1988).

¹² *Ibid.*, p.142.

Staff—he did not observe a change of style and recalled the President handing him back the ‘substantive plan of action’ for his second term ‘without spoken or written comment.’¹³

If Reagan was so detached when it came to his domestic goal of slashing income taxes and cutting ‘red tape’, how engaged was he with his foreign policy passion of confronting the USSR? Donald Regan’s view of the President prevailed throughout the 1980s and 1990s as accepted wisdom, but the release of three Reagan primary source materials has called for a revision of this popular image.

Starting in 2001, the release of Reagan’s hand-written radio addresses, letters and his presidential diary, has necessitated a re-evaluation of the widely held image of Reagan described above. Hoover Institute fellows Kiron Skinner and Martin and Annelise Anderson discovered hundreds of Reagan’s original drafts for his radio addresses of the 1970s, and published many of them in their book *Reagan: In His Own Hand*.¹⁴ Delivering an average of five addresses a week between the years 1975-1979, Reagan had to spend a great deal of time researching and writing. These primary source materials give the reader a doorway into Reagan’s mind: one can see in the crossed out sentences and the substituted phrases Reagan wrestling with his own thoughts, and seeking to articulate as best he could, the ideas he wished to express. Their publication caused something of a stir, and as *Newsweek* magazine reported, the book did ‘more to counter the image of Reagan as a manipulated dolt than probably any other publication’.¹⁵ Furthermore, the fact that Reagan used the addresses to help launch his presidential campaigns of 1976 and 1980, meant that he tackled a number of issues that he expected to make operational as President,

¹³ Ibid., p. 267.

¹⁴ Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, Eds, *Reagan In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan That Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2001).

¹⁵ Ibid. p.i.

including his viewpoints on US--Soviet relations. As such, they serve as something of a 'blue-print' for the Reagan presidency.

Another publication, by the same editors, further changed prevalent perceptions of Reagan. *Reagan: A Life in Letters*,¹⁶ published in 2003, showed for the first time that Ronald Reagan was a prolific letter writer, having authored over 10,000 letters over 72 years of correspondence. The letters are addressed to people from all walks of life, from ordinary citizens, to celebrities and political leaders, and deal with a wide range of issues, allowing the reader to gain a greater understanding of the core beliefs that Reagan held, including those concerning America's Soviet policy. What has struck people reading these letters is Reagan's gift for penmanship. As George Shultz states in the introduction to the work:

Ronald Reagan is widely known as 'The Great Communicator'. Well, we hardly knew how great a communicator he really was...Now we have this volume of letters, based on a stream of personal correspondence with a large, diverse set of people. Anyone who writes knows *what an effort it is to assemble your thoughts and commit them to a piece of paper*. Writing is an exercise in communicating with yourself as well as with others. *A good writer is almost by necessity a good thinker*.¹⁷ (Emphasis added).

Furthermore, the 2007 release of *The Reagan Diaries*,¹⁸ which cover Reagan's presidential years, sheds even more light on Reagan's day-to-day management of policy in the White House. The first President to keep a daily diary since the 19th century, Reagan's purpose was not to give an introspective account of his day, but rather to create a 'memory log' that would help him and his

¹⁶ Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, Eds, *Reagan: A Life In Letters*, (New York: Free Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Ibid. p. ix.

¹⁸ Ronald Reagan, Douglas Brinkley (ed.), *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

wife Nancy reminisce about the presidency when it was all over. As such, it often reads as a ‘laundry list’ of things that Reagan did throughout the day. Nonetheless, there are glimpses of the ‘inner man’ and, perhaps more importantly, ‘contrary to the contemporary public image’ the diary ‘demonstrates a huge capacity for work’ on behalf of the President, ‘matched by an ability to master complicated briefs on both foreign policy and the economy’.¹⁹ These newly released materials, as well as recently de-classified documents at the Reagan archives, call for a revision of the Reagan presidency. This thesis, however, will limit itself to re-examining his role vis-à-vis the USSR.

Literature Review

Primary Sources

The first primary sources evaluated for this dissertation have been the memoirs of the key players in this presidential and diplomatic history, beginning with Ronald Reagan. The former President penned a personal account of his political career in his 1990 book, *An American Life*.²⁰ The book provides considerable insight into Reagan’s thinking, and provides lengthy excerpts of his correspondence with the Soviet leadership. Reagan’s right-hand man for foreign policy, George Shultz, wrote the second most important work on American Soviet policy in his 1993

¹⁹ John Matlin, ‘The Reagan Diaries (Review)’, *Journal of American Studies*, (Cambridge: Dec. 2007), Vol.41, Iss. 3, p. 708. Also, it should be noted that as one who has seen the original diaries at the Reagan library, and have spoken in person to Mike Duggan, the chief archivist on the diary and Douglas Brinkley, the editor of the publicized version, I can attest to the veracity of the 2007 release. While there could be some argument that Reagan at times wrote aware of history’s future gaze, no attempt was made afterwards by the President or any other to alter the original manuscripts.

²⁰ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

book, *Triumph and Turmoil: My Years as Secretary of State*.²¹ Over 1,000 pages long, it is invaluable for its ‘behind the scenes’ details, particularly its description of the Superpower summits.

Since American--Soviet policy did not occur in a vacuum, but in opposition and response to Soviet policy, an examination of literature from a Soviet perspective was also undertaken. In terms of primary source autobiographies, Mikhail Gorbachev’s 1995 book, entitled *Memoirs*²², is of the greatest importance. In it, the former Soviet leader gives his reasoning for his twin reform projects of *glasnost* (opening) and *perestroika* (restructuring). Unlike Reagan’s and Shultz’s accounts, Gorbachev does not attempt to give a point-by-point history of those years, but nonetheless his explanations have provided a clearer understanding of how American actions were perceived in the Kremlin. In particular, the effects the American 1983 deployment of Pershing II nuclear weapons in Europe, which Gorbachev described as a ‘literal pistol to the head’ that ‘had to be removed’,²³ is of great significance, as are his descriptions of the relationship between himself and President Reagan. Also, the memoirs of the two Soviet foreign ministers during the 1980s, Andre Gromyko and Eduard Shevardnadze, rounds off Gorbachev’s history and gives further context to this research.²⁴

The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989, which contains every single press conference, interview, speech and statement from the President during his two terms, was

²¹ George P. Shultz, *Triumph and Turmoil: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1993).

²² Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (London: Doubleday, 1995).

²³ Ibid. p.444.

²⁴ Andrei Andreevich Gromyko, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom* (New York: Sinclair-Stevenson Ltd, 1991).

an extremely useful primary resource for this investigation. Having completed an entire review of these papers, examining all statements related to Soviet policy, this researcher assembled a chronology of the Reagan years, pinpointing every major decision and address. Over 100 pages long, this time-line enabled this researcher to conduct a thorough review of administration paperwork at the Reagan Presidential Archives in California.²⁵

This investigator spent close to three months examining primary source material relating to Reagan's Soviet policy at the Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California. First perused was the entire collection of Reagan's radio addresses from the 1970s. The 'Handwriting File' contained all speeches that Reagan personally wrote as President, or those which he edited, which were numerous. These demonstrate clearly the President's deliberation and involvement, including in foreign policy matters. The documents belonging to the National Security Council relating to the USSR give insights into where Reagan's team wanted US policy to go in areas ranging from missile defense, to the Grenada invasion, to the Superpower Summits. And the files belonging to Reagan's key staff members—Donald Regan, Bud McFarlane, Colin Powell, and so on—provided invaluable information about how events were viewed as they unfolded, especially those documents that spoke of the aims of US policy and the 'talking points' they wanted the President to adopt.

Furthermore, as this thesis investigates Reagan's Soviet policies in the context of the entire Cold War period, archival research was undertaken at the Presidential Libraries of Richard M. Nixon (Yorba Linda, California) and John F. Kennedy (Boston), as well as at the National Archives in Washington D.C.

²⁵ For a scaled down version of this time-line, see Appendix A.

While attention is not drawn to the fact throughout the thesis, it should be noted here that this work utilizes numerous documents never before published, and goes into greater analysis of the Superpower Summits, based on the transcripts, than any other publication.

Secondary Sources

As an emerging area of historiography, secondary sources on Reagan's Soviet policy are still relatively few. The vast majority of these over the past several years have been read by the author, who remains convinced of the originality of this dissertation.

Peter Schweizer's *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union*,²⁶ gives an incomplete, and therefore inaccurate, account Reagan's foreign policy. In Schweizer's view, the Reagan Administration was working with single-minded determination to bring about the end of the USSR, and hoped to achieve this by an arms race that would cripple the Soviets economically. For example, in *Victory*, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) that Reagan announced in 1983 terrified the Soviets not so much for its strategic value—in that it could aid a first strike capability—but more because it would have cost the USSR billions of dollars to create their own defense system. No mention is made of the fact that Reagan immediately offered to share any new technology with the Soviets. In addition to SDI, the Reagan Administration is credited in *Victory* for slashing the hard currency of the USSR by driving down the price of petroleum. They achieved this, so the theory goes, by plotting with Saudi Arabia. Shackled by an arms race, a weak currency and Reagan's support for Poland's

²⁶ Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994).

Solidarity movement, the ‘wall came tumbling down’ and with it a 70 year old empire. No doubt the issues Schweizer raises did impact on the USSR, but it was a system with grave economic problems before Reagan assumed office. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union had so many convergent forces—Gorbachev, Yeltsin, the ‘peace movement’²⁷ and so on—that it is almost impossible to say with any certainty that Reagan’s attempts to ‘sabotage’ the USSR played the decisive role. In addition to this, Schweizer’s book concentrates on the Weinberger outlook on the USSR,²⁸ which is very much of the early 1980s and not one that Reagan held by the end of his second term in office when he was attempting to assist Gorbachev with his reforms.²⁹ In the end, this book fails to substantiate the theory that the Reagan Administration had a consistent strategy to bring down the USSR, and purposefully ignores evidence that gives an alternative view of Reagan—as a man who in addition to holding the arrows of war, also extended many olive branches of peace to the Soviets.

Paul Lettow’s *Ronald Reagan And His Quest To Abolish Nuclear Weapons*³⁰ is a step in the right direction, but focuses solely on Reagan’s nuclear abolitionist views, to the exclusion of all others. Reagan’s arms race strategy was his attempt to ‘build up’ in order to ‘build down’, as he believed that a restoration of American military might would place the US in a better bargaining position with the USSR, from which nuclear arms reduction agreements could be

²⁷ ‘People power’ in Eastern Europe, Mary Kaldor argues in ‘Who Killed the Cold War’, was a vital component of the Cold War’s end, which is, in her view, entirely overlooked by most observers. See *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, (Chicago: Jul. 1995), Vol. 51, Iss. 4, p. 57.

²⁸ Caspar Weinberger was Reagan’s Defense Secretary from 1981-1987. Generally regarded as the chief ‘hawk’ in the administration, he frequently resisted any overtures to the USSR and still considered them a hostile threat as late as 1990, as evidenced by his book, *Fighting For Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990).

²⁹ By the final years of his presidency, Reagan would cross out in speech drafts any direct criticism of the Soviets, as material in the Reagan archives demonstrates.

³⁰ Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan And His Quest To Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005).

reached. At the height of the ‘nuclear freeze movement’, Reagan was portrayed by his critics as a dangerous warmonger, an out-of-touch Cold War Warrior, who could lead the world to nuclear war. This image of Reagan, as a political cowboy who loved nuclear weapons persists, when in reality the record shows that he detested nuclear weapons and desired to see their total abolition. Stereotypes die hard—particularly political stereotypes—and therefore Lettow’s history of Reagan’s anti-nuclearism is a much needed correction to a serious misconception. The work is also useful for its original research and its assessment of previously classified National Security documents. However, it is not a comprehensive history of Reagan’s overall Soviet policy, and it concludes with the Reykjavik Summit of 1986, two years before Reagan’s visit to Moscow.

Beth A. Fisher wrote a political science work entitled, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*.³¹ This book deals with the apparent turnaround in Reagan’s attitude to the Soviet Union in 1984. Fisher looks at three explanations for this change: domestic considerations, forces within the administration, and Reagan’s abhorrence for nuclear war. Fisher analyses positions one and two, dismisses them and settles on number three. In disagreement with Fisher’s position, it is this author’s view, having read the relevant historical documents, that it was a combination of all three elements. Furthermore, the Reagan ‘reversal’ was more a change of emphasis in rhetoric than of policy, as the evidence shows that Reagan had made numerous diplomatic overtures to the USSR prior to 1984 and had expressed his hope for substantive arms reductions as early as March 1981.³² The book, however, like Lettow’s,

³¹ Beth A. Fisher, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

³² See Interview with Walter Cronkite of CBS News, 3 March 1981; *The Public Papers of President Reagan*. (Hereafter referred to as *PPPR*).

supports the argument that Reagan's ideas, and not those of his subordinates, guided US Soviet policy.

Jay Winik's book, *On the Brink: The Dramatic Behind the Scenes Saga of the Reagan Era and the Men and Women Who Won the Cold War*³³ concurs fully with Fisher's second position (mentioned above). For Winik, it was forces within the administration that were responsible for the President's foreign policy. Winik singles out four individuals as the true authors of the Reagan Doctrine. These were neo-conservative Richard Perle (a Pentagon official), Jeanne Kirkpatrick (UN Ambassador), Elliot Abrams (a State Department official) and Max Kampelman (a human rights campaigner). This author's reading of history is different: obviously there were numerous people behind the scenes working at the formulation and implementation of American foreign policy during the 1980s, as there is at any time. However, the research shows that while Reagan may have been a 'delegator' in many respects, he refused to relinquish his right to guide foreign policy—best exemplified in his firing of Secretary of State Alexander Haig, who wanted total control. Winik's work is important in helping understand how key ideas were hashed out within the Reagan Administration, but fails to adequately include how Reagan inspired these ideas and modified them at times.

John Lewis Gaddis, in his latest book on the Cold War, entitled, *The Cold War: A New History*,³⁴ gives a greater emphasis to the role played by Reagan in the ending of the Cold War, but places him among a cast of other 'actors' who helped bring this about. In a fresh look at the 1980s, Gaddis emphasizes the role played by individual leaders whose vision helped propel

³³ Jay Winik, *The Dramatic Behind the Scenes Saga of the Reagan Era and the Men and Women Who Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1996).

³⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

international relations into a new era. In Poland, there was Pope John Paul II, and Solidarity leader Lech Walesa, who emphasized Polish national and religious identity over communist control; in Great Britain, there was the ‘Iron Lady’, Margaret Thatcher who, in Gaddis’ estimation, used *words as weapons* as Churchill had done;³⁵ in China, there was Deng Xiaoping, who brought market reforms, placing economic pragmatism over Marxist ideology; in the USSR, there was Gorbachev, a leader so unlike his predecessors in his willingness to reform; and in the United States, there was Reagan. Gaddis covers the main aspects of Reagan’s Soviet policy: the rhetoric, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and the Superpower Summits. Gaddis’ scholarly work, however, is not exhaustive: the Reagan/Gorbachev partnership is covered in 14 pages, as the entire book is meant to be a brief overview of the entire Cold War history. While it is satisfying to see a major historian emphasize the role played by individuals,³⁶ this work does not ask the main question of this thesis: what was the role that Reagan played in the formulation and execution of American Soviet policy?

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Francis Fitzgerald’s *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*³⁷ represents the ‘amiable dunce’ school of thought. Fitzgerald’s book focuses on Reagan’s missile defense program, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which she sees as an expression of American Protestant beliefs about American Exceptionalism. SDI, therefore, was more an attempt to protect the ‘new Eden’ from the evils of the ‘godless Superpower’ than it was about addressing the fact that there was no defense against

³⁵ Ibid. ,p. 216.

³⁶ Other authors have singled out other leaders for the ‘victory’ of the West in the Cold War, such as Matthew Spalding, Frank Gregorsky et al, who while giving credit to Reagan and Pope John Paul, acknowledge the key roles of five others: Winston Churchill, Harry S. Truman, Konrad Adenauer, George Meany, and Whittaker Chambers. See ‘The Cold War’s Magnificent Seven’, *Policy Review*, (Washington: Winter 1992), Iss. 59, p.44.

³⁷ Francis Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

incoming nuclear weapons. The Reagan/Gorbachev Summits are almost tagged onto her work on ‘Star Wars’, and the 499 page book devotes less than 7 pages to the Moscow Summit. How Reagan transformed US--Soviet relations is not made clear in this work. She quotes Reagan in Moscow as saying: ‘There is no way I can really explain how I came to be here.’³⁸ For Fitzgerald, Reagan was merely ‘present at the creation’ of a new world order. This dissertation’s evaluations on Reagan and his engagement with the Soviet Union are therefore substantially different from Fitzgerald’s.

Edmund Morris’s *Dutch*³⁹ is more a work of literature than it is of history. Morris won acclaim for his book *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* and was therefore selected by Reagan to be his official biographer, and was granted unprecedented access to the White House. Unfortunately, the book lost a lot of credibility when Morris felt the need to insert himself into the text as a fictional character, with fake footnotes to boot. Morris did this to try and de-code the enigma of Reagan, and his book does offer interesting insights into Reagan’s personality and his *modus operandi*,⁴⁰ but it offers no real analysis of Reagan’s involvement in US--Soviet policy. Instead, ‘Morris’s *Dutch* tells much less than we’d like to know about Reagan and much more than we care to know about Morris’.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid. p.457.

³⁹ Edmund Morris, *Dutch*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

⁴⁰ Morris explained the need to make himself a ‘spectator’ in the text saying: ‘Try and imagine how difficult it would be to explain in an orthodox fashion...how it could be that his very ordinary person, with these embarrassing lapses of knowledge—this often boring person—could in a fraction of a second mutate into a magical, world-changing statesman, and then move back to ordinariness again. The only way you can describe this kind of mystical transformation is in terms of witness, to have seen it happen. That’s why the spectator is so essential.’ As cited in John W. Sloan ‘Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan’ *Social Sciences Quarterly*, (Sep 2000) Vol. 81, Iss.3, p.895.

⁴¹ Robert D. Schulzinger, ‘Where’s the rest of him? Edmund Morris’s portrait of Ronald Reagan’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: June 2000), Vol.30, Iss.2, p. 388.

Former US ambassador to Moscow, Jack F. Matlock, wrote a memoir/history of Superpower relations during the 1980s in his book *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*.⁴² Though covering the same period of history as this thesis, the arguments differ over the aims of Reagan's Soviet policy. Matlock advocates for 'the arms race was sending Russia broke' argument saying Reagan had to 'convince the Soviet leader that his country would not be allowed to win an arms race.' Reagan's team certainly considered this, but in this author's estimation, for Reagan the arms race was about matching strength for strength in order to achieve deterrence and therefore encourage arms reduction negotiations. Useful for its behind the scenes details (as when Matlock drafted a letter to Gorbachev and Reagan copied it out in hand so that no-one else would question its authority) this book fails to present a comprehensive US foreign policy and Reagan's role in it.

Most recent in the evolving literature on Reagan and the Soviet Union is journalist James Mann's 2009 *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*.⁴³ Mann, author of a bestselling account of George W. Bush's war cabinet,⁴⁴ here takes the reader through various stages of Reagan's presidency: his relationship with Richard Nixon; his interactions with Soviet expert Suzanne Massie; the Berlin Wall address; and the Washington and Moscow Summits. Throughout it all, Mann paints Reagan as one willing to go against the advice and criticism of the 'foreign policy establishment' and his own conservative base, in his willingness to embrace Gorbachev as an agent of reform. Important in its thesis that Reagan was 'no-body's puppet', it is different from this study in that it takes a largely thematic approach, while this thesis looks more closely at

⁴² Jack Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004).

⁴³ James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War*, (New York: Viking, 2009).

⁴⁴ James Mann, *The Rise of the Vulcans: The Rise of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004).

tracing key ideas to Reagan and the implementation of these through actual documentary evidence.

From the research to date, periodical and journal articles continue to offer analysis of Reagan and his foreign policy team that fall short of the substantive research required to tackle the issue. Take for example *The Economist*, which featured Reagan on its cover on 10 June 2004 under the banner, ‘The man who beat communism’. The author summed up Reagan’s defeat of communism as follows:

If a re-armed America stood nose-to-nose with its adversary and firmly but politely refused to budge, he reckoned it would win the day. He was right. By the year Reagan left the White House, the Russians had lost Eastern Europe; by the next year, they had abandoned communism.

Just how a military arms buildup caused the USSR to fall the author does not explain—it simply happened. The author also gives no example of Reagan ever contemplating that his policies would cause the Soviet Union to fall overnight.

Though it clearly took the co-operation of both the US and the USSR, numerous scholars relegate Reagan as a mere spectator to Gorbachev’s reforms. Diane B. Kunz, writing for the *American Prospect*⁴⁵ contends that ‘the real story of the end of the Cold War was the Soviet Union’. In her analysis, Reagan merely had to accept ‘the gift that was given’. Vladislav M. Zubok’s opinion only varies slightly. Writing for the *New Republic*,⁴⁶ his praise for Reagan extends only so far as he co-operated with Gorbachev. Zubok contends that the US arms race and SDI were only ‘bit players’ in the drama, and it was rather the ‘new détente’ that was responsible for helping to facilitate ‘Gorbachev’s radical overhaul of Soviet domestic and foreign

⁴⁵ Diane B. Kunz, ‘Way Out There in the Blue’ *American Prospect*, (22 May, 2000), Vol.11, Iss.12 p.11.

⁴⁶ Vladislav M. Zubok, ‘Soft Power: Reagan the Dove’, *New Republic*, (21 June, 2004) p.11.

policy'. This, he says, 'brought the USSR crashing down'. Brookings Institute Senior Fellow Raymond L. Garthoff concurs, going so far as to say that the Reagan Administration actually 'delayed' the end of the Cold War through their 'policy actions on the margin'.⁴⁷ While arguments about who 'won' the Cold War are not included in this thesis, what will be made clear is that Reagan was no mere onlooker to Soviet changes, but was rather a participant. The transformation of relations between the Superpowers took many years to achieve and the Reagan Administration worked extremely hard to bring this about.

Interviews

If Ronald Reagan were alive today, he would be 99 years of age. This is stated to demonstrate that the availability of people from the Reagan era for interviews is limited due to the passage of time. For while the 1980s may not seem like a period too distant, time does catch up quickly. For example, a member of the Reagan White House in 1981 who was aged just 55, would now be 84. Many have reached a period in their life where old age precludes them giving an interview. And some key figures, like Caspar Weinberger and Michael Deaver, have passed on. Nonetheless, this researcher was privileged enough to be granted lengthy interviews by four of the most notable Reagan aides: George P. Shultz, Richard Perle, and Annelise and Martin Anderson.

George P. Shultz, former Secretary of State, granted almost an hour of his time for an in-depth interview on Reagan's Soviet policy at his office in the Hoover Institute, on the campus of Stanford University. The interview, conducted on 5 October 2007, covered a wide range of topics, all focused on the five key areas under review for this thesis. Though 87 years old at the

⁴⁷ Raymond L. Garthoff, 'Present at the Transformation: Shultz, Reagan and Gorbachev', *Arms Control Today*, (October 1993) Iss. 23, p.8.

time, Shultz's memory was sharp and he answered all the questions that were prepared. Shultz allowed himself to be recorded, and the transcripts of the conversation were given to him for his confirmation.⁴⁸

Annelise and Martin Anderson, former Reagan aides and biographers, also gave generously of their time. In both 2006 and 2007, the Andersons gave this researcher lengthy interviews—two hours in 2006 at the Reagan Library in Simi Valley and three hours in 2007 at the Hoover Institute. While not allowing a recording of these conversations, extensive notes were taken at the time, and a Memorandum of Conversation followed. Furthermore, discussed in detail was the focus of this study, and agreement was made that Reagan's Soviet policy could be encapsulated in the five key ideas proposed herein.

Richard Perle, former Pentagon official and the 'intellectual heavyweight' of the Reagan Administration, was also enormously helpful. Graciously granting an hour and a half of his time at his home in Chevy Chase, Maryland, Perle's conversation was expansive. Perle permitted himself to be video recorded, and this interview, as well as those with Shultz and the Andersons, has helped make this thesis a new contribution to the field.⁴⁹

Research Design: Methodology and Analytical Framework

The analysis undertaken in this study has been framed by articulating the central and ancillary questions presented on pages 6 and 7 of this chapter. These questions have allowed this researcher to focus the study on issues largely left unresolved or even untreated in other

⁴⁸ To read the entire transcript, see Appendix B.

⁴⁹ For the transcripts of Perle's interview, see Appendix C.

scholarly (and more popular) works on the Reagan presidency to date. They assist this researcher in the task of ‘analytically interrogating’ relevant source materials, many of which have only recently become accessible—as earlier explained. In particular, such a framework allows this researcher to propose a set of argumentative positions that are assessed in light of the evidence gleaned from a directed and in-depth perusal of both long extant and newer source materials. At all stages of the analysis undertaken in the study, this researcher has maintained an ‘open ended approach’ so as to avoid *a priori* conclusions or arguments that would limit or bias the scholarly nature of this endeavor. While presenting a revisionist interpretation of Reagan, hagiography is not the intention or result of this research: rather this author has critically evaluated the historical and academic record, to achieve an objective conclusion that is defended by the evidence presented herein.

In terms of political theory, this thesis proposes that the Reagan Administration’s Soviet policy began with a classic attempt of *Realpolitik*.⁵⁰ Though President Reagan spoke in Wilsonian terms⁵¹ about the triumph of democracy and foreign policy as an extension of personal morality, his actions were nonetheless based on matching strength with strength. An *imbalance of power* led America to seek equilibrium.⁵² In terms of presidential historiography, this researcher argues that Reagan’s presidency mirrors both that of Harry S. Truman and Richard

⁵⁰ A German word which means ‘real politics’, and used to describe a foreign policy based on ‘realism’ and a balance of power, it rejects idealism. President Nixon and Henry Kissinger are viewed to have been the chief practitioners of this term in American diplomatic history.

⁵¹ President Woodrow Wilson, who served in office from 1913-21, argued that international relations should not be based on the concepts of ‘balance of power’ or ‘self interest’, but rather nations should act in a ‘collective security’ manner, upholding international law and promoting liberty. The *League of Nations* was to be the embodiment of Wilson’s beliefs.

⁵² This dichotomy between idealist rhetoric and realist deeds, was also shown in the case of Reagan the crusader for a military arms buildup in his first term, and Reagan the nuclear abolitionist in his second. The ‘paradox’ can be explained, Douglas J. Hoeskstra explains, by the fact that Reagan believed that realism would take the US to a

Nixon. Reagan, like Truman, sought to confront the USSR through a combination of military and diplomatic measures, with the goal of ‘containing’ its aggression. Like Nixon, however, Reagan valued face-to-face negotiations with the Soviets, which he believed could result in nuclear arms control and lessen (if not eliminate) the hostility between the two nations.

Thus, in researching this dissertation through an archival/documentary approach, reference materials comprised of primary and secondary sources have been utilized. As mentioned above, the *Public Papers of Ronald Reagan* has been instrumental in re-constructing the President’s unfolding attitude towards the USSR. Memoirs, speeches, letters, diary entries and memos from the Reagan Archives have been used to piece together how the principal figures of that history understood their place in the unfolding drama of the Cold War’s end. Newspaper articles, journals and periodicals have also played a useful role in providing insight into how events were viewed at the time and how the perspective that comes with time had led to historical revisionism.

Why Reagan Is Misunderstood

Before examining Reagan’s role in the formulation and execution of American--Soviet policy, it is necessary to address some persistent myths and/or misconceptions about the 40th President of the United States. These are so prevalent and ingrained that before proceeding to delve into the central focus of this study, it is required to understand why until recently, it has been very hard for political scientists/historians and commentators, to take Reagan seriously. Only by first

position where an idealist outcome could be negotiated. See ‘Presidential Beliefs and the Reagan Paradox’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: Summer 1997), Vo. 27, Iss. 3, p. 429.

recognizing these reasons, explaining them and to a certain extent challenging them, can the discussion on Reagan be conducted objectively and intelligently.

The first major reason that the generally held view of Reagan is likely at such odds with the historical record may be that while Reagan took the presidency seriously, he did not take himself seriously. Reagan passed out jars of jellybeans at Cabinet meetings, told endless jokes, and perhaps most significantly, told self depreciating jokes.⁵³ The image of Reagan as a lazy Chief Executive who only worked a few hours a day and napped the rest of the time is not true—Reagan did not nap, and after his 9-5 workday, he spent most of the evening going through his ‘homework’—boxes of paperwork that he had to review.⁵⁴ Still, the image of Reagan as lazy was not helped by the President telling jokes that fed that perception; like his joke that one day they would hang a sign in the Cabinet room that read, ‘President Reagan slept here.’ Reagan used humor as a valuable tool as President—it lightened the mood, and deflected criticism (after all, it is hard to be angry at someone when you are laughing with them). Still, while making yourself the ‘butt’ of your own jokes may beat your critics to the punch, it still means that you and your critics are in agreement.

The second major reason why Reagan may have been misunderstood is that Reagan was prone to the foibles of old men, and with the later revelation of Alzheimer’s disease, people connect the two, and believe that Reagan was detached from reality, and therefore from his

⁵³ In the words of Edwin Meese III: ‘He had a great sense of humor. He would tend to leaven his conversation with stories about Hollywood, or with jokes, and a lot of people took that as a lack of seriousness, whereas for him it was a way of putting people at ease. He took his job seriously, but he didn’t take himself seriously’. As quoted in Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober, *Reagan: The Man and His Presidency, The Oral History of an Era* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), pp.-56-57.

⁵⁴ Ed Rollins, the president's 1984 campaign director, said Reagan did his homework "religiously." "The President has a clean-desk attitude. If you give him four hours of reading, he'll do it all. He won't talk about it. But you'll see his notes on page 40.' As quoted in Paul Kengor, ‘Comparing Presidents Reagan and Eisenhower’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: Spring 1998), Vol. 28, Iss. 2, p. 366.

presidency. For a man holding one of the most demanding jobs on Earth, Reagan performed remarkably well—there had not been a two-term President since Eisenhower, and far from being destroyed by the office like Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Carter, Reagan seemed to ‘make it look easy’ and left the presidency without having visibly aged. Considering that he did this for eight years while being in his 70s, is testament to his stamina and good health. But, the media was not that forgiving: Reagan, like most men in their eighth decade, sometimes had trouble finding the right words to a tricky question, forgot peoples’ names, or confused events. (Once, the jetlagged President even fell asleep while the Pope was addressing him!) When one considers the fact that the time period from the beginning of his candidacy to the end of his presidency was almost ten years—a decade before rolling cameras and open microphones, then one realizes that the gaffes were relatively few and far between. Nonetheless, when they did occur, they were played endlessly on television and tended to stick in the memory. And, while medical records and the continuity and clarity of Reagan’s diary over eight years rule out Alzheimer’s as having been present during the 1980s,⁵⁵ many link the gaffes of an old man to the later 1994 diagnosis of the debilitating disease, and conclude that Reagan must have been afflicted with the condition throughout his presidency. This is simply not true, as the evidence demonstrates.

Reagan’s mystifying behavioral traits is the third reason why the President may not have been understood correctly. First, Reagan was almost always in a good mood and his relentless optimism made people question how in touch he was with reality. After all, how can you keep up that positive attitude all the time? Nancy Reagan records being irritated at her husband during the Iran-Contra affair, because Reagan acted as though he did not have a care in the world, making

⁵⁵ In 1989, ex-President Reagan fell from a horse and sustained a head injury. Brain scans conducted at the time revealed no presence of Alzheimer’s disease.

jokes while she was worried sick over potential impeachment.⁵⁶ Also, the ‘wall’ between himself and others made many wonder just exactly what he was he thinking, and whether anything they were saying was registering.⁵⁷ Reagan appeared passive, and his reliance on cue cards in meetings did not help his image problem. But turn to his presidential diary, and there the evidence shows that Reagan was not merely playing the part of President: he had not mentally ‘checked out’, but was well aware of what was going on around him.

The fourth major reason why Reagan’s role was so underappreciated was that he rarely trumpeted his accomplishments, allowing others to take the limelight. Being the so-called ‘most powerful man in the world’ seemed never to go to Reagan’s head; he was unfailingly polite, treating kings and servants with the same courtesy. Part of being so well mannered was that Reagan rarely bragged about his achievements, and indeed he believed this to be a formula for success. A sign on Reagan’s desk read: ‘There is no limit to what you can achieve, if you don’t mind who gets the credit’. As a leader, Reagan remained a team player, and saw his

⁵⁶ Nancy Reagan wrote: ‘It can also be difficult to live with someone so relentlessly upbeat. There have been times when his optimism made me angry, or when I felt Ronnie wasn’t being realistic and I longed for him to show at least a *little* anxiety. And over the years I think I’ve come to worry even more than I used to because Ronnie doesn’t worry at all. I seem to do the worrying for both of us.’ During the Iran-Contra period Nancy writes: ‘In May 1987, just before the [Iran Contra] congressional hearings began, Ronnie and I were invited to a small dinner party in Washington. Ronnie was in fine spirits, which amazed even me. That night, in the privacy of our bedroom, I asked him if he was really as unperturbed about the hearings as he seemed to be. ‘Are you doing this for my sake?’ I asked. ‘No,’ he replied. ‘I don’t believe I did anything wrong. I realize there will be some unpleasant times coming up, but no, I’m not worried’. I was so struck by his response that I wrote it down in my diary...Ronnie recognized that there was a problem, but refused to let it get him down.’ Nancy Reagan *My Turn: The Memoirs of Nancy Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1989), pp.108, 109-110.

⁵⁷ Reagan’s Vice President, George H.W Bush, wrote in a diary entry on 13 April 1983 that while Reagan was ‘the most understanding human being’ who made him feel ‘close’ and ‘totally relaxed’, there was a cool distance in their relationship, especially when Bush voiced his opinions. Bush explained, ‘He’s hard to read; he doesn’t ask for advice; he doesn’t say, ‘What do you think about this?’, very much—but the other side of that is, I feel uninhibited in bringing things up to him. When I do bring up something controversial, he might not comment; he might not say anything right there; and he might not look particularly enthralled about it or say, ‘tell me more;’ but I never get the feeling that he doesn’t want me to tell him, so I do and I try not to overdo it...’. As quoted in George Bush, *All the Best, George Bush: My Life in Letters and Other Writings*, (New York: Touchstone Books, 1999), p.327.

administration as a single unit—if people thought that George Shultz or Robert McFarlane deserved the acclaim and recognition, Reagan did not protest.

And, finally, the other major reason why many may have downplayed Reagan's role in the formulation and execution of America's Soviet policy is because the entire American side was largely upstaged by Mikhail Gorbachev. There had never been a Soviet head of state like Gorbachev, and the media rightfully was intrigued by this cosmopolitan leader so at ease with himself, so in command, and so determined to enact sweeping reforms within the USSR. It was Gorbachev who in 1990 received the accolades as Reagan receded from public view: *Time Magazine* declared him their 'Man of the Decade', and he received the Nobel Peace Prize. Since Gorbachev looms so large in the popular imagination, the American side of the Superpower dialogue, and Reagan included, often get overlooked. This is understandable, but to borrow a phrase from Soviet usage, the 'personality cult' must be put aside, and the historical record examined. That record shows continual American diplomatic work with the USSR in the first four years of Reagan's presidency; an effort that only intensified once Gorbachev arrived on the scene in Reagan's second term. Furthermore, it could be argued, as Dinesh D'Douza does, that Reagan purposely ceded the limelight to Gorbachev, giving him his 'day in the sun' so that a 'zone of comfort' could emerge that would only help American interests.⁵⁸

Reagan's self depreciating humor, his gaffes, his idiosyncrasies, his humility and having to 'co-star' next to Gorbachev, have all led to Reagan's critical role in the formulation and execution of American Soviet policy to be misconstrued, overlooked or dismissed. It is hoped through a scholarly and objective investigation of more recent records this thesis can lead to a deeper understanding of Reagan's role. While acknowledging the huge credit owed to George

⁵⁸ Dinesh D'Douza, 'Russian Revolution: How Reagan won the Cold War', *National Review*, 24 November 1997.

Shultz, Caspar Weinberger, Richard Perle and many others, this study endeavors to shed new light on, and de-mythologize, America's 40th President.

Outline of Chapters

In this dissertation, President Reagan's role is placed in the context of American Presidential history, and the thaw in Cold War politics in the context of US--Soviet diplomatic relations.

From this starting point, *Chapter One* examines Reagan's vision of 'Peace through Strength' and details his long held opinion that America's decline in military superiority was the reason why the USSR seemingly held the upper-hand by 1980. The Soviets, to Reagan, only respected strength—and thus America needed a program of 'military modernization' if it were to avert war and negotiate from a position of parity. Central questions posed are: What was the history of deterrence in the Cold War? What did Reagan have to say on deterring Soviet aggression prior his election to the presidency? Who influenced him to hold these beliefs? And how did Reagan ensure that his ideas would be implemented as he assumed the presidency?

Chapter Two details how America's rearmament program became a reality. Spending close to two trillion dollars updating the triad of land, air and sea defenses, Reagan's military buildup demonstrated American resolve to return to a position of parity with the USSR. Central questions posed are: What were the main elements of America's military modernization program? Did Reagan play a passive role, or did he intervene at pivotal moments? To what extent was the projection of strength linked to Reagan's leadership during moments of crisis? Did Reagan as Commander-in-Chief increase or diminish the image of American strength? And,

in terms of military strategy, who played the leading role: Reagan, or Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger?

Chapter Three explores Reagan's moral struggle against communism, dating back to the 1940s, and details how it evolved over the decades. Reagan had been denouncing the threat of communism since his days as President of the Screen Actors Guild in Hollywood and his message helped him to establish a conservative political following throughout the country. While Reagan toned down his rhetoric during the emergence of détente, by the mid 1970s he began again to rail against what he later termed an 'Evil Empire'. Central questions posed are: Where did Reagan's anti-communism emerge from? What personal experiences led him to be such a vocal opponent to this ideology? Did Reagan use his crusade against communism as a platform for electoral success? Was Reagan an ideologue, a pragmatist, or an opportunist? Was he all three?

Chapter Four investigates Reagan's presidential rhetoric concerning communism and the USSR and how it changed over the course of his eight years in the White House. Beginning with his first press conference as President, Reagan painted the Soviet leaders as people who could not be trusted, as the 'focus of evil' who were destined to be left 'on the ash heap of history'. However, by 1984 Reagan had toned down his demagoguery and spoke instead of a 'constructive dialogue'. By 1987, he was challenging Gorbachev to 'tear down' the Berlin Wall and implement other reforms. Central questions posed are: Was there a 'Reagan reversal', or was the change in Reagan's rhetoric part of a strategy? Who wrote Reagan's main addresses: the President, or his speechwriters? Did Reagan edit or re-write addresses authored by others? To what extent were the speechwriters basing their work on Reagan's ideas, or on speeches he had

given previously? And finally, to what extent can the rhetoric of the Reagan years be ascribed to the President as being an authentic reflection of his beliefs?

Chapter Five examines the genesis of Reagan's disdain for the theory of 'Mutual Assured Destruction' (MAD). The idea that the Superpower's ability to wipe each other out as a guarantee for security (as enshrined in the 1972 ABM Treaty) did not appeal to Reagan, and he ultimately believed that America should embark on a program of missile defense. Central questions posed are: What is the history of missile defense systems in the Cold War? Did Reagan support a missile defense system prior to his presidency? Who was influencing Reagan to adopt such a course? And can it be said that the language Reagan would later use to describe missile defense, found its origins in Hollywood movies?

The Strategic Defense Initiative was Reagan's answer to MAD, and his dream for a shield against nuclear weapons is the subject of *Chapter Six*. Unveiled in 1983 as the anticipated means of making nuclear weapons 'impotent and obsolete', the announcement caused a storm of international controversy that remains to this day. Central questions posed are: Who in the administration brought missile defense to the fore in 1983? What role did Reagan have in this decision, and its announcement? Once proposed, how attached was Reagan to the concept? Can it be said that this was Reagan's policy, or others?

Closely linked with the preceding chapter is the idea that captivated the mind of Reagan: abolishing nuclear weapons. *Chapter Seven* examines where Reagan's nuclear abolitionist views originated from, and why he so intensely disliked nuclear weapons. Central questions posed are: What was the history of Reagan's anti-nuclearism? Did Reagan ever advocate total nuclear abolition prior to becoming President? Did any other President in the nuclear age support nuclear

abolition? What were Reagan's views on nuclear limitation and the SALT Treaties in particular? And, did Reagan have a clear agenda when it came to arms control?

Reagan's radical views about abolishing nuclear weapons had no support within the NATO alliance, and *Chapter Eight* explores Reagan's resolve in ensuring that it remained part of his government's official policy. Examined are the various arms reduction proposals tabled during his tenure, and Reagan's role is scrutinized to determine the influence of the President over his arms control experts. Central questions posed are: How involved was Reagan in supervising the agenda of his arms control negotiators? Was Reagan alone in the administration in advocating nuclear abolition? When it came to the Superpower Summits, was Reagan master of his brief? And, to what extent was Reagan responsible for the INF Treaty of 1987, and the START Treaties that were negotiated during his administration?

Chapter Nine assesses Reagan's belief concerning a possible 'Nuclear Armageddon' between the Superpowers, and his sense that he was fated to end the nuclear standoff. The quest for peace between the Superpowers that America sought over many years and various administrations is examined, as is Reagan's sense of destiny to end the Cold War, heightened by his survival of an assassin's bullet in 1981. Central questions posed are: Did other Cold War presidents seek to make a lasting peace with the USSR, and if so, how did they go about achieving this? Did Reagan really believe that he was destined to be President and end the Cold War? If so, where did he get this understanding from? And to what extent did Reagan's 1981 survival of an assassin's bullet influence his decision to reach out to the USSR in the hopes of making peace?

Chapter Ten investigates how involved Reagan was in bettering relations between the Superpowers. Reagan's personal relationship with Gorbachev was obviously a major factor in the transformation of US--Soviet relations, and this chapter explores Reagan's perception of this relationship and how he understood its usefulness in ending Cold War tensions. Central questions posed are: Was Reagan pushed into talks with the USSR, due to political considerations, as some theorized at the time? Did Reagan reach out to the three Soviet leaders who preceded Gorbachev? When he did meet with Gorbachev, did Reagan merely read the 'talking points' prepared for him by his aides, or did he follow his own script? Was he a good negotiator? And ultimately, what role did the 'human factor' of his personal relationship with Gorbachev play in the realization of a new détente between the Superpowers?

The *Concluding Chapter* reviews the thesis statement and looks again at the central questions of this dissertation. President Reagan's role, in the formulation and execution of Soviet foreign policy will then, it is hoped, be more fully clarified.

George Shultz called the subject of this thesis 'extremely important', and it will indeed be an original contribution to Presidential and Cold War historiography. This researcher's PhD candidature began during the 20th anniversary of the Geneva Summit and concludes with the 20th anniversary of Reagan's departure from the White House. The time has come, therefore, to write a new history of the 'Reagan Doctrine' and evaluate the role played by President Reagan himself.

Chapter 1:

PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH

“Only the strong are free, and peace only comes through strength.”

-Ronald Reagan⁵⁹

Ronald Reagan was a master orator who had the ability to articulate his militant agenda in terms acceptable to the American people. He did this by appealing to their sense of nationalism, explaining matters in a down to earth manner, and by summing up extremely complex issues into small expressions that everyone could grasp.

‘Peace through Strength’ was the slogan that the Reagan Administration used to justify a military modernization program that would ultimately cost close to two trillion dollars.⁶⁰ This chapter firstly determines how the arms buildup of the 1980s proceeded under the banner of ‘Peace through Strength’. From there, the concept of deterrence, which the expression represents, is examined, as is America’s evolving understanding of its application in the Cold War era. Finally, Reagan’s comprehension and use of this term and the possible influences on him in this regard are investigated, and it is detailed that Reagan, prior to assuming the presidency, was an ardent proponent of increased military preparedness.

⁵⁹ ‘Remarks at an Event Sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary,’ 1 March 1984, *PPPR*.

⁶⁰ Figure quoted by Lawrence Lindsey in ‘Was the Defense Buildup a Good Investment?’ Working Paper, *American Enterprise Institute* (Washington DC, 1997) as cited in D. D’Souza’s book, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became An Extraordinary Leader* (New York: Free Press, Touchstone Ed, 1999), p. 99.

‘Peace through Strength’: Official Reagan Administration Policy

‘Peace through Strength’ is a catchphrase that today is emblazoned on t-shirts and caps for sale at the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, and it was one that the Reagan Administration itself tried to ‘sell’ to the American people in the 1980s.

On 23 September 1984 President Reagan declared a ‘National Peace through Strength Week’ which involved rallies in all 50 states of the Union in support of ‘a strategy of peace based on strong defense.’ A statement released by the White House declared:

If history teaches us anything, it is that a strong defense is the prerequisite to a lasting peace, the only credible deterrent against aggression...We Americans maintain our military strength with the fervent hope that it will never be used, and with the conviction that this is, indeed, the best way to preserve the peace.⁶¹

Who this military arms buildup was directed against was no state secret: the Reagan Administration made clear that its policy of re-armament was aimed at matching the military capability of the USSR. This was a theme that the Reagan team had promised to implement if their man was elected Commander-in-Chief because it was their view (and others) that America was seriously inferior to the Soviet Union in military strength.

In the late 1970s there was a whole host of experts who agreed with Reagan’s assessment that America’s ability to defend itself was in serious question. President Carter’s Defense Secretary, Harold Brown, and Pentagon official, William J. Perry, had disclosed that according to their estimation, the Soviets had the ability to destroy the entire arsenal of 1,000 US Minuteman land-based nuclear missiles in a single surprise attack.⁶² Carter’s CIA Director, Stansfield Turner, did not say so at the time, but he later stated publicly that he too believed that

⁶¹ Ronald Reagan, ‘Statement on the Observance of National Peace Through Strength Week’, 23 September 1984; *PPPR*.

⁶² Lou Cannon *President Reagan: the Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 163.

‘in the last several years all of the best studies have shown that the balance of strategic nuclear capabilities has been tipping in favor of the Soviet Union’.⁶³ President Carter apparently was not listening to his own experts when he declared in 1980 that the United States was ‘the strongest nation on earth—militarily’.⁶⁴ In contrast to Carter’s glowing assessment of America’s defense capability, the Republican Party Platform that nominated Reagan for President called for a massive arms buildup to achieve the very superiority that Carter claimed was already existent:

Republicans commit themselves to an immediate increase in defense spending to be applied judiciously to critically needed programs. We will build toward sustained defense expenditure sufficient to close the gap with the Soviets, and ultimately reach the position of military superiority that the American people demand.⁶⁵

Unlike President John F. Kennedy’s realization upon taking office that the ‘missile gap’ he claimed existed was in fact a gap in America’s favor,⁶⁶ Reagan’s White House in its first year continued its refrain that America was in a dangerously weakened position.⁶⁷

⁶³ Stansfield Turner, Op/Ed ‘MX Is A Serious Mistake’ *Washington Star*, 29 March 1981.

⁶⁴ Jimmy Carter, ‘Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraising Reception’, 22 September 1980; *The Public Papers of President Carter*.

⁶⁵ ‘1980 Republican Party Platform’, *PPPR*.

⁶⁶ Meena Bose writes: ‘Once in office.. Kennedy soon learned that U.S. defenses were much stronger than his campaign rhetoric about a looming missile gap with the Soviet Union had suggested. The Kennedy administration faced public criticism on this issue after Defense Secretary Robert S.McNamara revealed to reporters in early 1961 that a missile gap did not, in fact, exist. By late 1961, the administration officially had affirmed U.S. strategic superiority, and the missile- gap debate essentially was moot, though some Republicans declared that Kennedy had won election on a false platform.’ *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, (East Lansing: Spring, 2008), Vol.11, Iss.1, p.170. See also Christopher A. Preble, ‘Who ever believed in the Missile Gap? John F. Kennedy and the politics of national security’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: December 2003), Vol. 33, Iss. 4, p. 801.

⁶⁷ The Soviet Estimate’, prepared by the CIA, consistently reported in the early 1980s that the Soviet Union was either superior in most weapons categories or on track to achieve superiority over the US. This led to President Carter’s significant increase in military funding for the fiscal year 1980-1981, and the Reagan arms buildup which followed. Today there is intense debate as to whether these estimates were accurate, or embellishments of Soviet strength. Norman Friedman argues that the estimates were correct, writing: ‘In the 1970s the Soviets had a crushing preponderance of military power, based on a combination of nuclear weapons and a massive mechanized army’, as he wrote in ‘The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War’, *RUSI Journal* (London: January 2001), Vol. 146, No. 3, p. 20. Pavel Podvig strongly disagrees

In his historic defense speech to the National Press Club in November 1981, President Reagan warned that ‘the continuing Soviet military buildup threatens both the conventional and nuclear balance.’ He asked the audience to ‘consider the facts’ as he contrasted American defense programs with that of the USSR:

Over the past decade, the United States reduced the size of its Armed Forces and decreased its military spending. The Soviets steadily increased the number of men under arms. *They now number more than double those of the United States.* Over the same period, the Soviets expanded their real military spending by one third. The Soviet Union increased its inventory of tanks to some 50,000 compared to our 11,000. Historically a land power, they transformed their navy from a coastal defense force to an open ocean fleet, while *the United States, a sea power with transoceanic alliances, cut its fleet in half.*

During a period when NATO deployed no new intermediate-range nuclear missiles and actually withdrew 1,000 nuclear warheads, *the Soviet Union deployed more than 750 warheads on the new SS-20 missiles alone.*⁶⁸ (Emphasis added).

Remarkably, the United States government did not state that its arms increase was to keep up with the Soviet Union, but rather to *catch up* to them. In a similar defense speech to the nation in 1982, President Reagan declared: ‘Today, in virtually every measure of military power, the Soviet Union enjoys a decided advantage.’⁶⁹

Admitting that America was the number two Superpower came as a shock to many, and no doubt weakened its position in the world. The Cold War was above all a psychological battle, where perceived threats were just as deadly as real ones (as evidenced by the Soviet propensity to display dummy missiles along with real ones in their Mayday parade). For the President to

with this in his article, ‘The Window of Vulnerability that Wasn’t: Soviet Military Buildup in the 1970s’, *International Security* (Cambridge: Summer 2008), Vol.33, No. 1, p. 118.

⁶⁸ Ronald Reagan, ‘Remarks to Members of the National Press Club on Arms Reduction and Nuclear Weapons’, 18 November 1981; *PPPR*.

⁶⁹ Ronald Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation on Strategic Arms Reduction and Nuclear Deterrence’ 22 November 1982; *PPPR*.

admit inferiority, therefore, invited potential disaster. But in the eyes of the Reagan Administration, the greater threat to American security was the lack of actual military might, and with a Congress being controlled by political adversaries, the President felt that only full disclosure of Soviet superiority would mobilize the masses to support his arms buildup program.

Thus, 'Peace through Strength' would involve a military arms buildup in the triad of America's defense capability: land, air and sea. Conventional military modernization—new tanks, ships and aircraft—would be undertaken simultaneously with enhanced nuclear capability. The 'window of vulnerability' had to be closed, and Reagan had promised to do everything in his power to achieve this. The idea behind 'Peace through Strength'—deterrence—is as old as human civilization, but it was only in the Cold War era that the United States fully grasped the concept.

Peace through Strength in the Cold War: Detering Soviet Aggression

The concept of deterrence is that a potential aggressor will refrain from attack if it believes that its opponent has sufficient military strength to withstand it. 'The Imposer seeks to deter the Target from behaving in an unacceptable fashion by threatening punishment'.⁷⁰ It is an idea that is timeless, as any competent military campaigner will first calculate the risks of launching war before initiating hostilities. If the commander believes that his adversary is just as strong as his force, then the campaign will end in stalemate, and nothing could be gained from an attack. Worse still, if calculations determine that his opponent is stronger than he, then barring unforeseen events, any attack would certainly end in defeat, and the commander (if he is sane) will not initiate hostilities.

⁷⁰ Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations*, (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 126.

Conversely, weakness invites aggression. If a potential adversary sees that a military conquest could be achieved with relative ease, then he is far more likely to seize the opportunity and ‘move in for the kill’; hence the necessity for a nation to appear strong if it is to maintain the peace—*si vis pacem para bellum*.

After the end of World War II, the need to deter Soviet aggression became clear as America’s former wartime ally became increasingly bellicose. Despite its promises of ‘free elections’ in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union began to impose its political will on the nations that it occupied. Two spheres of influence began to emerge in Europe: those nations whose governments were democratic and those that were communist.

Winston Churchill, who had accurately predicted the threat of the ‘gathering storm’ of Nazi Germany, had sought from the outset of post-war negotiations with the Soviet Union to deter its aggression by the threat of force. The Soviets, Churchill believed, only respected strength, and would not be moved by idealistic arguments. His recommendation to President Harry Truman was that:

...the Allies ought not to retreat from their present positions to the occupational line until we are satisfied about Poland, and also about the temporary character of the Russian occupation of Germany, and the conditions to be established in the Russianised or Russian-controlled countries in the Danube valley, particularly Austria and Czechoslovakia and the Balkans.⁷¹

Diplomacy, in other words, would be far more effective if the Allies maintained a military presence that could be used to leverage Soviet behavior by the threat of force. Unfortunately, American naivety about ‘Uncle Joe Stalin’ and distrust of the ‘balance of power’ school of thought led Truman to ignore the Prime Minister’s advice, and Allied forces withdrew behind the

⁷¹ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume 6: Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), p. 503.

demarcation line prior to the Potsdam Summit. Needless to say, it did not take long for Churchill to be as vindicated in his warnings about the Soviets as he had been with the Germans, as communist puppet regimes were installed in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, Churchill felt that the threat of force could still alter the situation and nip the Cold War in the bud.

The nuclear bomb, Churchill believed, could be used to threaten the USSR into a negotiated settlement for Eastern Europe. With America being the sole possessor of the awesomely destructive weapon, the possibility existed that Stalin would feel intimidated enough to withdraw from his occupied territories if the matter were 'brought to a head' in a tense, 'no holds barred' negotiation. An out of office Churchill said on 9 October 1948:

The question is asked: What will happen when they get the atomic bomb themselves and have accumulated a large store? You can judge yourselves what will happen then by what is happening now. *'If these things are done in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?'*...

No one in his sense can believe that we have a limitless period of time before us. We ought to bring matters to a head and make a final settlement. We ought not to go jogging along improvident, incompetent, waiting for something to turn up, by which I mean waiting for something bad for us to turn up. The Western Nations will be far more likely to reach a lasting settlement, without bloodshed, if they formulate their just demands while they have the atomic power and before the Russian Communists have got it too.⁷²

The nuclear ultimatum was never used by the Truman Administration to force a Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe. Instead, it was decided that Eastern Europe had become something of a lost cause, and efforts were made to contain rather than rollback Soviet expansionism.

The policy of 'containment' saw the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the first attempt by the West to deter further Soviet aggression. Diplomat George

⁷² Robert Rhodes James, (ed.), *Winston S. Churchill, His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963, vol. VII, 1943-1949* (New York/London: Chelsea House in association with R. R. Bowker, 1974), p.710.

Kennan, in his 'long telegram' from the American embassy in Moscow, had argued that Russia was by its very nature expansionist due to its tsarist history and its communist ideology. Later, as 'Mr. X' in his 1947 *Foreign Affairs* article, Kennan had said that this expansionism could be stopped by Western pressure, for 'if it finds unassailable barriers in its path, it accepts these philosophically and accommodates itself to them.' Kennan, therefore, urged the adoption of 'a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world.'⁷³ So, in addition to the 'Marshall Plan' of economic assistance in Europe, President Truman created NATO as a military coalition on 4 April 1949. NATO consisted of an alliance between the United States of America, Canada and Western European nations to counter the Soviet threat. Designed to stop Soviet tanks from rolling into Western Europe, the NATO alliance became far more complicated when the Soviet Union itself came to possess the atomic bomb.

When in 1949 the Soviet Union became the second nation to join the 'nuclear club', a Cold War atomic standoff began, which ultimately created a real deterrence for both sides of the Superpower divide. While news of the USSR's possession of the nuclear weapon created alarm in the West, it actually served to create greater stability in Europe. Aggressive moves by either side into the respective spheres of influence could trigger a nuclear attack, and if that were to occur, both sides would be guaranteed to experience 'mutual assured destruction' (MAD). However, the nuclear deterrence was a precarious peace. As Churchill observed, 'safety will be the sturdy child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation.'⁷⁴ Consequently, the

⁷³ 'X' (George F. Kennan) 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct,' *Foreign Affairs*, (July 1947), Vol. 25, no. 4, p.575.

⁷⁴ David Cannadine, (ed.), *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat: The Speeches of Winston Churchill* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), p. 341.

United States and the Soviet Union treaded carefully, lest they inadvertently turn a regional issue into a global thermo-nuclear war. The presence of the nuclear threat brought the longest period of peace to Europe for generations, but when the Soviets were acquiring their nuclear capability, the United States feared that it would actually *increase* the likelihood of war. As the National Security Document NSC-68 said in April 1950:

At the moment our atomic retaliatory capability is probably adequate to deter the Kremlin from a deliberate direct military attack against ourselves or other free peoples. However, when it calculates that it has a sufficient atomic capability to make a surprise attack on us, nullifying our atomic superiority and creating a military situation decisively in its favor, the Kremlin might be tempted to strike swiftly and with stealth. The existence of two large atomic capabilities in such a relationship might well act, therefore, not as a deterrent, but as an incitement to war.⁷⁵

And thus began the paranoia that ten or twenty or even one hundred nuclear weapons were not sufficient for security, and hence the need for an arms race whereby both sides stockpiled thousands upon thousands of nuclear weapons. This arms race spiraled out of control until the Nixon Administration sought to slow things down through nuclear arms limitation talks.

President Richard M. Nixon sought to achieve an arms control agreement with the Kremlin because he saw the convergence of two opposing wills in the Superpower psyche. On the one hand, the Soviet Union had greatly increased its missile stockpile in the aftermath of its humiliating back down over the Cuban Missile crisis of 1962 and its upsurge in military spending saw no end in sight. Conversely, in the United States, Nixon accurately read the political will of the Congress, and foresaw a massive reduction in funding for defense spending. Thus, a brief window of opportunity existed for Nixon to engage the Soviets in negotiating an arms control treaty that would be mutually advantageous.

⁷⁵ US National Security Council, 'National Security Directive 68', 14 April 1950: Accessed at: <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm>

In 1972 President Nixon met with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow and signed a treaty aimed at achieving ‘nuclear sufficiency’. The SALT I agreement saw, for the first time in the history of the Cold War, an acknowledgment between the two adversaries that peace was achievable only through an equal nuclear deterrent. President Nixon recounted his reasoning behind nuclear arms limitation in his memoirs:

It was clear to me by 1969 that there could never be absolute parity between the U.S and the U.S.S.R in the area of nuclear and conventional armaments. For one thing, the Soviets are a land power and we are a sea power. For another, while our nuclear weapons were better, theirs were bigger. Furthermore, absolute superiority in every area of armaments would have been meaningless, because there is a point in arms development at which each nation has the capacity to destroy the other. Beyond that point the most important consideration is not continued escalation of the number of arms but maintenance of the strategic equilibrium while making it clear to the adversary that a nuclear attack, even if successful, would be suicidal.

Consequently, at the beginning of the administration, I began to talk in terms of *sufficiency* rather than *superiority* to describe my goals for our nuclear arsenal.⁷⁶

However, the majority of American people grew as distrustful of Nixon’s assurances of ‘sufficiency’ as they were of his general policy of ‘détente’, which they believed could not be depended upon as a reliable deterrent.

In the face of renewed Soviet aggression, at the close of the 1970s American policy makers were calling for a new arms race that could deter a possible war. Despite President Carter’s negotiation of a second SALT treaty with the USSR in 1979, which placed ceilings on nuclear arms levels between the Superpowers, a feeling of American inferiority developed as the Soviets flexed their military muscles. The Soviet deployment of the SS-20 missile in Europe, their invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 and their ongoing arms buildup convinced many analysts that the Soviets had rejected the idea of deterrence and were in fact preparing for war.

⁷⁶ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Arrow Books, 1978), p. 415.

The fear expressed in the 1950 NSC-68 document—that the Soviet Union would attempt a first strike against the US—grew as its military capability looked geared more towards *offense* than *defense*. It was into this climate that Ronald Reagan entered into the debate.

Reagan's Call for an Arms Buildup

Ronald Reagan recognized the threat of the USSR and articulated his belief that only overwhelming military strength was capable of preventing war. Invoking the failed response of the Western democracies in the 1930s to the growing danger of a militarized Nazi Germany, Reagan said that a similar appeasement of the USSR was occurring in the 1970s. In a radio address that Reagan wrote in April 1975, he said of the pre-World War Western Alliance:

The leaders of that generation saw the growing menace and talked of it but reacted to the growing military might of Germany with anguished passiveness. Will it be said of today's world leaders as it was of the pre-World War II leaders 'they were better at surviving the catastrophe than they were at preventing it'?⁷⁷

To those who believed that an American arms race could be destabilizing, Reagan countered that:

World War II did not happen because the Nations of the free world engaged in a massive military buildup. In most countries including our own, 'too little too late' described the reaction to the Nazi military colossus.⁷⁸

Strength deters aggression, while weakness invites it. The weakness of the European nations

⁷⁷ Radio address 'Peace', April 1975. *Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts* Box 1. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California. (Hereafter referred to as *RPL*)

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

encouraged Hitler to become more aggressive, while American weakness caused the Pearl Harbor attack, Reagan believed. He stated:

Certainly we haven't forgotten that after World War II the Japanese told us they decided on war when they saw our army staging war games with wooden guns. They also took note that one month before Pearl Harbor Congress came within a single vote of abolishing the draft and sending the bulk of our army home.⁷⁹

According to Reagan, what was true leading up to World War II was true of the Cold War conflict of the 1970s, and unless America re-armed, war was inevitable. He surmised:

But if we are told the truth, namely that enough evidence of weakness or lack of willpower could tempt the Soviet Union as it once tempted Hitler and the military rulers of Japan, I believe our decision would be in favor of... prevention.⁸⁰

Only a massive military buildup on behalf of the United States could stop the coming conflict between the Superpowers. Reagan said he would 'rather prevent a war by being well armed than by surrendering', for only this could bring an acceptable peace. His rationale was that:

Peace is purchased by making yourself stronger than your adversary—or by dismantling power and submitting to one's enemies. Power is not only sufficient military strength, but a sound economy, a reliable energy supply and credibility—the belief by any potential enemy that you will not choose surrender as the way to maintain peace. Thomas Jefferson said, 'The American people won't make a mistake if they are given all the facts.'⁸¹ (Emphasis added).

The 'facts' according to Reagan were that the American people had been duped into believing that 'détente' with the USSR had made them more secure. On the contrary, Reagan stated that the rapprochement with the Soviet Union had permitted it to achieve military superiority. His

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

1976 Presidential campaign had sought to take the Republican nomination from Gerald Ford, largely by mocking Ford and Kissinger's assertions that they had achieved 'Peace through Strength'. He noted:

James Schlesinger, former Secretary of Defense has said, 'at no point since the 1930s has the Western World faced so formidable a threat to its survival.' *Is that 'Peace through Strength'?*

Paul Nitze, former Deputy Secretary of Defense, writing about Soviet strategic nuclear power says, 'After 1977, the Soviet advantage after an assumed attack mounts rapidly.' *Is that 'Peace through Strength'?*

General Alexander Haig, Commander of NATO, said recently, 'We are getting to the fine edge of disaster.' *Is that 'Peace through Strength'?*

Dr. Malcolm Currier, chief of Research and Engineering at the Pentagon says, 'The momentum is now on the side of the Soviet Union and it is staggering.' *Is that 'Peace through Strength'?*⁸² (Emphasis added).

The USSR, Reagan warned, had surpassed the US in military power:

The Soviet army outnumbered ours more than 2 to 1 and in reserves, 4 to 1. They outspend us on weapons by 50%. Their navy outnumbered ours in surface ships and subs 2 to 1. We are outgunned in artillery 3 to 1 and their tanks outnumbered ours 4 to 1. Their strategic nuclear missiles are larger, more powerful and more numerous than ours.⁸³

Reagan's attempt to wrestle the nomination from the incumbent President was unsuccessful; however, while Ford became the Republican Party's nominee, he narrowly lost the White House to Jimmy Carter in the general election. Many blamed Reagan for this loss, but he remained unrepentant as the Ford Administration passed into history. On the eve of Carter's Presidential inauguration, Reagan wrote in 1977:

Shortly before the changing of the guard in the nation's capital, the former Secretary of State [Henry Kissinger] addressed the Washington press club. In his address, he vehemently denied that we had lost military supremacy to the Soviet Union. He spoke somewhat harshly of those who claimed otherwise, which, I

⁸² *Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings*, Radio Broad BOX 44, RPL.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

assume, included me. But to tell you the truth, he didn't change my mind.⁸⁴

The title of this radio address was 'Farewell Speeches', and Reagan contrasted Henry Kissinger's assertions of American power with that of the retiring head of Air Force Intelligence, Major General George J. Keegan Jr. who told the *New York Times* flatly: 'the Soviet Union has already achieved military superiority over this country.'⁸⁵ Reagan quoted the General as saying:

By every criterion used to measure strategic balance...that is: damage expectancy, throw weight, equivalent mega tonnage or technology *I am unaware of a single important category in which the Soviets have not established a significant lead over the United States.*⁸⁶

This Soviet military buildup, the general said, was evidence that the 'Soviet Union is not only trying for superiority but is preparing for war.' The general's 'somber assessment' concluded that 'the greatest global conflict in history is likely to occur within the next decade or two unless there is a radical change in United States intelligence perceptions.'⁸⁷ The General may not have converted the Carter Administration to his dire predictions, but he did find a loyal adherent to his views in Reagan. The future president called for a massive re-assertion of American military power in preparation for potential war.

Weapons Systems

Thus, in his years prior to assuming the presidency, Reagan proposed an arms buildup that he believed would be the best way to avert a possible war with the Soviet Union. Believing that the

⁸⁴ Ronald Reagan, 'Farewell Addresses' 19 Jan. 1977, *Pre- Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Addresses*, Box 6 RPL.

⁸⁵ David Binder, 'Air Force's Ex-Intelligence Chief Fears Soviet Has Military Edge,' *New York Times*, 3 Jan. 1977.

⁸⁶ Ronald Reagan, 'Farewell Addresses', *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Soviets had already achieved military superiority and that only American strength could deter war, Reagan seemed to support every new weapons program under consideration, in spite of the arguments against them.

Take, for example, the Neutron Bomb: cancelled by the Carter Administration due to a lack of NATO support, it was a weapon that had the ability to kill civilians without doing major damage to infrastructure. It was thus deemed immoral by some, for it seemed to place a higher emphasis on protecting buildings than it did on saving lives. It was politically ‘dead in the water’, and President Carter decided that whatever its military merits, the United States was not going to fund a weapon for NATO that had no support among the European people and their leadership.⁸⁸ Reagan rejected the criticism of the Neutron Bomb in a radio address written in March 1978. Addressing the so called ‘immorality’ of the weapon that kills people but leaves property undamaged, Reagan countered:

Now some express horror at this and charging immorality portray those who would pursue such a weapon as placing a higher value on property than human life. This is sheer unadulterated nonsense. It is harsh sounding but all war weapons back to the club, sling and arrow are designed to kill the soldiers of the enemy. With gunpowder and artillery and later bombs and bombers, war could not be confined to the battlefield. And so came total war with non-combatants outnumbering soldiers in casualties.⁸⁹

Reagan saw the Neutron Bomb as ‘the dreamed of death-ray weapon of science fiction’ and said it was ‘one which can provide the deterrent we need to any Russian attack.’ The Soviets, Reagan pointed out, had ‘assembled an offensive force of tanks, mobile artillery, support aircraft and armored personnel carriers on the Western front in Europe superior to our NATO forces.’ To

⁸⁸ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), pp.225-227.

⁸⁹ Ronald Reagan, ‘Radio Address: War’, 13 March 1978 as reprinted in Kiron K Skinner, Annelise and Martin Anderson, eds, *Reagan In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan That Reveal His Revolutionary Vision For America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 102.

counter this threat, the United States needed to employ tactical nuclear forces. Reagan thought it was well worth the price tag to manufacture and deploy the Neutron Bomb:

Here is a deterrent weapon available to us at a much lower cost than trying to match the enemy gun for gun, tank for tank, plane for plane. It isn't unreasonable to believe that the Soviets will be most hesitant to send those waves of tanks westward if we have a weapon that can wipe out their crews at virtually no cost to ourselves. Indeed the neutron bomb represents a moral improvement in the horror of modern war.

'War', Reagan said, 'is an unpleasant thing to talk about', but he believed that the 'neutron bomb could be the ideal deterrent weapon—one that wouldn't have to be used.'⁹⁰

Carter's decision to cancel another military program, the 'B-1 Bomber', was also harshly criticized by Reagan as yet another sign of American weakness in the Cold War. The planned replacement of the ageing fleet of B-52 bombers had been cancelled by President Carter in 1977 as being an unnecessary expense. With an estimated cost of \$100 million dollars per plane, it was labeled by the President a 'gross waste of money'.⁹¹ Carter told the defense community that B-52s and other alternatives would have to do, but for Reagan, the cancellation of the new plane became 'symbolic' of 'an unease on the part of the people about our entire defense posture.' In Reagan's opinion, the B-1 bomber was: 'a war plane so far advanced beyond anything we have that the world would be years trying to match it'. And 'the facts reveal the arguments supporting its cancellation are not true.'⁹² Firstly, Reagan disputed the estimated cost of the program:

We are told the B-1 had a price tag of \$100 million and it was vulnerable to the Soviet Air Defense System. Well no one can look with pleasure on a \$100 million aircraft being knocked down by anti-aircraft fire. First we should know that \$100 million price tag is figured in 1986 dollars on the basis that inflation will

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 81.

⁹² Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts BOX. 21 RPL.

continue. The real price tag is about \$65 million—still a tidy sum.⁹³

Then, Reagan argued that the so called cheaper alternatives were not nearly as good as the B-1 Bomber:

It was pointed out that the air launched cruise missile could be made for \$1 million and launched by re-fitted B-52s, F1-11s or even 747s from outside Russia's perimeter. Now this is true—as far as it goes. But, the 747 modified costs more than the B-1 and of course is (with its size) extremely vulnerable. The B-52 can only carry half the pay load of the B-1 even though it's almost twice as big and the modification required is quite expensive—especially when you consider you are talking about two B-52s to substitute for a single B-1.⁹⁴

In addition to the B-1 being able to carry more bombs, Reagan spoke of its superior technology in other regards:

The B-1 incidentally travels twice as fast as the B-52 and being so much smaller is less vulnerable because of its radar image. It shows up on a radar screen about the size of a fighter plane...The B-1 is designed to go in low beneath radar, penetrating the enemy air defense system before launching the cruise missiles.

In Reagan's reasoning, therefore, there was not a single fact made available by the Carter Administration that would justify a cancellation of the B-1 program. Reagan could only think of one possibility that would cause Carter to cancel the new plane: 'If the President has information that the Soviets have a new defense system that makes the B-1 less useful, he should tell us. It won't be a surprise to the Soviets' he said. And if they did not have that defense system, then Reagan thought the B-1 bomber would be useful in creating an arms race that would cost the Soviets 'more than the B-1s cost to develop a defense against them, and what's wrong with that?'⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts BOX. 21 *RPL*.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Evident in Reagan's commentary on military programs is a sophisticated knowledge of the systems under discussion, but also a lack of concern over the potential costs of engaging the Soviet Union in a new arms race. Achieving deterrence, clearly, was priority number one. But where did Reagan get these ideas?

The Origin of Reagan's Ideas

Ronald Reagan was a man who held stubbornly to his beliefs, and it was extremely rare for Reagan to ever change his opinions. When it came to developing his belief about strength deterring aggression, and hence 'Peace through Strength', one can find in Reagan's writings many references to other thinkers of his day. Whether Reagan was influenced by these ideas or sought out those who thought as he did, remains open to debate. What is clear is that Reagan was not a solitary voice in the 1970s when sounding an alarm about increasing Soviet strength. It is evident in Reagan's radio addresses that he was drawing on a wide range of sources to back up his arguments concerning the need for military modernization. Quotations can be found from books, articles, newspaper columns and television programs that indicate that Reagan spent an enormous amount of time researching his radio addresses. As Nancy Reagan recalled of this era in his life:

I can see him sitting at his desk, writing, which he seemed to do all the time...Nobody thought that he ever read anything either—but he was a voracious reader. I don't ever remember Ronnie sitting and watching television. I really don't. I just don't. When I picture those days, it's him sitting behind that desk in the bedroom, working.⁹⁶

Reagan's work—his writing—took up most of his time, be it at home or travelling. And he

⁹⁶ As quoted in *Reagan: In His Own Hand*, p.xv.

wanted to augment his arguments with facts, figures and quotes from others who had investigated American military strength and who felt as Reagan did, that only a resurgence of American military potency could possibly deter the Soviet Union from embarking on further aggressive activities.

What is manifest from Reagan's 1970s addresses is that he was an avid reader of conservative publications. Reagan quotes from the conservative magazine *The National Review* in his address on 'Intelligence'.⁹⁷ This magazine was founded by William F. Buckley Jr. in 1955 in response to a growing liberalism within the Republican Party. It found a champion in Barry Goldwater's campaign for the Presidency in 1964 and supported Reagan in his attempt to oust President Ford. Many *National Review* articles in the 1970s echoed Reagan's call for a massive arms build-up.

Similarly, it can be seen that Reagan was a subscriber to the conservative publication *The American Spectator*. This magazine, founded in 1967 by R. Emmett Tyrell Jr., was called by Reagan 'a fine paper' and he quotes it as saying:

Further, they [the USSR] rush ahead with gigantic civil defense projects and with a military buildup that strongly suggests that they are attempting to achieve nothing less than a war fighting, war winning posture in strategic weaponry.⁹⁸

Whether Reagan actually believed that the Soviets were preparing for a military confrontation with the US cannot be substantiated. However, he did use those who predicted such a dire outcome to support his call for a massive military buildup. Reagan was thus a part of the conservative movement that gained momentum in the 1970s and which would come to see him

⁹⁷ Ronald Reagan, 'Radio Address: Intelligence' 23 March 1977 *Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts, Box 8 RPL*.

⁹⁸ Ronald Reagan, 'Radio Address: Russians' 25 May 1977 *Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts BOX.10; RPL*.

as its champion.

Reagan was perhaps also influenced by several organizations formed in the 1970s by neo-conservatives to warn of the growing threat of the Soviet Union. The ‘Committee on the Present Danger’ formed in 1976 was an off-shoot of President Ford’s ‘Task Force B’, an independent body of advisers organized to counter the CIA’s assessment of the Soviet threat. The reasons for this action by Ford were completely political: his weakest point that Reagan had been manipulating during the Presidential primaries was his support of détente. Ford caved into pressure and appointed Task Force B, which lends further proof to the argument that when it came to foreign policy, by 1976 Reagan had achieved an effective ‘veto power’ over the Ford Administration. The group formed was made up of an ensemble of bi-partisan foreign policy figures, including former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, diplomat Paul Nitze and Jean Kirkpatrick. Reagan, who said that the ‘group [is] of unquestionable credentials’ quoted them in a 1977 radio address as having said:

Our country is in danger and the danger is increasing. The principal threat is the Soviet drive for dominance based upon an unprecedented military buildup. The scope and sophistication of the Soviet campaign and its tempo [has] quickened. Encouraging divisiveness among nations new and old, it has been acquiring a network of positions, including naval and air bases, which supports its ...expansion.⁹⁹

Eventually Reagan himself would join the organization in 1979. While it is clear that this organization did not create Reagan’s views about the need for military modernization, what should be noted is that he was not a lone voice in championing this cause, but was rather part of a larger political movement.

⁹⁹ Radio Address, SALT II, May 4, 1977 in Kiron K Skinner, Annelise and Martin Anderson, *Reagan In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan That Reveal His Revolutionary Vision For America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 112.

1980 Presidential Election Campaign

In challenging Jimmy Carter for the presidency, a constant theme that Reagan spoke of around the country was the need for America to re-arm in the face of renewed Soviet aggression. Echoing John F. Kennedy's assertion in 1960 that there was a 'missile gap', Reagan denounced what he labeled a 'window of vulnerability'. On the campaign trail, Reagan continued to re-iterate the necessity for the United States to re-arm and rebuild its military capabilities so as to achieve not only 'Peace through Strength', but also American superiority. Reagan warned in 1980 that: 'We now enter one of the most dangerous decades of Western civilization' and that 'our allies are losing confidence in us and our adversaries no longer respect us'.¹⁰⁰ American weakness was to blame, he said, and the lack of courage on behalf of the Carter Administration was reminiscent of Western appeasement of Adolph Hitler in the 1930s. 'I believe we are seeing the same situation as when Mr. Chamberlain was tapping the cobblestones of Munich,'¹⁰¹ Reagan warned. America, Reagan claimed, was dangerously behind the Soviets in the arms race and the USSR 'lead us in all but six or eight of the forty strategic military categories and may well surpass us in those if present trends continue'. In response to Carter's charge that should Reagan be elected President America would begin a new arms race, Reagan countered that America was already in an arms race, 'but only one side is racing'. It was time for the US to catch up, and spend 'whatever is necessary' or else face the prospect of 'surrender'.

Casting aside the conventional logic that the US should seek 'parity' with the USSR in weapons numbers, Reagan was unashamedly pro-American superiority. In a speech to the

¹⁰⁰ Hendric Smith, Adam Clymer, Leonard Silk, Robert Lindsey, and Richard Burt, *Reagan, The Man, The President* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 99-100.

¹⁰¹ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak *The Reagan Revolution* (New York: EP Dutton, 1981), p. 159.

American Legion Reagan asked, ‘Since when has it been wrong for America to be first in military strength? How is military superiority dangerous?’¹⁰² George Shultz would later be unsure about whether Reagan ever sought American military superiority,¹⁰³ instead stating that Reagan ‘wanted to be strong enough to deter aggression’ as superiority by one side creates imbalance and leads to a continued arms race. But the record shows that in 1980 Reagan did in fact advocate US military superiority over the Soviets.

Making His Ideas Policy

Following his election to the presidency in November of 1980, President-elect Reagan wasted no time during the transition period making sure that his desire to achieve a military arms buildup to counter the USSR would become official US policy.

The first and most important way Reagan achieved this was appointing Caspar Weinberger as his Secretary of Defense. Weinberger, a longtime friend of Reagan and a World War II veteran, had formerly held the office of Director of Budget Management under Nixon, where he had gained the nickname ‘Cap the Knife’ for his slashing of expenditures. Shortly after his landslide victory, Reagan rang Weinberger and asked him to return to Washington. ‘I know that you have a full, a very exciting and a very rich life,’ Reagan said. ‘I know all of the rewards that there are there for you, and now I want to spoil the whole thing by asking you to serve as Secretary of Defense.’ Reagan outlined the reasons why he wanted Weinberger to accept the offer. As Weinberger later recounted:

He emphasized briefly many of the points he had made during the campaign...the lamentable state to which our armed forces had sunk as a result of neglect, while

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 160

¹⁰³ Interviews with author, 5 October 2007, Hoover Institute, Stanford University, California.

at the same time the Soviets were expanding and rapidly increasing their own military capabilities...the great alarm that our policies and lack of strength had occasioned among our allies; the growing belief, among both our allies and other nations with whom we should be friendly, that the United States was a very unreliable ally, not a good partner and certainly not a country that was militarily strong, at least compared to the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴

Weinberger said he accepted the position of Secretary of Defense because, he explained, ‘I knew it was absolutely necessary for America to change course drastically to regain our military strength—and to regain also the respect and support of allies, without whom we could not expect to keep our freedom’.¹⁰⁵

Reagan announced Weinberger as Secretary of Defense designate on 1 December 1980, and in doing so he appointed a man who would almost fanatically carry out the President’s wishes to achieve ‘Peace through Strength’. As Weinberger admitted:

From then on I became almost totally immersed in defense and security issues, and would remain so with an intensity and single-mindedness that permitted thought about virtually nothing else, night and day, every day until the end of November 1987.¹⁰⁶

Thus Reagan had taken his idea about ‘Peace through Strength’, and made it official US defense policy. His challenge to Ford for the Presidential nomination had begun in earnest only when he had denounced ‘Dr. Kissinger’s and Mr. Ford’s’ policy of détente. In his radio addresses he had warned that weakness invites aggression, that American military modernization was essential to deter Soviet attacks, and that unless this occurred America faced a choice between surrender and war. And in the 1980 Presidential election, he had promised that if elected

¹⁰⁴ Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), pp.14-15.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,p.16.

he would work to restore America's military superiority over the USSR. Many hours reading, writing and delivering these ideas, as well as campaigning all around the country, had paid off. In selecting Caspar Weinberger, Reagan had ensured that 'Peace through Strength' would become the manifesto of the Pentagon.

In the final analysis, the official defense policy of the United States in the 1980s can find its origin in the person of Ronald Reagan. In this respect concerning his presidency, he was the chief script writer and producer of the biggest arms buildup in US peacetime history. But, whether Reagan directed the details of this 'military modernization program' once in office will be investigated in the following chapter.

Chapter 2:

MILITARY MODERNIZATION

“I wanted peace through strength; not peace through a piece of paper.”

-Ronald Reagan¹⁰⁷

‘Peace through Strength’ was Ronald Reagan’s theory that American military power could deter Soviet aggression. Upon being inaugurated President, Reagan had the opportunity to put his hypothesis to the test. Over the course of the eight-years of the Reagan Administration, the United States would spend close to 2 trillion dollars on defense: an unprecedented ‘peace time’ military buildup. In Reagan’s worldview, the Soviet Union had spent the decade of the 1970s constructing the most awesome war machine ever produced in history of the world, and if America hoped to survive the 1980s, then they had to catch up fast. Critics charged that Reagan had fallen prey to the ‘military-industrial complex’ that Eisenhower had warned against in his farewell address to the nation,¹⁰⁸ but the President perceived things differently.

¹⁰⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 267.

¹⁰⁸ The term was coined by Eisenhower's speechwriters Ralph Williams and Malcolm Moos, and while some saw it as an attack at the incoming Kennedy Administration who had accused Eisenhower of presiding over a ‘missile

Reagan, as the preceding chapter demonstrates, believed that strength deterred aggression. This simple message was summed up in a re-election commercial in 1984, which had the image of a bear moving about in the woods, with the narrator saying:

There is a bear in the woods. For some people, the bear is easy to see. Other's don't see it at all. Some people say the bear is tame. Others say it's vicious, and dangerous. Since no one can really be sure who's right, isn't it smart to be as strong as the bear—if there is a bear?¹⁰⁹

The commercial ended with the image of a man, with a rifle hanging over his shoulder, walking up the bear. There could be no doubt that the bear represented the threat of the 'Russian bear', and that the fearless hunter was Ronald Reagan.

This chapter details how the US set out to achieve parity with the Soviets in the triad of America's conventional defense capability: air, land and sea. Also examined is the nuclear component—so central to the Cold War—and how the Reagan Administration sought to 'close the window of vulnerability' through an enhanced nuclear deterrent. The questions addressed are: Did Reagan merely approve recommendations presented to him on proposed arms programs, or did he carefully review each case on its merits as his predecessor Jimmy Carter had done? Did Reagan as Commander-in-Chief project an image of strength, and thereby increase deterrence? And finally, who was the driver of America's arms buildup during the Reagan years: Was it Reagan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the Defense Secretary?

The Beginnings: Empowering the Secretary of Defense

gap', historians now conclude that Eisenhower's warning was a genuine reflection of his feelings. See William D Hartung, 'Eisenhower's Warning: The Military-Industrial Complex Forty Years Later', *World Policy Journal*, (Spring 2001) Vol. 18, Iss.1, p.39.

¹⁰⁹ As quoted in Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 94.

In the Reagan White House, the President liked to empower his subordinates to do their jobs on their own, and only to see him if there was something they could not handle themselves and needed his decision on. Delegating so much power to unelected officials meant that Reagan had to carefully select people who would adhere to his ideological viewpoints. As the preceding chapter demonstrates, Caspar Weinberger absolutely agreed with Reagan's assessment of the defense situation and concurred with Reagan's conclusion that a 'military modernization program' was a vital necessity. With the selection made, the next most important step was for Reagan to give clear guidelines on what he wished to see accomplished at the Defense Department, and this Reagan did prior to Weinberger taking command at the Pentagon.

Weinberger received his first operational directives from Reagan when the two met a few weeks before the inauguration at the beginning of 1981. The transition team had moved into Blair House, a residence directly across from the White House traditionally used for visiting heads of state. There Reagan and Weinberger discussed the grave situation of Poland, and came to the conclusion that American military weakness meant that there was no real deterrent for the Soviets not to launch an aggressive strike on the rebellious Warsaw Pact nation. As Weinberger recalled, Reagan said that 'his top priority was to reverse the situation, to give the military capabilities' that would 'back up' diplomacy. In Reagan's view, 'there was nothing worse than an empty threat or an idle boast or bluff'. He stated: 'If you get called and cannot respond, your chances of being believed a second time are exceedingly low.'¹¹⁰

Reagan made clear in that transition meeting that the modernization program would go forward regardless of cost, and as quickly as possible. Weinberger recalled that Reagan, a man well known for his joviality, was 'deadly serious' when making these points to him. If it came to

¹¹⁰ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, p.35.

a choice between a balanced budget and an enhanced military program, Reagan opted for the latter, even if that meant running up large deficits. Viewing the international situation, Reagan noted Soviet expansion into Angola, Afghanistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ethiopia and elsewhere, and said that America had to ‘regain our strength as quickly as possible’ if it were to persuade the Soviets that they could not take similar actions in the future. These ‘extremely important conclusions,’ as Weinberger recalled them, set the tone for the Administration’s endeavors during the first months in office.¹¹¹ The next step was to formulate Reagan’s guidelines into an official manifesto that would steer the various branches of government towards the same goal of Reagan’s vision of ‘Peace through Strength’.

National Security Decision Directive 12

Eight months of strategic review by the Departments of Defense, State and the National Security Council resulted in a policy directive signed by Reagan that set the course for where America’s arms buildup needed to go.

National Security Decision Directive 12 (NSDD-12)¹¹² came into effect on 1 October 1981 and outlined the critical areas of defense that required the ‘long term development of’ America’s ‘strategic forces’. It further aimed to ‘help redress the deteriorated strategic balance with the Soviet Union.’ Using classic ‘Peace through Strength’ language, the document justified the expenditures as necessary to achieve deterrence; a deterrence that could in the end accomplish what no other administration before it had—actual nuclear arms reductions. It stated:

The result will be a deterrent that is far more secure and stable than our present nuclear forces. The program will also give us a force that is more resilient to

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² National Security Decision Directive 12, (1 October 1981) *Federation of American Scientists* Retrieved May 3, 2008 <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-012.htm>

Soviet attempts to negate our progress. This should, in turn, create better incentives for the Soviets to negotiate genuine arms reductions.

To 'build up in order to build down' was the stated aim of the nuclear program. But the document also called for a conventional arms buildup:

It is important to bear in mind that in addition to the strategic forces modernization decided herein, we will also be devoting even greater resources to improving, modernizing and strengthening our conventional forces, and to research and development, as well as to improving the readiness of our existing forces.

The document went on to outline five 'mutually reinforcing parts' of the modernization program:

- 1) *'Making our strategic communications and command systems more survivable, so that we can communicate over survivable networks with our nuclear forces, even after an attack.'*

-Surprisingly this was deemed to be 'the highest priority element in the program' as Reagan officials had discovered to their alarm that a single surprise attack by the Soviets could take out their entire communications system, thus bringing America's military to its knees in one foul blow. There was no use having the best weapons systems and the strongest army in the world if the President of the United States could not communicate with his generals and direct a response. The next point of the NSC document dealt with the air force:

- 2) Bomber Force: *'A modernized bomber force will be built and deployed, consisting of B-1s and Advanced Technology Bombers that could penetrate present and future Soviet air defense.'*

-The B-1 Bomber cancelled by Carter and championed by Reagan was now 'back from the dead'. The document estimated that these planes would not be operational till 1986, and

therefore called for ‘air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs)’ to ‘be deployed, beginning in 1982, on the most modern of our present B-52 force.

From airpower, to submarines:

3) *‘Increasing the accuracy and payload of our submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM)’*

-With the USSR having more land based intercontinental ballistic missiles than the US, and with the continual problems surrounding the basing of America’s latest nuclear missile the MX, a reliance on submarine nuclear capability was a must.¹¹³ From offense, to defense:

4) *‘Strategic Defense’:*

-What would later be known as the ‘Strategic Defense Initiative’ was first mentioned here as part of a ‘vigorous research and development program’ that looked to create ‘air and space defenses’. In addition to this, Civil Defenses were proposed: the ability for society to continue in the wake of a nuclear attack. Citizen Reagan had criticized Carter for his failure to plan for a nuclear strike, now America was about to do just that.

5) *‘Land Based Missile Deployment’:*

-To counter the Soviet nuclear threat, the Reagan Administration would push ahead with the MX missile. NSDD-12 called for enough units to be produced to ‘support 100 operational missiles’. The document rejected Carter’s ‘Multiple Protective Shelter basing’ while calling for research and development of two other basing options: ‘airmobile basing and deep

¹¹³ Despite the passing of almost 27 years, the details of this objective remain top secret and unavailable to scholars.

underground basing.’

In signing this document, Reagan was embarking on a long and sometimes vicious battle with the Congress over funding. His critics would paint him as a warmonger, but Reagan believed as the document stated: that his arms buildup would achieve peace via deterrence and could pave the way for actual arms reductions. As Reagan recounted in his memoirs:

The journey leading to arms reduction wasn’t going to be short or easy. And I knew it had to begin with an *increase* of arms...I had given final approval to blueprints for a multibillion-dollar modernization of our strategic forces. In order to assure that we would regain and sustain in military superiority over the Soviet Union, which for a decade had been moving forward with the largest and costliest military buildup in the history of man, we had decided to build one hundred B-1B bombers to replace our deteriorating fleet of B-52 bombers (the B-1s development had been canceled by the Carter administration); to build one hundred new intercontinental-range missiles, the MX Peacekeeper; to deploy new Trident nuclear submarines and develop a new missile to be launched from them; to develop the Stealth bomber, which was capable of penetrating Soviet defense radars; and to construct a wide array of new surface ships, fighter aircraft and space satellites for communications and other military purposes.¹¹⁴

Reagan recalled that his critics charged that it was ‘contradictory’ and ‘hypocritical’ of him to claim to be seeking ‘nuclear peace by building more nuclear weapons’. But again it came back to Reagan’s belief that ‘peace’ came from ‘strength’, and at the bargaining table it was always best to negotiate from a position of strength, not weaknesses. ‘If you were going to approach the Russians with a dove of peace in one hand,’ Reagan said, ‘you had to have a sword in the other.’¹¹⁵

The MX ‘Peacekeeper Missile’

¹¹⁴ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 294.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

A major component of Reagan's attempt to offset Soviet military advantage was his championing of the MX missile. This inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) had been in development since 1972 and had received the abbreviated title 'MX' from 'Missile-eXperimental'. To emphasize its deterrent factor and help neutralize opposition to the project, Reagan re-named the 10-warhead missile the 'MX Peacekeeper'. The vulnerability of American's ICBMs to a surprise Soviet attack made the MX an indispensable necessity if America were to convince the Soviets that they operated from a position of strength. Unfortunately for Reagan, Congress proved to be as unwilling to fund the missile as it had been under Carter, and it all had to do with the fact that the proposed mode of deployment kept the 'window of vulnerability' wide open.

If the MX 'Peacekeeper' missile were to close a 'window of vulnerability', then Reagan needed to find a deployment method that would be acceptable to the United States Congress. In 1976 the House of Representatives had blocked the deployment of President Ford's silo-based proposal, arguing that the missiles were worthless if the Soviets knew of their exact location and could destroy them in a single strike. In 1979 President Carter again asked for Congressional approval of the MX, this time addressing the vulnerability question by proposing a system of underground silos linked by rail. Like a shell game, the Soviets would not know which silos had missiles in them and which ones did not. Critics pointed out that all the Soviet had to do to overcome this would be to bomb *all* of the silos. With this option politically dead, Reagan proposed a 'dense pack' solution: hardened silos that could withstand a nuclear attack, and spaced only 1800 feet apart. In theory, 'dense packing' would create a fratricide effect if bombed: after initial Soviet ICBM explosions, further incoming missiles would be destroyed by the lingering blast effect. The super-hardened silos would survive the attack, and thus allow the

US to respond. Again, the critics said that this too could be overcome by Soviet modifications to their weapons, and Reagan was left without a critical component to his nuclear re-armament program.

Despite Reagan's many phone calls to Congressional leaders and his appeal to the public for support, the White House and the Congress had become completely deadlocked on the MX missile by 1982. Consequently, Reagan turned to a man that he knew had the intelligence and respect of those in power to show him a path to MX deployment: Brent Scowcroft.

Dr. Scowcroft, who would later serve as President George H.W Bush's National Security Advisor, was appointed by President Reagan on 3 January 1983 to head up a 'Blue Ribbon Commission' to investigate and then advise the President and Congress on how best to achieve nuclear deterrent capability against the Soviets. Called the 'Commission on Strategic Forces'¹¹⁶ it served as a 'go between' for both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue and deliberately set out to create a political compromise that would be satisfactory to everyone over the long haul.¹¹⁷ Scowcroft worked closely with NSC advisor Robert McFarlane and a host of congressional leaders including Senator Sam Nunn (Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee), Senator Henry 'Scoop' Jackson and Representatives Les Aspin and R. James Woolsey of the

¹¹⁶ Presidential Commissions can be divided into two categories: those that seek innovative policy prescriptions, such as the Rodham Clinton Commission into healthcare reform in 1993, or those that seek to create a solution to a deadlock between the President and Congress; the Scowcroft Commission fell into this latter category. Furthermore, for a commission to be successful, two conditions are necessary: 'First...a relatively high level of prior presidential interest in the subject matter of the commission's report is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for enactment of the commission's suggestions; second....within this high-interest group, commissions that relied more on executive agency information and less on "outside" information are most likely to have their recommendations followed by the president and the federal government in general.'As quoted in Daniel A. Smith, Kevin M. Leyden, Stephen A. Borelli, 'Predicting the Outcomes of Presidential Commissions: Evidence from the Johnson and Nixon Years', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington, Spring 1998), Vol. 28, Iss. 2,p.269.

¹¹⁷ R. James Woolsey, 'The Politics of Vulnerability: 1980-1983', *Foreign Affairs*, (New York: Spring 1984), Vol. 62, Iss. 4, p. 805.

House Armed Services Committee.¹¹⁸ A compromise was reached by this bi-partisan group within three months and they made three major recommendations:

- 1) a hardened silo deployment was recommended for the MX;
- 2) development of a small, mobile single warhead ICBM would solve the vulnerability question; and
- 3) the White House should base arms control on the number of warheads, not the launchers.¹¹⁹

As the negotiated conclusions went to the House and Senate for a vote, Reagan worried about the outcome, as this November 1982 diary entry indicates: ‘During the day I sandwiched in meetings with Lyn N[ofziger] and another with John Tower re the MX. No doubt we’re going to have trouble—the Dems will try to cancel the whole system. It will take a full court press to get it. If we don’t, I shudder to think what it will do to our arms reduction negotiations in Geneva’.¹²⁰

Reagan did push hard to get support for the MX missile, and linked it to his concept of ‘Peace through Strength’. In a radio address to the nation on 21 May 1983 Reagan said:

To prevent nuclear war, we must have the capability to deter nuclear war. This means we must keep our strategic forces strong enough to balance those of the Soviet Union...By building the MX Peacekeeper and small, single warhead missiles, we will not only preserve our ability to protect the peace, we will also demonstrate that any Soviet quest for nuclear superiority will not work, that it is in everyone’s interest to end the arms race and agree to mutual arms reductions.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ William W. Newman, ‘The Structures of National Security Decision making: leadership, institutions and politics in the Carter, Reagan and G.H.W Bush Years’ *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: June 2004), Vol.32, Iss.2, p. 272.

¹²⁰ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 113. This entry suggests that Reagan linked an arms buildup to an eventual arms reduction, and that this was his eventual goal for ‘Peace through Strength’.

¹²¹ Ronald Reagan, ‘Radio Address to the Nation on the Observance of Armed Forces Day’, 21 May 1983; *PPPR*

On 24 May 1983, the House of Representatives passed the MX missile program, and the following day the Senate followed suit. Reagan hailed it as ‘an important signal to the world: Americans are uniting in a common search to protect our security, reduce the level of nuclear weapons and strengthen the peace.’¹²² The MX missile helped create stronger deterrence for the United States, but in Europe the nuclear imbalance between East and West was creating a crisis within NATO, and this too required strong leadership from President Reagan.

INF

If peace comes through strength, then there is a need to match the strength of the enemy if a nation is to achieve equilibrium. In the late 1970s the nuclear equilibrium of Europe, which had maintained the peace for three decades, was destroyed as the Soviets achieved a decided nuclear superiority. The imbalance of the nuclear forces in Europe thus created a crisis within the NATO alliance—a feeling of inferiority heightened a sense of vulnerability which would either lead to individual European nations cutting a deal with the Soviets, or a united front led by the United States to counter the Soviet threat with an increase of nuclear forces to restore a sense of parity.

The challenge to the West began in 1977 as the Soviet Union began replacing its intermediate range nuclear arsenal with the advanced ‘SS-20’ nuclear weapon. The SS-20 had several elements that caused alarm within NATO: it had great range, with the ability to strike every European capital; it was fast, and could wipe out a European city within four minutes of its launch; it was mobile, meaning it had far greater survivability than a silo based missile; and it was superior to the weapons it replaced, with three independently targeted warheads.¹²³ The

¹²² Statement released by the White House, 24 May 1983; Ibid.

¹²³ Jack Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004), p.38.

NATO alliance therefore decided in December 1979 that it had no choice but to enter into a period of negotiation with the USSR that would either lead to an agreement that placed ceilings on INF weapons, or in the event that no settlement could be reached, American deployment of Intermediate-Range-Nuclear forces to counter the Soviet threat.

Reagan inherited this ‘dual track’ approach to the SS-20 crisis and his administration threw the Soviets a ‘curve ball’: the so called, ‘Zero-Option’. This proposal, devised by Pentagon official Richard Perle, was a public relations triumph: President Reagan proposed in November 1981 that NATO would deploy no INF missiles if the Soviets were to dismantle theirs. It was a fundamental break with the Carter Administration’s position that some deployment would be necessary.¹²⁴ This controversial negotiating offer received Reagan’s personal imprimatur because it mirrored his nuclear abolitionist views and seemed to him to be a good diplomatic tactic.

The Administration’s ‘Zero-Option’ is an example of Reagan making a strong, clear cut executive decision and instructing how negotiations were to proceed. The arms control experts in the State Department thought that the concept was redundant: there was no way that the Soviets would trade their weapons for ‘air’ and to even propose it was to invite ridicule. Reagan on the other hand did not agree with this opinion: the ultimate aim of his ‘Peace through Strength’ program was get to a position where the Soviets would begin negotiating true nuclear arms reductions. In unveiling the ‘Zero-Option’, Reagan was telling the world that America’s intentions were peaceful—that its entire nuclear program was aimed at deterring war. Therefore, if the Soviets’ unilaterally removed their weapons, there would be no need for America to deploy theirs. Secretary of State Alexander Haig strongly disagreed.

Firstly, Haig did not like a diplomatic position originating from Weinberger’s

¹²⁴ Strobe Talbott, *Deadly Gambits: The Reagan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1984), pp.72-3, 39, 58.

Department of Defense, and secondly he felt that it gave him no room to bargain with the Russians and proposed instead a ‘Zero-Plus Option’, which would incorporate America’s aim for zero weapons, but would enable him to negotiate a ceiling on INF weapons.¹²⁵ And perhaps thirdly, Haig thought that he knew better than the President.¹²⁶ Reagan later recalled, ‘It was one of many instances I faced as President when my policy of encouraging cabinet members to speak frankly and to fight for their points of view put me in the middle’. The decision was the President’s alone to make, and he gave his reasoning for the decision in his memoirs:

Al’s idea of leading with a flexible proposal had merit, but I’d learned as a union negotiator that it’s never smart to show your hole card in advance. If we first announced that our goal was the total elimination of intermediate-range nuclear weapons from Europe and then hinted we might be willing to leave a few, we’d be tipping off the bottom line of our negotiating position before negotiations even began.

I thought our goal should be the total elimination of all INF weapons from Europe, and stating this before the world would be a vivid gesture demonstrating to the Soviets, our allies, the people storming the streets of West Germany, and others that we meant business about wanting to reduce nuclear weapons.¹²⁷

Reagan was as determined to pursue the Zero-Option as he was to see through deployment of INF weapons if his proposal was rejected by the Soviets. Considering the leadership in the Kremlin at the time, Reagan had no choice but to deploy, but to do so required all of his leadership abilities, to make sure that the NATO alliance held firm.

The successful deployment of American INF weapons in 1983 was due largely to

¹²⁵ Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), pp.228-9.

¹²⁶ Haig’s approach towards Reagan had always been one of thinly disguised contempt for the President’s abilities. Haig’s major problem, in the view of most within the administration, was that he thought that he was the President, not Reagan. President Reagan seemed to share this assessment, as his diary indicates when Haig was later forced to resign: ‘Today was the day—I told Al H[aig] I had decided to accept his resignation....Up to Camp David where we were in time to see Al read his letter of resignation on TV. I’m told it was his 4th re-write. Apparently his 1st was pretty strong—then he thought better of it. I must say it was OK. He gave only one reason and did say there was a disagreement on foreign policy. Actually, the only disagreement was over whether I made policy or the Sec. of State did.’ (Entry for 25 June, 1982) Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, pp. 90-91.

¹²⁷ Reagan *An American Life*, pp.296-297.

Reagan's ability to persuade European leaders to ignore massive protests and stand firm with the United States. Reagan began his personal offensive in earnest at the Williamsburg G-7 Summit in May 1983. Unlike the meetings that had preceded it, Reagan wanted his chairmanship of the summit to be different, and he therefore laid down some new ground rules. Firstly, there would be no pre-negotiated communiqué. In the past, diplomats representing the nations had met months in advance, written out a joint communiqué that could be agreed upon and left the circled sections that could not be resolved up to the leaders. Thus, the G-7 leaders were held hostage to lower level bureaucrats. Reagan wanted any communiqué to represent what was actually discussed during the meeting. Secondly, the President directed that as much time as possible would be spent by the leaders interacting among themselves, without foreign ministers. Accordingly, the heads of state sat around a circular table and discussed matters among themselves, with translators out of view. What came out of this format chaired by Reagan was a clear and unmistakable declaration of support for INF deployment. The joint communiqué read:

Our nations express the strong wish that a balanced INF agreement be reached shortly. Should this occur, the negotiations will determine the level of deployment. It is well known that should this not occur, the countries concerned will proceed with the planned deployment of the US systems in Europe at the end of 1983...The security of our countries is indivisible and must be approached on a global basis. Attempts to avoid serious negotiation by seeking to influence public opinion in our countries will fail.¹²⁸

According to Shultz, Reagan's leadership during this period was 'critical'¹²⁹ in getting a united NATO commitment to deploy.

Despite dire predictions that deployment would cause a nuclear confrontation, Reagan gave the order to begin deployment of INF weapons on schedule beginning on 23 November

¹²⁸ Shultz, *Triumph and Turmoil: My Years as Secretary of State*, pp. 355-357.

¹²⁹ Interview with author, see Appendix B.

1983. The Soviets responded by walking out of the Geneva arms talks. While Superpower relations seemed to have reached a new low, Reagan believed that the united resolve shown by the NATO alliance was the greatest indicator that they would not be bullied, that strength would be matched by strength and that in this way deterrence and peace would be achieved. Though no-one could see it at the time, the INF deployment would later prove to be a decisive turning point towards the ending of the Cold War.

In addition to nuclear modernization and deployment, Reagan's 'Peace through Strength' program included enhancing the triad of American military: Army, Navy and Air force. The most pressing of these three was the Navy, which was considered to be in a situation of extreme neglect.

The Reagan Maritime Strategy

President Reagan and his Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger were in complete agreement about the dilapidated state of American Naval power at the beginning of the 1980s. As Reagan recounted in his memoirs:

Militarily, our nation was seriously in danger of falling behind the Soviet Union at a time a former naval officer was holding the watch as Commander-in-Chief. The Soviets were modernizing their fleet and their ground and air forces on a massive scale. Yet on any given day, I was told as many as half the ships in our navy couldn't leave port because of a lack of spare parts or crew.¹³⁰

Caspar Weinberger concurred:

The condition of the Navy we inherited clearly required substantial increases in both the number of ships and their capabilities. The appropriations we needed, of course, were the result of ten years of neglect, during which we had not kept pace with the rapidly growing Soviet Navy, nor even with the normal maintenance, overhaul and repairs of the ships we did have. We would, if our proposals were approved, be well embarked on the goal of achieving the 600 ship Navy that our

¹³⁰ Reagan, *An American Life* p.217.

commitments and our security required.¹³¹

The goal of 600 ships was an ambitious attempt to regain the former prestige of American Naval power which had declined from 689 vessels in 1961 to just 455 ships in 1981. In addition to this, Weinberger estimated that with the need for a global presence of the Navy, America would require 15 aircraft carrier task forces, as opposed to the 12 in existence.¹³²

The shipbuilding began in earnest and with it a massive budget expenditure. Between 1980 and 1985, the Navy's budget rose from 63 per cent in real dollars, more than the entire Pentagon budget, which increased 53.6 per cent during the same period.¹³³ Many critics questioned the need for these massive expenditures,¹³⁴ but Reagan's naval buildup received support from Congress due to what was to become known as the 'Reagan Maritime Strategy'.

Authored by Secretary of the Navy John Lehman Jr. and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral James Watkins, the 'Reagan Maritime Strategy' gave Congress a reason to fund Naval expenditures other than the President's blanket call for deterrence through strength. The strategy that was sold to the Congress featured three rationales for Reagan's strengthened Navy in the event that America and the USSR went to war. Firstly, Lehman argued that in the early stages of combat, the US Navy could strike Soviet naval vessels before they had a chance to begin battle. Secondly, the Navy would attack the USSR in the Far East, in an attempt to move their forces from the likely scene of battle (Europe or the Middle East) and thus weaken their huge conventional force superiority. And finally, the Navy would destroy the Soviet's ballistic missile

¹³¹ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, p. 57.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.57.

¹³³ Michael L. Ross, 'Disarmament at Sea' *Foreign Policy*, No. 77 (Winter,1989), pp.94-112.

¹³⁴ See, Keith A. Dunn and William O. Staudenmaier, *Strategic Implications of the Continental-Maritime Debate*, Washington Paper No. 107 (New York: Praeger, 1984); Robert W.Komer, *Maritime Strategy or Coalition Defense?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1984)

submarines, making American survival of a nuclear war far more likely. Accurate war games demonstrating this theory in 1982 were conducted at the edge of Soviet territory in the Sea of Japan, the Kurile Islands in the northwest Pacific and in the Norwegian Sea. These successful operations garnered the support the Navy sought from Congress, and its budget increased dramatically, peaking at \$99 billion in 1985.¹³⁵

By the time Reagan left office, he had accomplished what he had promised: the United States Navy was again second to none. The Soviets feared the renewed presence of American naval ships constantly circling the globe, and Reagan's goal of a 600 ship Navy was almost achieved, falling short only by 9.¹³⁶ New technologies and a new strategy also helped fund Reagan's Air Force modernization program.

Air Force: New Technology and Strategy

The Reagan years can also be credited for creating the modern American Air-Force as it is now known, both in terms of new technology, and a change in military strategy that has been employed by the US in all major military engagements since. Candidate Reagan had been quick to criticize Jimmy Carter's Pentagon for failing to adequately fund the military programs that would propel America towards a new dawn of aerial warfare. Once in office, Reagan reversed many of the Carter decisions and gave the green light for the cancelled programs to go ahead, and in many aspects the Air Force that America now has, was created during the Reagan Presidency.

In terms of new technology, the Reagan Administration advanced aerial warfare by the

¹³⁵ Ibid. See also John F Lehman, Jr., *Command of the Seas: Building the 600-Ship Navy* (New York: US Naval Institute Press, 1988).

¹³⁶ Greg Schneider and Renae Merel, 'Reagan's Defense Buildup Bridged Military Ears: Huge Budgets Brought Life Back to Industry' *Washington Post*, 9 June 2004.

introduction of ‘smart’ bombing and weapons. The ageing B-52 bombers were given new life by equipping them with laser guided bombs and air-launched cruise missiles which permitted the US to strike targets in a highly accurate manner without exposing the planes to great danger, as the attacks could be carried out from a considerable distance.¹³⁷ When air-strikes were carried out in close range, the ability to bomb and escape unnoticed took a quantum leap with the introduction of the ‘Stealth Bomber’, an airplane which has the ability to go unnoticed by an enemy’s radar.¹³⁸ These new technologies lent themselves to a ‘revolution in military strategy’ that has been employed up to present times.

The ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ saw American military leaders loathe to place ‘boots on the ground’ and thereby risk the possibility of high casualties and the criticism and low morale engendered by this.¹³⁹ Consequently, during the 1980’s the military brass devised a new method for future warfare that sought to accomplish its war aims without the accompanying American death toll. The new military doctrine thus adopted, called ‘AirLand Battle’ placed a heavy emphasis on the use of the Air Force to carry out initial bombardments designed to take out an enemy’s ability to wage war.¹⁴⁰ The aerial bombings could then pave the way for a more effective land invasion by the army, or if successful enough, remove the necessity for a manned invasion at all. Reagan employed the Air Force to bomb Libya in 1986 in retaliation for its support for terrorist activities, most notably the bombing of the *LaBelle* nightclub in West

¹³⁷ See Frank Barnaby’s *The Automated Battlefield* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

¹³⁸ John Arquilla *The Reagan Imprint: Ideas in American Foreign Policy From the Collapse of Communism To the War on Terror* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), pp. 100, 133.

¹³⁹ Derek N. Buckaloo argues that the Reagan and the 1st Bush Administration did not overcome the Vietnam Syndrome, but rather their military actions were ‘accommodations to, rather than transcendence of, the limits of the syndrome’. See *Fighting the Last War: The Vietnam Syndrome as a Constraint on United States Foreign Policy, 1975–1991*, PhD dissertation, Emory University, 2002.

¹⁴⁰ For a comprehensive look at the defense posture and tactics of the Reagan/Bush era, see Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1993).

Germany that was popular with US servicemen. This action was considered a sufficient response, without the need to use the army. Following Reagan's presidency, the 'AirLand Battle' doctrine was employed with great success in the Gulf War of 1991 and the Kosovo military action of 1999 demonstrated that a war could be won with total reliance on air power. Despite its limited effectiveness in fighting insurgent guerilla forces, the wars of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) each saw the Air Force used in a 'shock and awe' opening salvo of targeted bombings. Thus, the Reagan presidency can be credited for the creation of a new military strategy that is still being employed over twenty years after its inception. Though Reagan cannot claim authorship personally for originating this new doctrine, his championing of a technological advancement in the Air Force brought this about.

But having the best military in the world does not make a nation appear strong if its leader is personally weak or indecisive. Thus, the Soviets watched closely when Reagan did order military strikes, and this was no more so than his 1983 decision to invade Grenada. Examined next will be Reagan's role as Commander-in-Chief during the Grenada invasion, and how his actions were perceived around the globe.

Commander- In-Chief: the Grenada Invasion, a Case-study

While this thesis argues that the 'Reagan Doctrine' encompasses the whole spectrum of US Soviet policy in the 1980s, the term has been traditionally applied to Reagan's support of anti-communist guerilla forces and his own military adventures as Commander-in-Chief. This emphasis on military action, demonstrates the belief that while projection of force is important, it is the actual use of force that leads to real battlefield results and above all else gives pause to one's enemies. While it is true that Reagan's use of the military in the theatre of battle was

limited generally to ‘coercive diplomacy’,¹⁴¹ the times in which he did use it had enormous ramifications internationally and did enhance the idea of ‘Peace through Strength’, as Reagan demonstrated his willingness to act decisively, unilaterally and overwhelmingly to further his goal of overturning ‘communist aggression’.

As President, there is no duty more awesome or burdensome as that of Commander-in-Chief. To give the order to send men and women into harm’s way, knowing that they could well die, was according to Reagan, the toughest part of the job;¹⁴² but how a President acts during a crisis, especially if they do order a military strike, will greatly enhance or diminish the perceived strength of the nation. Presidential weakness can invite aggression, as evidenced by the Soviet decision to send nuclear weapons to Cuba following Kennedy’s poor judgment during the botched Bay of Pigs invasion and his weak performance at the Vienna Summit.¹⁴³ Similarly, a strong performance can strengthen deterrence, and Reagan’s leadership during the Grenada crisis showed the leaders in the Kremlin that the President could be very strong indeed, perhaps deterring Soviet aggression elsewhere.

The crisis began on Wednesday, 19 October 1983, when President Reagan received word that the Caribbean nation of Grenada was in deep trouble: leftist leader Maurice Bishop had been murdered by his deputy Bernard Coard and General Austin had declared a state of martial law.

¹⁴¹ See Bruce W. Jentleson, ‘The Reagan Administration and Coercive Diplomacy: Restraining More than Remaking Governments’, *Political Science Quarterly*, (Spring: 1991), Vol. 106, Is. 1, p. 57.

¹⁴² Reagan wrote the parents of a Marine: ‘There is nothing in my job so difficult as issuing the order that sends those young men into situations where they are endangered. There is nothing so heartbreaking as the calls I’ve made to wives and parent who’ve lost husbands and sons.’ As reproduced in *Reagan: A Life In Letters*, p. 636.

¹⁴³ At least this is the view of Richard Nixon who wrote in his chapter ‘Presidential Power’: ‘Even when you are strong, it is bad strategy to let yourself appear weak. This can lead to a dangerous miscalculation on your adversary’s part. The 1961 Vienna Summit between Khrushchev and Kennedy led to such a miscalculation...Khrushchev later called Kennedy’s hand by putting missiles into Cuba. A dangerous confrontation with nuclear overtones resulted, one that could have been prevented had Kennedy’s conduct in Vienna given Khrushchev a greater impression of strength and determination’. *The Real War*, (New York: Warner Books, 1980),p.277.

Of immediate concern to Reagan was the fate of some six-hundred American medical students living on the island as they were all potential hostages. The White House swung into action, and Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North suggested on 20 October that a Beirut-bound ship of Marines be diverted to the vicinity of Grenada. Over the objections of the Joint-Chiefs-of Staff, Reagan agreed with North and ordered the *USS Independence* to stay close at hand and await the President's orders.¹⁴⁴ So as not to create the impression that a military strike was imminent, Reagan went ahead with his schedule and flew Friday evening to Georgia for a weekend of golf.

Staying at the Eisenhower Cottage at the Augusta Country club, Reagan was awakened Saturday morning, 22 October, at around 3am by National Security Adviser Bud McFarlane. Emerging from his bedroom in robe and pajamas, the President was informed by McFarlane, who was joined by Secretary Shultz, that six East Caribbean states had formally requested American assistance to overthrow the government of Grenada, which they considered to be a puppet of Cuba and a potential threat to their own nations. Reagan had up to this point been presented with two possible military responses: one, a simple 'non combatant evacuation operation' (NEO) to rescue the Americans studying at 'St. George's University School of Medicine'; or two, a full scale invasion. In an interview with the author, Shultz was asked why Reagan ultimately settled on the second option. His reply, in essence, was that only a fully fledged military invasion toppling the junta could ensure the safety of the students.¹⁴⁵ However, at the time there were many around the President arguing that the US could stage a commando style raid and rescue the American citizens without having to overthrow the regime. Indeed, it appears that there was a lot more to the Grenada invasion than a mere 'rescue mission' as the

¹⁴⁴ Bob Woodward, *Veil*, pp. 289-92.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 5 October 2007, Stanford University. See Appendix B.

Reagan White House sought to spin it.¹⁴⁶

For Reagan the bigger issue at play was the allegation that Cuba was building a 10,000 foot runway which had all the appearance of preparations to use Grenada as a base from which to export communism to the other Caribbean nations. Instead of seeking to ‘contain’ Grenada’s potential ambitions for conquest, Reagan would do what no President had done before in the history of the Cold War: he would ‘roll back’ a communist government, overturning for the first time the so called ‘Brezhnev Doctrine’ which held that ‘once a nation is part of the communist world, it will always be part of the communist world’. Reagan’s decision to give the go ahead could also be seen as an invocation of the ‘Monroe Doctrine’, which stipulated that North America and its surrounds were ‘off limits’ for European expansion, for if Cuba were behind events in Grenada, that meant that the USSR was also involved. Furthermore, Reagan felt that since America had been asked by Grenada’s neighbors in the Caribbean to respond, failure to do so would weaken America’s alliances throughout the world. As Reagan told his National Security Adviser:

The real issue here is that we have four countries—the East Caribbean states—asking us to help. And if we get that request and say no, what signal does that send to NATO, to London, Bonn, Tokyo and industrial nations who are relying on us? When somebody asks for help where there is such blatant provocation, we can’t say no. We have to say: We have to do this.¹⁴⁷

As soon as Reagan was given this pre-text for invasion—the invitation from the Caribbean nations—Reagan gave the order for the military action, saying simply, ‘Let’s do it’. As Reagan recounted in his diary: ‘I OK’d an outright invasion in response to a request by 6 other Caribbean nations including Jamaica & Barbados. They will all supply some forces so it will be a multi-

¹⁴⁶ See Reagan’s White House spokesman Larry Speaks *Speaking Out: The Reagan Presidency From Inside the White House* (New York: Avon Books, 1988), Chapter 10, ‘The Grenada Fiasco’ pp. 187-202

¹⁴⁷ As quoted in Strober, *Reagan: the Man and His Presidency*, p. 271.

national invasion.’¹⁴⁸ Shultz and McFarlane admired Reagan’s absolute decisiveness in giving the go-ahead for the invasion and the seriousness with which he approached his responsibilities. ‘Is there anything else I ought to know that I haven’t thought about?’ he asked.¹⁴⁹ When it was discussed if they should return immediately to Washington, Reagan said no, as it would ‘give away the story’. Instead he asked Shultz to join him on the pre-scheduled golfing game the following day, delegating the planning of the invasion to Vice President George Bush and his ‘Special Situations Group’ back at the White House.

The next twenty-four hours would see the lowest point in the Reagan presidency, as the Commander-in-Chief was buffeted by a surreal day that ended in unspeakable horror. That Saturday morning Reagan spoke with Bush’s group over the telephone, vetoing suggestions that the operation be limited to rescuing the students. ‘Well, if we’ve got to go there, we might as well do all that needs to be done,’ the President said before leaving for his round of golf. The game looked normal enough with no hint of what was being planned for Grenada, when a presage of what lay ahead occurred when a crazed gunman crashed through the course gate in a pickup truck, before taking five people hostage in the pro-shop. The President and Shultz were at the sixteenth hole when an armored car suddenly appeared and the Secret Service whisked them away to a secure location. Hostage negotiators tried in vain to reason with the gunman, who demanded to speak with the President. Reagan got on the phone, only to be hung up on several times. One by one the hostages managed to escape, and two hours later the gunman was seized.

Reagan went back to his cottage and after dinner, to bed. But once more, it was not to be a good night’s sleep: the President was awoken again by his National Security Adviser at 2:27am

¹⁴⁸ Reagan’s diary, written Friday October 21 as published in *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 189.

¹⁴⁹ Strober, *Reagan*, p. 271.

Sunday morning, this time to be informed that a suicide bomber had driven past security checkpoints at Beirut International Airport and detonated himself where American soldiers were stationed. Reagan was told that at least a hundred were dead, with hundreds still unaccounted for. McFarlane thought that Reagan looked every one of his seventy-three years when he tried to comprehend the carnage, asking ‘How could this happen?’¹⁵⁰ The final death toll numbered 241 US servicemen, with hundreds more injured. Reagan decided that it was time to return to Washington, and at 6:30am *Air Force One* took the deeply dejected President back home.

Despite the sobering news of the hundreds of Americans killed in an ill-fated ‘peacekeeping’ mission in Lebanon that Reagan had approved over the objections of his Secretary of State and Defense, the President determined that despite only a few days of planning, the invasion of Grenada would go ahead. Arriving back in Washington, Reagan composed himself and had a full day of meetings regarding the Beirut bombing and the Grenada invasion. Those who were present for the meeting saw that Reagan was ‘controlled, but furious’. When some present argued for a delay of the invasion in light of the terrorist attack in Beirut, Reagan snapped, ‘If this was right yesterday, its right today, and we shouldn’t let the act of a couple of terrorists dissuade us from going ahead’.¹⁵¹ Another objection by Secretary of Defense Weinberger that the military action was being ‘rushed’ was also brushed aside by the President. Leaving a meeting with the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff, Reagan asked General John Vessey how many

¹⁵⁰ McFarlane, *Special Trust* (New York: Cadell & Davies, 1994), p. 263.

¹⁵¹ The argument, therefore, put forward by many that Reagan’s Grenada invasion was actually a response to the terrorist attacks in Lebanon, is without historical foundation. Alexander DeConde, while noting that other factors are involved when a President uses military force, nonetheless argues that ‘Presidential Machismo’ compels Presidents to act in an aggressive fashion to vindicate their standing: ‘Reagan, stung by the October 23, 1983, suicide truck bombing disaster in Lebanon that killed 241 marines, retaliated two days later by invading the pygmy state of Grenada, an act that was greeted by a 90 percent public approval rating.’ See David Gray Adler’s review of ‘Presidential Machismo: Executive Authority, Military Intervention, and Foreign Relations’ *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. (Washington: Dec 2000), Vol. 30, Iss. 4; p.806. As the evidence presented in this account demonstrates, the Grenada invasion was set in motion prior to the tragedy in Beirut and went ahead in spite of it, not because of it.

troops were planned for the invasion. When he was told the number he said: 'Double it'. When asked why, he replied: 'Because if Jimmy Carter had used 18 helicopters for Desert One instead of nine, you'd be briefing him now instead of me'.¹⁵²

The National Security Directive authorizing the military action was brought to the President to sign. Taking a pen from his pocket, Reagan signed the papers quickly and said one word: 'Go'.¹⁵³ American forces were thus authorized to begin to move into position for an invasion within the next forty-eight hours. If Sunday saw Reagan steering his government and military to get behind the invasion, Monday saw Reagan ignore the protests of the Congressional leadership and NATO allies to forge ahead.

Once Reagan had set in motion the American overthrow of Grenada's government, fierce protests from Congress and allies like Margaret Thatcher did not budge him an inch. Reagan's meeting with the leaders of the Congress and Senate did not go down too well: Reagan was hardly *consulting* with them, as the Constitution insisted, as he was *informing* them of a military decision that he had already made and one that would proceed regardless of how they felt about it. Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil said: 'You are informing us, not asking us'.¹⁵⁴ It was on purpose. As Reagan later recounted in his memoirs, he had deliberately kept the Congress in the dark for fear that involving them in the process would lead to leaks to the press and along with it, 'the prediction that Grenada was going to become another "Vietnam"'.¹⁵⁵ "We didn't ask anyone's permission,' Reagan said, 'we just did it'. The meeting was interrupted by a call from British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who at 8:10 pm rang and 'screamed' at the President

¹⁵² As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 183.

¹⁵³ See 'Grenada: Anatomy of a 'Go' Decision' *Reader's Digest* Feb. 1984

¹⁵⁴ Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 184.

¹⁵⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 451.

to halt the invasion immediately, as Grenada was a member of the British Commonwealth and therefore not America's responsibility. Holding the phone a few inches from his ear as Thatcher continued with her tirade,¹⁵⁶ the President ended the call by informing her that 'We are already at zero', but not telling her that operations had already begun. If Reagan was troubled by Thatcher's call, he did not show it: returning to the meeting he spoke with enormous confidence about the planned invasion, and predicted that just as American soldiers had departed the re-liberated Philippines in 1946 to hundreds of thousands of islanders throwing garlands of flowers at them, so too the Grenadian people would react in a similar fashion.¹⁵⁷ It turns out that Reagan's optimism was to be justified.

The invasion of Grenada achieved its objectives: the communist government was overthrown, and all US citizens on the island were rescued and returned safely to America. The success of the American invasion of Grenada also sent a powerful message to the Soviet Union: that Ronald Reagan was a resolute leader who was willing to act independently of his NATO allies to restore democracy and check communist aggression. As Andrew Busch notes:

The invasion of Grenada represented the first time that a Communist country was liberated by U.S. troops and the first major use of force by the U.S. since Vietnam. The strategic and psychological balance in the Caribbean was altered favorably, and for the first time in recent memory, it was more dangerous to be America's enemy than her friend.¹⁵⁸

International ramifications aside, domestically what was most important was the footage of the American medical students kissing the airport tarmac upon arrival on US soil. These images

¹⁵⁶ McFarlane, *Special Trust*, p.265.

¹⁵⁷ 'God help us all' Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil thought, 'This really is about Lebanon.' As quoted in Edmond Morris, *Dutch*, p. 504.

¹⁵⁸ Busch, 'Ronald Reagan and the defeat of the Soviet Empire', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: Summer 1997), Vol. 27, Iss.3,p.451.

made Reagan hugely popular with the public, and Congressional and media analysts, who had been sharply critical of the invasion, soon changed their tune. While Weinberger had been right about the lack of proper planning for the invasion—nine-teen American servicemen died during the two day assault, some drowning due to poor strategy—Reagan took the view that his actions had been both necessary and defensible. For in addition to saving the students, hundreds of Cuban military advisers and Soviet weaponry were found, which led credence to the idea that Grenada was in fact going to be used as a base to export communism to the region.¹⁵⁹ While some thought that a Superpower invading a tiny Caribbean island was akin to a human swatting a fly, the ‘act of piracy’ as the Soviets called it, along with Reagan’s support for ‘contras’ in the Americas helped make ‘Peace through Strength’ more credible, for it demonstrated the fact that Reagan was not afraid to use force when he felt it was necessary to further America’s ideological and military interests.¹⁶⁰

Reagan’s Role: Conclusions

In assessing Reagan’s leadership as Commander-in-Chief throughout the 1980s, one must credit him for achieving his goal of ‘Peace through Strength’, by empowering his subordinates and

¹⁵⁹ The State Department’s Bureau of intelligence and Research prepared a summary of their findings for the President entitled, ‘Grenada: What the Captured Documents Prove’. The memo said in part: ‘Documents show that Soviet, Cuban and North Korean involvement in the militarization of the island was on a relatively large scale. The three Soviet agreements—covering the period 1980 to 1985—provided for delivery of \$25.8 million in weapons, ammunition, uniforms, trucks and other logistical equipment. Another \$12 million in war material were to be supplied per an agreement with North Korea, signed in April.’; White House Staff and Office Files, National Security Affairs: Office of the Assistant to the President For: Records, Country File, Grenada Invasion—Oct. 1983. (2) Box 91, 365; RPL.

Despite this, and other evidence, some still question whether the three-fold justification of the invasion—secure the students, stop the export of communism to the region, and halt a Soviet air-base—were legitimate. See especially Wendell Bell, ‘The American invasion of Grenada: a note on False Prophecy’, *Foresight: The Journal of Future Studies, Strategic Thinking and Policy*, (Bradford: 2008), Vol. 10, Iss. 7, p. 27.

¹⁶⁰ Lebanon and Grenada left Tip O’Neil fearful of the President, saying: ‘We can’t go with gunboat diplomacy...his policy is wrong and frightening...To be perfectly truthful, he frightens me.’ See *New York Times*, 29 October 1983 and 9 November 1983.

intervening at key points, but his overall ‘hands off’ approach led to wasteful expenditures.

Reagan’s greatest decision regarding defense policy was to select Caspar Weinberger as his Secretary of Defense. In doing so, Reagan was assured that he had his own man at the Pentagon. But who was the stronger partner, Reagan or Weinberger? Richard Perle, who worked closely with Weinberger, said of the Defense Secretary:

He was very important not in shaping the ideology, the ideas, the framework—that was Reagan, though it was shared by Weinberger—but Weinberger was the implementer; he was the person who was tasked with restoring American defenses and restoring them in a way that recognized that for some years prior to Reagan, American defenses had been allowed to deteriorate... And it was Reagan’s view that needed to be fixed and that Weinberger was the man to fix it.¹⁶¹

Weinberger did fix it, but at the cost of plunging the American government into massive deficits. The man who had been dubbed ‘Cap the Knife’ as Nixon’s budget director, cared little about the costs of the military programs he brought to the President for approval. While the ‘ideology and framework’ came from the President downwards, it was a ‘bottom up’ process when it came to the procurement of defense contracts.

According to a former Pentagon insider, whatever the Generals wanted, they got: Weinberger never vetoed anything, and argued that everything was ‘essential’ to America’s national security.¹⁶² Weinberger was also infamously stubborn, and with Reagan’s budget director David Stockman pushing for cuts, Reagan was in the awkward position of having to arbitrate between the two. At one time Stockman wanted a defense budget cut of \$23 billion dollars, while Weinberger would only agree to \$8 billion. At a meeting between the two and the President, Stockman said he could live with a \$15 billion dollar cut, with Weinberger saying that

¹⁶¹ Interview with the author, 14 November 2007, Chevy Chase, Maryland. See Appendix C.

¹⁶² ‘Weinberger on the Ramparts’, *NYT Magazine* 6 February 1983, p.19.

an \$11 billion cut was as far as he would go. Taking out a notepad and doing some arithmetic, Reagan could see that there was a four billion difference between the two men. Meeting them halfway, Reagan proposed a cut of \$13 billion dollars.¹⁶³ Problem solved, Reagan returned to reading his mail. Contrasted with Carter who read the Defense Budget line-by-line to scour any waste, Reagan's hands off/compromise approach is open to much criticism. Yet despite this, Reagan achieved his objectives.

Ultimately, Reagan was successful in his goal of 'military modernization', and while most of the defense programs and strategies came from others, Reagan's intervention was pivotal at times. On the MX basing problem, Reagan, a man who knew the value of negotiations from his days as President of the Screen Actors Guild, approved the formation of the Scowcroft Commission: a bi-partisan undertaking that finally solved the problem of weapons basing. In response to the Soviet SS-20 missiles, Reagan approved Richard Perle's INF 'Zero-Option' over the objections of his Secretary of State, Alexander Haig. This gave him the political cover to proceed with deployments, and became the basis for the 1987 INF Treaty that did in fact reduce these weapons to zero. With the Navy, Reagan's figure of a 600 ship fleet was a target that was worked towards and almost accomplished, with some assistance by the 'Reagan Maritime Strategy' which helped sell the budget to Congress. With the Air force, the programs cancelled by Carter like the B-1 Bomber proceeded, as candidate Reagan had promised they would along with a new 'AirLand' strategy authored by others. And finally, as Commander-in-Chief, Reagan demonstrated that he was willing to decisively use force whenever necessary, whether to check terrorist activities in Libya, or overthrow a communist threat in Grenada. The details generally came from others, but the leadership came from the President who displayed that he was resolute

¹⁶³ David Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics: How the Reagan Revolution Failed* (New York: Harper and Row), pp. 318-19.

under pressure.

Thus it can be concluded that Reagan as Commander-in-Chief set the overall tone and goals of the military modernization program of the 1980s, was willing to make strong executive decisions when required, but generally left the weapons procurement and the details to others. 'Peace through Strength' was achieved in that America's nuclear and conventional capabilities took a quantum leap from what Reagan inherited from Carter to what he bequeathed to Bush. Reagan's weakness was his inability to rein in spending, but with a Secretary of Defense like Weinberger who insisted that every cent was 'essential' for national security, cutting costs would have been a difficult task indeed. After all, Weinberger was so committed to implementing 'Peace through Strength', that the motto is now the epitaph inscribed on his tombstone.¹⁶⁴ Still, the 'buck stops' with the President, and therefore Reagan deserves both credit for restoring America's defense capabilities and strengthening deterrence, but also criticism for massive deficits which weakened America's economic position. For while Reagan quipped that the deficit was 'big enough to take care of itself',¹⁶⁵ it would be his successors Presidents George H.W Bush and William Jefferson Clinton that had to pay down that debt.

¹⁶⁴ Caspar Weinberger is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia among other veterans of World War II. His plot is in Section 30, Grave 835-1.

¹⁶⁵ As quoted by Glen Jeansonne in 'The 1980s and the Age of Reagan', *History Today*, (London: August 2004), Vol. 54, Iss. 8, p. 38.

Chapter 3:

REAGAN THE IDEOLOGUE

“The guiding hand of Providence did not create this new nation for America alone, but for a higher cause: the preservation and extension of the sacred fire of human liberty. This is America’s solemn duty.”

-Ronald Reagan¹⁶⁶

As President, Ronald Reagan articulated his foreign policy agenda in sweeping ideological terms, more so than any other occupant of his office during the Cold War period. This chapter seeks to determine whether Reagan’s ideological and moral rhetoric vis-à-vis the Soviet Union was indeed a true reflection of his personal views and asks: what were his beliefs in the decades preceding his presidency? Investigated are his experiences in Hollywood during the tumultuous late 1940s: an epoch marked by acrimonious worker strikes and career ruining black listings, the

¹⁶⁶ ‘Remarks at the *We the People* Bicentennial Celebration in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania’, 1 September 1987;

result of an alleged conspiracy by the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) to take over the motion picture industry and turn it into its own propaganda tool. As President of the Screen Actors Guild during this time, Reagan came into contact with this turbulence first-hand, and it was an experience that marked him both personally and as a politician. From that period onward, it is questioned if there was a continuous line of developing thought expounded by Reagan right up to his presidency. What was Reagan saying through the 1950s and 1960s on the speaking circuit? And what were his ideas throughout the 1970s, both on his radio program and on the stump as he sought the presidency? Does the evidence show that Reagan was a true anti-communist ideologue throughout his career?

The Ideological Nature of the Reagan Administration

The Reagan Administration, particularly in its first three years, articulated its foreign policy objectives towards the Soviet Union in ideological terms. This rhetoric reflected a belief that the Cold War was above all else a moral struggle between the forces of liberty and oppression; between free-markets and centrally controlled economies; between democracy and totalitarianism. Since the Soviet Communist manifesto was seemingly the antithesis of all that America stood for, the Reagan Administration placed its contest with the USSR in the context of a broader struggle between the very forces of good and evil.

Perhaps no speech reflected this moral outlook more than Reagan's 'Evil Empire' address to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida on 8 March 1983. The speech came just over two weeks before the unveiling of the Strategic Defense Initiative, and may have been an early attempt to rally support for extra defense expenditures by reminding the American

people of the Manichean nature of their conflict with the Soviets. Using religious language, Reagan said:

Let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness—pray that they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the earth, they are the *focus of evil in the modern world*. (Emphasis added).¹⁶⁷

Reagan then quoted from the religious writer C.S Lewis who in the *Screwtape Letters*¹⁶⁸ said that the ‘greatest evil’ is done not in the ‘final result’ of ‘concentration camps’ but ‘it is conceived and ordered’ in ‘clear, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voice.’

The ‘evil’ men Reagan was referring to were obviously the leaders in the Kremlin, who at that time were seeking to paint America as a belligerent obstacle on the path to world peace.

Reagan urged the Pastors gathered to:

Beware the temptation of pride—the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and *the aggressive impulses of an Evil Empire*. To simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and *good and evil*. (Emphasis added).¹⁶⁹

Reagan’s rhetoric was obviously not the ‘run of the mill’ diplomatic language used by world leaders. And even within the American context, where religious and moral precepts are used

¹⁶⁷ ‘Address to Convention of Evangelical Pastors, Orlando Florida, March 8, 1983’ *PPPR*.

¹⁶⁸ C.S Lewis *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*.

commonly, his choice of words¹⁷⁰ was seen as a dramatic departure from the standard norms of American diplomacy. Criticism abounded for this rhetoric,¹⁷¹ and when Henry Brandon of the *London Sunday Times* pointed out that these words left ‘no logical conclusion except war’, Reagan responded by saying that his speech was ‘a recognition and a willingness to face up to what these differences are in our views and between us, to be realistic about it.’¹⁷² Though not using the same choice of words, Secretary of State George P. Shultz, shared Reagan’s outlook that the Cold War conflict was above all a moral conflict.

As President Reagan’s Secretary of State, Shultz operated like Reagan from a standpoint where foreign policy was as much about morality as it was about strategic self interest. In an interview with the author in 2007, Shultz was asked whether he would like to be remembered as a ‘realist’ or an ‘idealist’ practitioner of statecraft and replied, ‘Well, if you don’t have a sense of realism, you aren’t going to get very far. So I think the idea that they are two very different things is not correct’. Shultz agreed that the two were ‘intertwined’.¹⁷³ His seminal address before the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco on 22 February 1985, however, laid out his vision for America’s global role, basing it firmly on ideological/moral grounds. He said:

All Americans can be proud that the example of our Founding Fathers has helped to inspire millions around the globe. Throughout our own history, *we have always believed that freedom is the birthright of all peoples and that we could not be true*

¹⁷⁰ They were Reagan’s choice of words, for while speechwriter Anthony Dolan penned them, it was Reagan who re-inserted them into the text when more prudent White House staffers excised them. See Oberdorft, *The Turn*, pp.23-24.

¹⁷¹ The *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis labeled the speech: ‘Primitive—That’s the only word for it’, while in *The Washington Post* Henry Steele Commager said: ‘It was the worst presidential speech in American history. I’ve read them all. No other presidential speech has ever so flagrantly allied the government with religion’. As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 141.

¹⁷² ‘Interview with Henry Brandon of the London Sunday Times, March 18, 1983’, *PPPR*.

¹⁷³ See Appendix B.

to ourselves or our principles unless we stood for freedom and democracy not only for ourselves but for others...

America also has a moral responsibility. The lesson of the postwar era is that America must be the leader of the free world; there is no one else to take our place. The nature and extent of our support—whether moral support or something more—necessarily varies from case to case. But there should be no doubt where our sympathies lie...

*First, as a matter of fundamental principle, the United States supports human rights and peaceful democratic change throughout the world, including in noncommunist, pro-Western countries. Democratic institutions are the best guarantor of stability and peace, as well as of human rights.*¹⁷⁴ (Emphasis added).

Shultz, like Reagan, believed in the moral superiority of Western style democracy, and painted the struggle between communists and capitalists, as an expression of the human will triumphing over totalitarian dictatorship. He continued:

In recent years, Soviet activities and pretensions have run head-on into the democratic revolution. People are insisting on their right to independence, on their right to choose their government free of outside control. Where once the Soviets may have thought that all discontent was ripe for turning into communist insurgencies, today we see a new and different kind of struggle: people around the world risking their lives against communist despotism. We see brave men and women fighting to challenge the Brezhnev doctrine.¹⁷⁵

After listing various nations around the globe that were resisting communist take-over, such as Afghanistan, Angola and Nicaragua, Shultz insisted that despite massive US aid, the phenomenon was ‘not an American creation.’ However, Shultz concluded on a note of renewed American involvement stating:

¹⁷⁴ George Shultz, ‘America and the Struggle for Freedom’ *US Department of State Bulletin* (April 1985).

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

*Our moral principles compel us to support those struggling against the imposition of communist tyranny. From the founding of this nation, Americans have believed that a people have the right to seek freedom and independence—and that we have a legal right and moral obligation to help them.*¹⁷⁶ (Emphasis Added).

This image of America, intervening around the world as part of a moral crusade to resist communism and foster democracy was therefore official administration policy. While Reagan's 'Evil Empire' speech did not emerge from a consensus of his government, Shultz's speech did. Secretary Shultz had not only gone over the text of his address personally with the President, but had also run it past Secretary of Defense Weinberger, CIA Director Bill Casey and National Security Advisor, Bud McFarlane.¹⁷⁷ Shultz's speech, therefore, represented a consensus within the Reagan Administration that its foreign policy would work through a moral and ideological framework. It should come as no surprise that Reagan had approved Shultz's speech. It was, after all, a reflection of his own beliefs that he had held since the 1940s.

The Origins of Reagan's Anti-Communism

Ronald Reagan was a man of strong convictions, and after reading up on a particular topic, thinking it over and coming to his own conclusions, there was no way to change his opinion—or to stop him from sharing it with others. This was true of his beliefs concerning the role of government, and was also true of his beliefs concerning communism and the USSR.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 525.

Reagan's political philosophy was originally left-wing, placing him as a 'New Deal' Democrat during the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.¹⁷⁸ Like his father, Jack Reagan, prior to 1952 Ronald Reagan had consistently voted as a Democrat his entire adult life, considering himself to be a 'true believer'. This often resulted in heated political quarrels with his brother, Neil, who was a Republican. Neil's arguments after World War II that 'big government' was encroaching upon civil liberties and that America's wartime ally Russia could not be trusted, sounded like nonsense to Reagan, who told his brother that he was merely 'spouting Republican propaganda'.¹⁷⁹ Yet, Reagan would soon begin to share his brother's convictions after he looked into communist ideology and discovered a growing communist threat in his own industry town, Hollywood.

'In Hollywood,' Reagan often said, 'if you don't sing or dance, you become an after dinner speaker.'¹⁸⁰ In the late 1940s, with his movie career in decline, Reagan joined the speaking circuit in California, and spoke out against the threat of fascism, as then operating in Franco's Spain. After giving his usual address to the Men's Club at the Hollywood Beverly Christian Church, Reagan's pastor came up to him and said that while agreeing with his

¹⁷⁸When Reagan exactly 'broke' with his idol FDR is unclear, as Phillip Abbott explores in 'Leadership by Exemplar: Reagan's FDR and Thatcher's Churchill', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: Spring, 1997). Vol. 27, Iss. 2, p. 186.

Reagan would later use his background as a Democrat for some humorous statements. Take for example this exchange between CBS White House correspondent Dan Rather and President Reagan at a Press Conference:

Q. Mr. President, in talking about the continuing recession tonight, you have blamed mistakes of the past, and you've blamed the Congress. Does any of the blame belong to you?

The President: Yes, because for many years I was a Democrat!

'The President's News Conference' September 28th, 1982, *PPPR*

¹⁷⁹ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 105.

¹⁸⁰ One such time was during a 'Question and Answer Session with Students at Thomas Jefferson High School of Science and Technology in Fairfax County, Virginia, February 7, 1986' *PPPR*.

warnings against fascism: ‘I think your speech would be even better if you also mentioned that if communism ever looked like a threat, you’d be just as opposed to it as you are to fascism.’¹⁸¹

Reagan took the minister’s advice, and not long afterwards gave a speech to a citizen’s organization about fascism which he ended by saying:

I’ve talked about the continuing threat of fascism in the postwar world, but there’s another ‘ism,’ communism, and if I ever find evidence that communism represents a threat to all that we believe in and stand for, I’ll speak out just as harshly against communism as I have fascism.¹⁸²

Reagan’s speech was met with a ‘dead silence’, and a few days later he received a letter from a woman in the crowd who wrote that she hoped Reagan would ‘recognize’ what the silence meant: ‘I think the group is becoming a front for communists,’ she wrote. For Reagan it was a turning- point, and he recalled: ‘Thanks to my minister and that lady, I began to wake up to the real world and what was going on in my own business, the motion picture industry.’¹⁸³ Reagan soon became one of the leading opponents of communism in Hollywood, a struggle that would cost him personally, but would also open up new horizons.

Reagan became the ‘leading man’ in a Hollywood drama that saw him battle against an alleged communist attempt to take over the movie industry. The saga began when several motion picture unions joined forces and formed the ‘Conference of Studio Unions’ (CSU). Headed up by a man named Herb Sorrell, the CSU attempted to become the official representative of all set erectors, and wanted the International Association of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE)

¹⁸¹ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 106.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid. p. 107.

to renounce its jurisdiction over these workers. The CSU called a strike, and picketed outside studios, calling on the movie moguls to acknowledge them as the set erectors' sole representative. When the IATSE told its members to cross the picket line, conflict was inevitable.

As a member of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), Reagan hoped to help end the strike by resolving the CSU's differences, but found instead that a simple power grab was being attempted. Acting as a peace broker, Reagan had called together CSU and IASTE representatives to find out what the underlying problems behind the strike were. He did not find any. Concluding that the strike was 'a phony' and not designed to improve wages or working conditions, Reagan saw the CSU for what it was: a group attempting to take away IASTE members and consolidate its own power. A general meeting of the SAG was called, and Reagan was assigned the task of presenting his findings to its members. Several days before the meeting, however, he received a threatening phone call from an anonymous person who warned him against giving the speech. The caller said: 'Your face will never be in pictures again'; a threat that Reagan later discovered involved a hit squad that intended to attack his face with acid.¹⁸⁴ Reagan was given police protection, began carrying a gun, and went ahead with his speech, the result of which was that the SAG voted 2,748 to 509 to walk through the picket lines. Their stand against the CSU did not come cheap, but it did end in triumph.

Reagan had known that the CSU strike was a power grab, but when he was informed that it was a communist plot to take over Hollywood, he was determined to see it destroyed. Visited one night by FBI agents, Reagan was told that their investigations had found that the CSU was a

¹⁸⁴ Sworn testimony in *Jeffers v. Screen Extras Guild*, July 1, 1955, 3396, SCCA-SAD as cited in Peter Schweizer's *Reagan's War: The Epic Story of his Forty-Year Struggle and Final Triumph Over Communism* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), p. 11.

front for the local communist party, which not only desired to control Hollywood's workforce, but also wanted to turn the motion picture industry into a propaganda tool.¹⁸⁵ The FBI agents told Reagan of a meeting several nights earlier of the American Communist Party in downtown Los Angeles, during which one member asked: 'What the hell are we going to do about that son-of-a-bitching bastard Ronald Reagan?' Reagan accepted their request that he become an FBI informant and he received the code name 'T-10'.¹⁸⁶ He also agreed to lead the resistance against the CSU, and despite violent protests, fire bombings and having to be bused into studios, the SAG stood firm and the CSU strike folded in 1947. However, the turmoil left Reagan a changed man.

Reagan's struggle against communism in Hollywood caused major changes in his life, but it ultimately set him on a political course that would lead him to the White House. The first major change was very personal. His wife, Academy Award winning actress Jane Wyman, filed for divorce in 1948, citing 'mental cruelty' and declaring in her divorce papers:

In recent months, my husband and I engaged in continual arguments on his political views...finally there was nothing in common between us...nothing to sustain our marriage...Despite my lack of interest in his political activities, he insisted that I attend meetings with him and be present during discussions among our friends. But my own ideas were never considered important.¹⁸⁷

The second major change was Reagan's belief system: he would forever be an implacable opponent to communism. As Reagan wrote in his memoirs:

¹⁸⁵ FBI Secret memo, Subject: Communist Infiltration-Motion Picture Industry, File Number 100-138754, Serial 1003, Parts 8-15 (FOIA)

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ronald Reagan/Jane Wyman divorce records, Los Angeles County Court House Archives, Case # D360058; As cited in Peter Schweizer's *Reagan's War*, p.15.

These were eye-opening years for me. When I'd come back to Warner Brothers after the war, I'd shared the orthodox liberal view that Communists—if there really *were* any—were liberals who were temporarily off track, and whatever they were, they didn't pose much of a threat to me or anyone...Now I knew from firsthand experience how Communists used lies, deceit, violence, or any other tactic that suited them to advance the cause of Soviet expansionism. I knew from the experience of hand-to-hand combat that America faced no more insidious or evil threat than that of Communism.¹⁸⁸

And the third major change during this period was that Reagan became a full time political figure. Reagan believed that due to his prominent anti-communist crusade, his acting career fizzled out to minor movie roles, and TV appearances. 'There is no question my career suffered from anticommunism' Reagan later said. But with the close of one chapter in his life, came the opening of another. Robert Montgomery, President of the SAG resigned suddenly on 10 March 1947 due to the strain that the CSU strike had on him.¹⁸⁹ Reagan assumed his position as President of SAG, and served in that capacity for six years. As head of Hollywood's largest union, he honed his speaking and negotiating skills—tools that would serve him well when he became California's Governor and then America's President.

¹⁸⁸ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 115.

¹⁸⁹ Another reason Montgomery gave was his fear of retribution by communists as 'all actors and actresses who have taken such a stand will not be on the screen in ten years'. FBI Secret memo, Subject: Communist Infiltration-Motion Picture Industry, File Number 100-138754, Serial 1003, Parts 8-15 (FOIA)

Reagan's Anti-Communist Crusade: 1940s-1960s

As Hollywood's 'one man battalion'¹⁹⁰ against communism, Reagan remained outspoken about the threat that he believed communism posed to America's liberties. In speech after speech throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Reagan continued to warn against the assault that communist ideas could have on America's way of life. However, Reagan was no rabid 'better dead than red' ideologue, and he condemned the excesses of McCarthyism.

On 25 September 1947, Reagan received a summons to appear before the US House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee. He stated that he 'detested' communist philosophy and 'their tactics,' but did not wish to see any 'democratic principles' compromised. He testified: 'We have spent 170 years in this country on the basis that democracy is strong enough to stand up and fight against the inroads of any ideology. I believe, as Thomas Jefferson put it, if all the American people know all the facts they will never make a mistake.'¹⁹¹

It was Reagan's contention that if the pursuit of communists involved the destruction of civil liberties, then victory would be handed to the communists. Reagan believed that the good of America's traditions about freedom and democracy, could destroy the evil of communism. In an article he wrote in 1952 entitled, 'How Do You Fight Communism?' Reagan said:

The real fight with this new totalitarianism belongs properly to the forces of liberal democracy, just as did the battle with Hitler's totalitarianism. There really is no difference except the cast of characters. On the one hand is our belief that the people can and will decide what is best for themselves, and on the other (Communist, Nazi, or Fascist) side is the belief that a 'few' can best decide what is good for all the rest...If we get so frightened that we suspend our traditional

¹⁹⁰ Phrase used by former communist sympathizer Sterling Hayden. Reagan called it 'one of the best reviews' that he'd ever received, as quoted in Reagan *An American Life*, p. 114.

¹⁹¹ Ronald Reagan Testimony, *House Un-American Activities Committee*, 1947, pp.118-26.

democratic freedoms in order to fight them—they still have won. They have shown that the democracy won't work when the going gets tough.¹⁹²

During this period, it is clear, that Reagan was a 'centrist' on the question of communism. As Edward M. Yager, in his book, *Ronald Reagan's Journey: Democrat to Republican* notes of this period in Reagan's life:

Overall, Reagan pursued a middle course in his reaction to communism. On the one hand he did not resist investigative efforts by the federal government (as some in Hollywood did) since he did cooperate with the FBI and the House on Un-American Activities investigating communist activities in Hollywood. On the other hand, Reagan's approach to opposing communism was significantly more restrained than many in Hollywood and Washington at the time.¹⁹³

Within ten years, however, Reagan's tone had substantially changed. In the Reagan archives there is a *Monitor* article that Reagan wrote, circa 1962, which he entitled 'Our Eroding Freedom'. In it, Reagan rejected the notion that 'we are at peace, albeit an easy one, with Russia'. Instead, he asserted:

The truth of the matter is that we are at war. We are losing that war simply because we don't or won't realize that we are in it. It's a strange war, fought with unusual weapons and strategy, but nevertheless a war. In this struggle every move and every word of the Russians is a calculated maneuver aimed at furthering their campaign.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²Ronald Reagan, 'How Do You Fight Communism?' *Fortnight*, 22 January 1951.

¹⁹³ Edward M. Yager, *Ronald Reagan's Journey: Democrat to Republican*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 33.

¹⁹⁴ Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts, Box 43; *RPL*.

Reagan pointed out that this was not just his opinion, because the Soviets themselves had ‘declared war’ through their writings stating that ‘communism and capitalism cannot exist in the world together’.¹⁹⁵ Reagan’s article was reprinted and received a limited distribution around the country, but his views received national, prime-time prominence two years later, when Reagan was asked to speak for a presidential candidate.

In 1964, Reagan’s personal crusade against ‘big government’ and communism made him a national political figure when he was asked to give a televised speech on behalf of the Republican Presidential challenger to Lyndon Johnson, Barry Goldwater. The television spot had been paid for by a group of wealthy party donors who felt that Reagan could articulate better than Goldwater, the principles of conservatism. However, Goldwater grew apprehensive about allowing Reagan to give the speech, because of Reagan’s inclusion of an attack on Social Security, so he recommended instead that a tape be played showing himself meeting with former President Eisenhower. Recognizing that the political opportunity of a lifetime could slip away, Reagan refused to back down. In a telephone conversation with Goldwater, Reagan said flatly:

Barry, I’ve been making the speech all over the state for quite a while and I have to tell you, it’s been very well received, including whatever remarks I’ve made about Social Security. I just can’t cancel the speech and give away the airtime; it’s not up to me. These gentlemen raised the money and bought the airtime. They’re the only ones who could cancel or switch it.¹⁹⁶

Reagan went ahead with the speech, entitled *A Time for Choosing*, which aired nationally on 27 October 1964. In so doing, Reagan showed that his allegiance was always to himself first, and to the party leadership second. Reagan’s instinct was right: his speech propelled him to national

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Reagan, *An American Life*, pp.140-41.

prominence as a political figure, and paved the way to the Governorship of California and the White House. Reagan's opinions had struck a chord with the American people, but read now, over forty years later, Reagan's world view comes across as puritanical, painting the contest against communism as a life and death struggle where the loss of Vietnam spelt doom and where rapprochement with the Soviets was treason.

Reagan in 1964 saw the communist world as a monolith, with communist states receiving their orders directly from the Kremlin, and gave no consideration to the underlying nationalist and economic causes of communist revolutions taking place around the world. Winning the war in Vietnam, therefore, was not only absolutely necessary for America's security, but was also a moral imperative. Reagan said:

We are at war with the most dangerous enemy that has ever faced mankind in his long climb from the swamp to the stars, and it has been said if we lose that war, and in doing so lose this way of freedom of ours, history will record with the greatest astonishment that those who had the most to lose did the least to prevent its happening. Well, I think it's time we ask ourselves if we still know the freedoms that were intended for us by the Founding Fathers.¹⁹⁷

Despite the fact that Australia, Western Europe and many other nations enjoyed democratic government, Reagan believed that his nation, the United States, stood alone as the sole hope of humanity saying: 'If we lose freedom here, there is no place to escape to. This is the last stand on Earth.' Whatever his rationale, Reagan considered any 'accommodation' with the enemy to be treasonous:

If you and I have the courage to tell our elected officials that we want our national policy based upon what we know in our hearts is morally right. We cannot buy

¹⁹⁷ *'A Time For Choosing'* Address on behalf of Senator Barry Goldwater, 27 October 1964. As accessed at: www.reaganfoundation.org/reagan/speeches/rendezvous.asp

our security, our freedom from the threat of the bomb by committing an immorality so great as saying to a billion now in slavery behind the Iron Curtain, 'Give up your dreams of freedom because to save our own skin, we are willing to make a deal with your slave masters.' Alexander Hamilton said, 'A nation which can prefer disgrace to danger is prepared for a master, and deserves one.'¹⁹⁸

Reagan concluded his speech telling his audience: 'You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We will preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on Earth, or we will sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness.'¹⁹⁹ The American people overwhelmingly rejected Barry Goldwater for President a few weeks later, and President Johnson won in the biggest landslide in American history. However, the speech did become a 'rendezvous with destiny' for Reagan, as it propelled him to the office of Governor of California in 1966,²⁰⁰ which inevitably meant a future run for the White House.

Friend of Nixon, Foe of Ford

As the Republican Governor of California, Reagan was a loyal and vocal supporter of President Nixon's foreign policy, despite the Nixon Administration's emphasis on strategic self-interest over ideology and its outreach to the communist nations of China and the Soviet Union. Perhaps it was Reagan's belief that he would become Nixon's successor as President in 1977 that made him 'toe the party line', or maybe it was Nixon's wise decision to include Reagan in his

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ For a study of Reagan's 1966 gubernatorial victory see Totton J. Anderson, Eugene C. Lee's 'The 1966 Election in California' *The Western Political Quarterly* (June 1967), Vol.20, Iss.2, pp. 535-554.

decisions, that made Reagan put aside his personal feelings and support the President's stance on issues controversial to conservatives.

As Nixon makes clear in his memoirs, he considered himself to be the centrist of his party, with Nelson Rockefeller on his left and Ronald Reagan on his right.²⁰¹ With his aim to engage the two communist giants, the USSR and 'Red China', Nixon's biggest fear was that Reagan would lead a right-wing revolt and challenge him for the 1972 Republican nomination. Consequently, Nixon decided to include Reagan in these contentious changes in policy, and enlisted Reagan as his personal envoy to ease concerns with allies that a closer relationship with communist nations did not mean an abandonment of old friends.

Sent first to Taiwan, Reagan assured Chiang Kai-shek in October of 1971, that an opening with China did not mean a closure with Taiwan. Reagan argued along the same lines as he had used in a speech earlier to the 'Young Americans for Freedom', in which he said, '[The President] has been blunt in his declarations that he will not under any circumstances desert an old friend and ally...give anything away, or betray our honor. If I am wrong and that should be the result—time then for indignation and righteous anger'.²⁰² Similarly, to help ease concerns over America's rapprochement with the USSR, Nixon sent him as his envoy for an eighteen day European trip in July of 1972. Reagan met with the NATO General Secretary, with the Foreign Ministers of France, and Spain, and with the Prime Ministers of Denmark and England. Reagan also met with Pope Paul VI at the Vatican, and legendary figures Francisco Franco of Spain and

²⁰¹ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 302.

²⁰²Speech Draft for Young Americans for Freedom Convention, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan. *RPL*.

President Eamon de Valera of Ireland.²⁰³ In these meetings he assured America's allies that détente with the Soviets did not mean a lessening of the defense relationship with Europe.

Reagan's support for détente ended, however, when Nixon left office and Gerald Ford became both President and presumed nominee for the 1976 Presidential election. Reagan, needing an issue to rally conservatives against Ford, chose to revert to strident anti-communism. It was a ploy that almost worked.

Reagan violated the '11th commandment' of 'Thou shalt not speak ill of a fellow Republican' when he savaged President Ford's and Henry Kissinger's policy of détente during the 1976 Presidential elections.²⁰⁴ Reagan's insurgent campaign against Ford to take the party's nomination failed to win him a single primary, until he changed track in North Carolina and condemned the Ford and Kissinger policy towards the USSR as being immoral and 'wandering without aim'. Despite the fact that Reagan had not once expressed concern over the policy of détente when Kissinger had briefed him over the years,²⁰⁵ Reagan the candidate voiced widespread apprehension over the policy and questioned what it meant:

Now we are told we are dropping the word détente but keeping the policy. Whatever we call it, the policy is what's at fault. Just what is our policy?...

²⁰³ As cited by Edmund Morris in *Dutch*, p. 380

²⁰⁴ The 11th commandment was issued by the Chairman of the Republican Party in California, Gaylord Parkinson, in the 1966 gubernatorial campaign. In his memoirs, Reagan claims: 'It's a rule I followed during that campaign and have ever since'. As quoted in Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 150.

²⁰⁵ Kissinger writes of Reagan's rhetoric against him during this period: 'Though he savaged me during his failed bid for the presidential nomination in 1976, I found it impossible to hold a lasting resentment, despite the fact that, as National Security Adviser, I had been briefing him for years without any protest on his part about the very policies he was now assaulting. When it was all over, I remembered not the campaign rhetoric but the combination of common sense and epigrammatic goodwill with which Reagan conducted himself during the briefing sessions.' Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 766.

We yield to demands by the Red Chinese and reduce our military presence on Taiwan where we have another long time friend and ally: the free Republic of China.²⁰⁶

Reagan's harshest criticism was for America's relationship with the USSR, and charged that Ford and Kissinger had accepted military inferiority:

The evidence mounts that we are number 2 in a world where it is dangerous if not fatal to be 2nd best.... Now we must ask if someone is giving away our own freedom.

Dr. Kissinger is quoted as saying he thinks of the US as Athens and the Soviet Union as Sparta. The day 'of the US is past and today is the day of the Soviet Union. My job as Secretary of State is to negotiate the most acceptable 2nd best position available.'

Ask the people of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and all the others what it's like in a world where the Soviet Union is number one. I don't want to live in that kind of world and I don't think you do either....²⁰⁷

Reagan said he did not believe that the people he had met during the campaign were 'ready to ensign this last island of freedom to the dust bin of history' and he asked if the USSR's strategic superiority was the reason for their policy of détente:

Is this why Mr. Ford refused to invite Alexander Solzhenitsyn to the White House? Why he traveled half way around the world to sign the Helsinki pact putting our stamp of approval on Russia's enslavement of the captive nations? We gave away the freedom of millions of people—freedom that was not ours to give.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Campaign Speech, Circa 1976. Pre Presidential Papers, BOX 44. *RPL*.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

By signing the Helsinki Accords in 1975, by accepting second place, Reagan insinuated that Ford and Kissinger were guilty of treason. In place of their détente, he proposed an alternative vision for America, one that harkened back to the Founding Fathers:

Call it mysticism if you will, but I believe God had a divine purpose in placing this land between two great oceans to be found by those who had a special love of freedom and the courage to leave the countries of their birth. From our forefathers to our own modern day immigrants we have come from every corner of the earth, from every race and ethnic background and we've become a new breed in the world. We are Americans and we have a rendezvous with destiny.²⁰⁹

Reagan's attempt to wrestle the party's nomination from Ford failed, but Reagan through his radio addresses continued to call for a foreign policy that honored America's ideological and moral traditions.

Reagan's Radio Addresses: Advocating an Idealist Foreign Policy

Using his radio addresses in the mid to late 1970s as a platform for his conservative message, Reagan sought to remind the American people of the moral nature of their struggle with the USSR. He did this firstly by re-establishing in the mind of his listeners that the USSR was to be regarded as an enemy to be despised. In a May 1975 address entitled 'Communism, the Disease' Reagan asked, 'Mankind has survived all manner of evil diseases but can it survive Communism?' He then explained:

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

When a disease like communism hangs on as it has for a half century or more it's good, now and then to be reminded of just how vicious it really is. Of course those who have the disease use all kinds of misleading terms to describe its symptoms and its effects. For example, if you and I in America planted mines on our borders, ringed the country with barb wire and machine gun toting guards to keep anyone from leaving the country we'd hardly describe that as 'liberating' its people.

But we've grown so used to communist doubletalk I sometimes think we've lost some of our fear of the disease. We need frequent vaccination to guard against being infected until the day when this health threat will be eliminated as we eliminated the black plague.²¹⁰

Reagan then gave examples of human rights violations behind the 'Iron Curtain' in his attempt to show that the communists lacked all human sympathy. He detailed the story, reported in the *New York Times*, of a five year old boy who fell into the Berlin River, and died because East German soldiers denied any attempts to rescue him.²¹¹ To Reagan, this was an example of the inhuman qualities of communist nations, a common theme of his addresses.

Another common theme that Reagan spoke of was the Soviet's refusal to grant its citizens the right to immigrate.

Russian law and the Universal Declaration of Human rights fully entitle a citizen of the Soviet Union to an exit visa—meaning permission to leave Russia and live in another country. As a matter of fact, that Helsinki pact they talked us into signing contains their pledge to let people live where they want to. Like yesterdays newspaper, the Helsinki pact should be used for wrapping garbage.²¹²

²¹⁰ Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts Box 1. *RPL*.

²¹¹ Story recorded in the article 'Berlin Drowning Increases Tension' *New York Times* 18 May, 1975.

²¹² Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts Box 5. *RPL*.

The Helsinki pact negotiated by Ford and Kissinger was to Reagan doubly iniquitous for it collaborated with Moscow's hypocritical assertions of honoring human rights, and it recognized the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Any formal American recognition of the Warsaw Pact nations was anathema to Reagan. He condemned Ford for doing this, and he condemned Carter when he did the same.

When President Carter returned 'St. Stephen's Crown' to the Hungarian government on 5 January 1978, Reagan cried 'foul'. The crown, which tradition records was given by the Holy See to St. Stephen, King of Hungary in the year 1000, had become a symbol of legitimacy for Hungarian governments for centuries, and had been kept since World War II at Fort Knox.²¹³ Reagan said:

Now the White House has declared this crown, which confers legitimacy and the blessings of Heaven upon the Hungarian government to be the rightful property of the godless, communist rulers of that captive land.

At Teheran we sold a freedom not ours to sell. Now we give legitimacy not ours to give to an illegitimate government. *Are we really serious about human rights?*²¹⁴ (Emphasis added.)

Though the international community had long accepted the Warsaw Pact as a permanent fixture in Europe, Reagan still held the opinion that the 'captive nations' should be freed of their satellite status. In 1977 Reagan quoted Leonid Brezhnev discussing the issue of borders relating

²¹³ 'Hungary's Ancient Symbol: A Long, Strange Journey' *New York Times*, 6 January 1978.

For the decision making process behind Carter's decision to return the Crown, as well as the political bearing this had on him in the 1980 presidential election, see Katalin Kadar Lynn, 'The Return of the crown of St. Stephen and its subsequent impact on the Carter Administration', *East European Quarterly*, (Boulder: Summer 2000), Vol. 34, Iss. 2, p.181.

²¹⁴ Ronald Reagan, 'Human Rights III' Jan. 9, 1978 Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts Box 18; *RPL*.

to the Israeli/Palestinian dispute. Brezhnev said: ‘We hold in particular, that in the final documents should be based on the principle of...the impermissibility of acquisition of territory by war.’ Commenting on this, Reagan said:

Then we must say to the Soviet Union by way of Mr. Brezhnev, ‘You of course, must get out of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia which you seized by force of arms.’ And come to think of it, that means turning loose Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany and Romania.’²¹⁵

In addition to cataloging the bellicose nature of the USSR and its poor track record on human rights, Reagan pointed out to his listeners that when it boiled down to it, détente between the Superpowers was like trying to mix oil and water, for by the very nature of their governments, they were incompatible. He said:

There’s a worldwide struggle going on for the hearts and minds of mankind. For a time, we called it the Cold War; then ‘détente’. Actually, the struggle has been going on for a century or more. It’s a contest between capitalism and socialism.²¹⁶

And for Reagan, being capitalist was something that should not cause shame, because:

Capitalism is what America’s all about. Indeed, you can’t have freedom without capitalism, for capitalism simply means your right as an individual to own things; to do what you will with your money you earn; to buy a piece of land, build a home of your own.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Ronald Reagan, 13.4.1977, ‘Brezhnev’ Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts Box. 9 *RPL*.

²¹⁶ Ronald Reagan Radio Address, Capitalism/Socialism 21.11.77 Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts Box 16, *RPL*.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

To those who said that capitalism had failed and that socialism was the answer, Reagan pointed out that the Soviet Union had had over fifty years to ‘put into practice a completely socialist system’, a nation with 250 million workers and a ‘great many natural resources’. Mockingly, Reagan outlined what it would take to ‘match their Socialist Utopia’. He stated:

It would take a little doing. We’d have to cut our paychecks by 75%, move 60 million workers back to the farm, abandon 2/3 of our steel-making capacity, destroy 40 million TV sets, tear up 14 out of every 15 miles of highway, junk 19 out of 20 autos, tear up 2/3 of our railroad track, knock down 70% of our houses, and rip out 9/10 of our telephones. Then all we’d have to do is find a capitalist country that would sell us wheat on credit to keep us from starving.²¹⁸

And, thus, Reagan summed up his opinion of the Soviet Union: it imposed its ideology on nations by means of war; it denied its citizens basic human rights; and the purpose of it all—communism—was not helping the average person, but making them live in substandard conditions on the verge of starvation. Détente with the Soviets was worthless in Reagan’s view, and in 1977 he stated that he would not care if détente collapsed completely:

In mid-March the Soviet Union warned us that ‘détente’ would be endangered if American officials continue to criticize violations of human rights behind the Iron Curtain. I don’t know about you, but I didn’t exactly tear my hair and go into a panic at the possibility.²¹⁹

Conclusion

This account of the history of Reagan’s anti-communist beliefs leading up to his 1980 Presidential bid demonstrates that he was indeed an ardent anti-communist, and that these beliefs

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ronald Reagan Radio Address, ‘Intelligence, 23.3.77’ Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts Box 8. *RPL*.

were his own. Reagan's anti-communism was not the result of Soviet actions in Eastern Europe following the Second World War (he dismissed his brother Neil's arguments), but rather his beliefs grew out of his experiences in Hollywood during the late 1940s. Coming up against an alleged plot by the Communist Party of America to take over the motion picture industry, Reagan confronted threats, intimidation, and violence. For a man who generally saw the world through 'rose tinted glasses', it served as a 'wake-up call' to the reality of the ideological struggle occurring around the world. While perhaps costing Reagan his marriage to Jane Wyman and crippling his acting career, it also opened up new opportunities in politics: first as President of the Screen Actors Guild, then as a sought after speaker at political events. From there, Reagan became the Governor of California, and then a presidential candidate. Both on the stump and in his radio addresses as he sought the Republican nomination in 1976, Reagan condemned the 'Kissinger-Ford' foreign policy of 'détente' with the Soviet Union, and decried the replacement of morality with self-interest. Of course, Reagan's speeches were also self serving: he toned down his rhetoric while Nixon was in office, but brought it back with a vengeance when it served his political purposes while challenging Ford and Carter. Reagan was an ideologue, but also a pragmatist and when circumstances called for it, an opportunist. As the following chapter on Reagan's rhetoric while in office will demonstrate, this ability to change his tune according to the times would infuriate die-hard conservatives, but also would display that while Reagan truly did abhor communism, he was also a pragmatist who wanted results.

Chapter 4:

MORAL CRUSADER

“I made the ‘Evil Empire’ speech and others like it with malice aforethought: I wanted to remind the Soviets we knew what they were up to.”

-Ronald Reagan²²⁰

Throughout his eight years in the presidency, Ronald Reagan remained a crusader against the ‘evils’ of communism, even when he ‘changed gears’ from implacable foe to partner in a renewed rapprochement. While his criticism of the regime in Moscow evolved over time, the moral tone of his public pronouncements did not.

This chapter demonstrates that the moral rhetoric of the ‘Great Communicator’²²¹ never wavered, but the emphasis did in fact transform over time. It is detailed that Reagan began his presidency with the firm intention of re-moralizing the Cold War conflict by condemning the USSR for its various abuses. As the above quote reveals, Reagan’s ‘Evil Empire’ speech and other denunciatory addresses had a definitive end towards which they were directed. However, as Reagan headed into fourth quarter of his first term in office, he decided that having certainly

²²⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.569.

²²¹ Reagan’s talent for oratory led him to receiving this title, which he accepted. But it has led many to argue that Reagan’s successes were primarily a result of his effective use of what Teddy Roosevelt termed ‘the bully pulpit’, especially when it came to Reagan’s legislative victories. However, as Ken Collier argues in his article, ‘Behind the Bully Pulpit: the Reagan Administration and Congress’, Reagan’s White House had a dedicated, professional and highly adept congressional lobby which was responsible for these successes. See *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: Summer 1996), Vol. 26, Iss. 3; p. 805.

accomplished his objective, it was time to change track and emphasize dialogue. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, Reagan began that process in earnest. Then, having established a partner for this renewed engagement, Reagan turned to the final stage of his moral rhetoric: challenging the USSR to implement true reforms that would further the cause of human liberty; a cause that was at the heart of Reagan's idealism. But in examining these three stages, these questions are asked: what role did Reagan play in the drafting of these speeches? Can it be said that they were his own, or the work of others? Was Reagan the 'tool' of his speechwriters, of his conservative base, or did he decide what he wanted to say? And in the final analysis, to what extent can it be said that the moral rhetoric of the Reagan Administration was truly reflective of Reagan's beliefs about communism and the USSR?

1981: Reagan Sets the Agenda

Presidential inaugurations provide the newly sworn in President the opportunity to speak on the wide range of challenges that confront the nation at that moment in history, both domestic and foreign. Many Presidents, like Kennedy and Carter, used the occasion to address the international situation in their inaugural address, while Reagan, for whatever reasons, decided to focus almost entirely on domestic economic concerns.²²² This left many questioning whether Reagan, now as President, would take a more moderate position regarding the Soviet Union and perhaps engage them in détente. The answer was given at the President's first press conference.

²²² Perhaps it had something to do with the Administration's decision to focus on the 'economic recovery program' for its first 100 days in office. See James Baker, *Work Hard, Study...And Keep Out of Politics* (New York: C.P Putnam's Sons, 2006), Chapter 8.

Held nine days after his inauguration, Reagan's first press conference made clear in some of the least diplomatic language in the history of the Cold War that his moralistic rhetoric would remain. Asked by Sam Donaldson of *ABC News* about the long term intentions of the Soviet Union, and whether Reagan believed détente was possible,²²³ Reagan astounded his listeners with a scathing condemnation of both détente and of the Soviet Union.

Labeling détente as nothing more than a 'one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue its own aims', Reagan then gave his interpretation of Soviet intentions based on his reading of their history. He said:

I know of no leader of the Soviet Union since the revolution, and including the present leadership, that has not more than once repeated in the various communist congresses they hold their determination that their goal must be the promotion of world revolution and a one-world socialist or communist state, whichever word you want to use.²²⁴

Then, turning to Donaldson's question about a possible détente with the Soviets, Reagan said:

Now, as long as they do that and as long as they, at the same time, have openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, *meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat, in order to attain that, and that is moral, not immoral, and we operate on a different set of standards*, I think when you do business with them, even at a détente, you keep that in mind.²²⁵ (Emphasis Added).

²²³ Donaldson would become the ultimate 'gotcha' style questioner, seeking through his questioning to illicit a response that would either embarrass the President, or get him to comment in a fashion that Donaldson knew would become a 'sound bite' for the evening news. Studies suggest that Donaldson was not alone. According to Stephen. E Clayman and John Heritage's study, which compares the press conferences of Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan, the press of the 1980s were very different from their 1950s counterparts. Their findings demonstrated that 'journalists have become much less deferential and more aggressive in their treatment of the U.S. president'. See 'Questioning Presidents: Journalistic Deference and Adversarialness in the Press Conferences of U.S Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan', *Journal of Communication*, (New York: Dec. 2002), Vol.52,Iss.4,p.749.

²²⁴ 'News Conference', 29 January 1981, *PPPR*.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

When criticism abounded for these remarks—and the first press conference was mentioned continually over the years—Reagan insisted that he was only quoting the writings of Lenin and the statements of the Soviet leadership. Privately, however, he had another intention: namely to let the leadership in Moscow know that ‘there was a new management in the White House’.²²⁶ The first salvo in the Reagan’s ideological rhetorical war²²⁷ was unmistakably heard in the Kremlin and Reagan’s private olive branch letter to Brezhnev sent following the assassination attempt in March that year, only served to send a mixed message.²²⁸ Publicly, Reagan’s stinging criticism did not let up. From attacking the morality of the Soviet leadership, Reagan moved to predict its eventual downfall.

Reagan considered the USSR to be a state whose days were numbered, and when the leader of a Superpower says it publicly, it takes on a very ominous edge. In the early 1980s the general consensus was that the Soviet Union was a permanent fixture which would continue indefinitely into the future. As such, the USSR was seen as a fact of life that had to be accommodated. Reagan did not agree. On the contrary, he was of the opinion that due to the very nature of the communist system—its denial of human and religious rights and its economic

²²⁶ Reagan, *An American Life*, p 267.

²²⁷ Barbara Franham wrote of this press conference that it reflected Reagan’s ‘overall assessment of Soviet capabilities’ being ‘highly ideological, combining the conviction that the Soviets held a short-run advantage over the United States with a belief in their inevitable failure over the long term owing to their ideological blinders’. See ‘Reagan and the Gorbachev Revolution: Perceiving the End of Threat’, *Political Science Quarterly*, (Summer: 2001), Vol.116, Iss.2, pp.225-252.

²²⁸ See Chapter 10 of this thesis.

failures—it was a state doomed to implosion. In a commencement address at Notre Dame University on 17 May 1981, Reagan, the ‘hard-line romantic’²²⁹ said emphatically:

The years ahead are great ones for this country, for the cause of freedom and the spread of civilization. The West won’t contain communism, it will transcend communism. It won’t bother to...denounce it; *it will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.*²³⁰ (Emphasis added).

Of course, Reagan *did* continue to denounce the Soviet Union, despite his belief that it was nearing certain death. The ‘Polish problem’ permitted Reagan such an opportunity.

The tense situation in Poland at the close of 1981, with the imposition of martial law and the threat of a Soviet invasion, caused Reagan to include a large section on Poland in his 1981 Christmas Address. In it, Reagan pointed the finger of blame squarely at the leadership in the Kremlin and in doing so, drew attention again the moral failures of their state. Reagan said:

*The Soviet Union, through its threats and pressures, deserves a major share of blame for the developments in Poland. So, I have also sent a letter to President Brezhnev urging him to permit the restoration of basic human rights in Poland provided for in the Helsinki Final Act. In it, I informed him that if this repression continues, the United States will have no choice but to take further concrete political and economic measures affecting our relationship.*²³¹ (Emphasis added.)

The Helsinki Final Act, which Reagan had considered worthless when it was negotiated by President Ford, was invoked to show the hypocrisy of the communist governments, for it had

²²⁹ A term employed by William D. Anderson and Sterling J. Kernik in the mid 1980s in their attempt to explain Reagan as both a realist and an ideologue. See ‘How Realistic is Reagan’s Diplomacy?’, *Political Science Quarterly*, (Autumn 1985), Vol.11, Iss. 3, pp.389-409.

²³⁰ ‘Commencement Address to Notre Dame’ 17 May 1981; *PPPR*.

²³¹ ‘Address to the Nation About Christmas and the Situation in Poland’ 23 December 1981; *PPPR*.

promised to respect its citizens' human rights. Reagan wanted to demonstrate the moral inferiority of the Soviet Union, and sought to impress upon his audience that for the USSR, its involvement in Poland was business as usual.

But what role did Reagan play in the drafting of this speech? A review of the original draft at the Reagan archives shows that Reagan was clearly involved in the writing of this speech, for in addition to his insertions about the birth of Jesus, Reagan rewrote the Christmas address linking the Polish problem to the 'Brezhnev doctrine'. Reagan's insertion (italicized) read 'The tragic events now occurring in Poland *almost two years to the day after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan* have been precipitated by the public and secret pressure from the Soviet Union.'²³² Reminding the American people of the brutal nature of the Soviet system, as evidenced by the Afghanistan invasion, was 'vintage Reagan'; the President wanted to denounce the Soviet Union as an aggressive and immoral nation. It was a theme he carried on into 1982.

1982: The 'Ash-Heap of History' Prediction

The new year began with Reagan addressing the 'People of Foreign Nations' on television, and the President used the opportunity to attack the fundamental elements of communist beliefs, which he likened to Nazism:

During my life time, I have seen the rise of fascism and communism. Both philosophies glorify the arbitrary power of the state. These ideologies held, at first, a certain fascination for some intellectuals. But both theories fail. Both deny those God-given liberties that are the inalienable right of each person on this planet; indeed they deny the existence of God. *Because of this fundamental flaw, fascism has already been destroyed and the bankruptcy of communism has been*

²³² Presidential Handwriting File, Box 2, Folder 42; RPL.

*laid bare for all to see—a system that is efficient in producing machines of war, but cannot feed its people.*²³³ (Emphasis added).

That fascism had already been destroyed, and communism would soon follow the same fate was the message of Reagan's New Year Address. If the point had been lost on anyone, the President's major foreign policy address of that year, and perhaps of his entire Administration, spelt this out loud and clear.

Reagan's seminal address on America's struggle against the Soviet Union was his 1982 speech before the British Parliament. This discourse, the first time that an American President had addressed both houses of the British Parliament,²³⁴ was meant to rally the democracies of Western Europe to a 'crusade of freedom'. The speech stands out in the history of the Cold War as a damning expose of the failures of communism, and as an accurate prediction of the eventual fall of the Soviet Union.

Reagan's speech was a powerful indictment of Marxist-Leninist theory in that it demonstrated that the governments who had attempted to implement these theories were far from achieving a 'worker's paradise'. Terming the early 1980s as a 'turning point', Reagan said that 'in an ironic sense Karl Marx was right' for:

We are witnessing today a great revolutionary crisis, a crisis where the demands of the economic order are conflicting directly with those of the political order. *But the crisis is happening not in the free, non-Marxist West, but in the home of Marxist-Leninism, the Soviet Union. It is the Soviet Union that runs against the*

²³³ 'Address to People of Foreign Nations' 1 January 1982; *PPPR*.

²³⁴ Due to protests from Labor party members, the speech was moved from the 'Westminster Hall' to the Royal Gallery, and only 30 Labor members, out of 225, attended the speech. See the *New York Times* 'President Urges Global Crusade For Democracy' 9 June 1982.

tide of history by denying human freedom and human dignity to its citizens. ²³⁵
 (Emphasis added).

Reagan then noted the ‘deep economic difficulty’ that the USSR was undergoing as evidence of the ‘astounding’ failure of their system: ‘A country which employs one fifth of its population in agriculture is unable to feed its own people.’ Then, echoing a theme he had spoken of in his 1970s radio addresses, Reagan pointed out that the, ‘tiny private sector’ which made up ‘three percent of arable land’ accounted for ‘nearly one quarter of the Soviet farm output’. Capitalist, market driven farming experiments were successful, while ‘over centralized’ communist systems with ‘little or no incentives’ were causing ‘shrinkage of economic growth’. While the people were close to being ‘on the brink of famine’, the ‘Soviet system’ was pouring ‘its best resources into the making of instruments of destruction’. The ‘heavy strain’ this was causing the ‘Soviet people’ was proof enough that Marxist theories had failed, for as Reagan concluded, ‘What we see here is a political structure that no longer corresponds to its economic base, a society where productive forces are hampered by political ones’. Reagan then argued that communist systems did not represent the people, for they were totalitarian in nature.

The Soviet Union and other communist states did not represent the people they governed, Reagan said, because they were dictatorships without any form of democratic representation. This, Reagan believed, was evidence again that Marxist claims of being ‘for the people’ were ludicrous. Echoing Winston Churchill’s famous ‘Iron Curtain’ speech, Reagan said:

From Stettin on the Baltic to Varna on the Black Sea, the regimes planted by totalitarianism have had more than 30 years to establish their legitimacy. But

²³⁵ ‘Address to Members of the British Parliament’, 8 June 1982; *PPPR*.

none—not one regime—has yet been able to risk free elections. *Regimes planted by bayonets do not take root.*²³⁶ (Emphasis added).

Noting the strength of the Solidarity movement in Poland, Reagan joked that it demonstrated that the ‘Soviet Union would remain a one-party nation even if an opposition party were permitted, because everyone would join the opposition party’. When Solidarity swept Poland’s parliamentary elections in 1989, winning all but one seat it contested, Reagan’s joke seemed prescient.²³⁷

The lack of democratic involvement in communist regimes, Reagan said, had caused uprisings against the ‘police state’, and the President linked Solidarity to similar popular revolts in the past: ‘1953 in East Germany, 1956 in Hungary’ and ‘1968 in Czechoslovakia’. However, the conduct of ‘Western democracies’ would ‘determine whether this trend continues’, Reagan said, adding, ‘We must take actions to assist the campaign for democracy’.

To Reagan, the communist systems not only enslaved their own people, but were a threat that had to be eliminated. Noting that in 1982 they were ‘approaching the end of a bloody century’, the President said the cause of its bloodshed was a ‘terrible political invention—totalitarianism’. The West, Reagan said, would be remembered in the history books for its ‘consistent restraint and peaceful intentions’. Yet, the West could not ignore the threat ‘to our very existence’ that the USSR posed, for ‘if history teaches anything it teaches self delusion in the face of unpleasant facts is folly.’ Accurately capturing the mood of the West in the early 1980s, Reagan said:

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, p.241.

We see around us today the marks of our terrible dilemma—predictions of doomsday, anti-nuclear demonstrations, an arms race in which the West must, for its own protection, be an unwilling participant. At the same time we see totalitarian forces in the world who seek subversion and conflict around the globe to further their barbarous assault on the human spirit. What then is our course? *Must civilization perish in a hail of fiery atoms? Must freedom wither in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil?*²³⁸ (Emphasis added).

Reagan said that ‘strong leadership’ would ensure that ‘the forces of good ultimately rally and triumph over evil’. The West, Reagan said, ‘must not hesitate to declare our ultimate objectives’, which meant the overthrow of totalitarian regimes. This was Reagan’s ‘ultimate objective’, yet he made clear that any change of government would have to be indigenous:

We cannot ignore the fact that even without our encouragement there has been and will continue to be repeated explosions against repression and dictatorships. The Soviet Union itself is not immune to this reality. Any system is inherently unstable that has no peaceful means to legitimize its leaders. In such cases, *the very repressiveness of the state ultimately drives its people to resist it, if necessary, by force.*²³⁹ (Emphasis added).

Despite Reagan’s emphasis that any overthrow of communist regimes would have to come from within those nations,²⁴⁰ the President made clear that the West would be there to assist this process. Reagan asked the Western nations to join him to ‘foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties’ and ‘universities’ behind the Iron Curtain. Charges of ‘cultural imperialism’ were without foundation, for ‘it would be cultural

²³⁸ ‘Address to Members of the British Parliament’, 8 June 1982. *PPPR*.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Norman Podhoretz argued in ‘The Reagan Road to Détente’, that despite Reagan’s tough rhetoric, the Reagan Administration had no intentions to ‘roll back’ communism in Eastern Europe, and that the administration’s approach was no different from what President Nixon’s described as ‘hard headed détente’. See *Foreign Affairs*, (Winter: 1984/85), Vol.63, Iss.3, pp.-447-464.

condescension or worse to say that any people prefer dictatorship to democracy'. Reagan's aim was to create a 'world in which all people are at last free to determine their own destiny', but he made clear that for the USSR, this process would lead to its demise:

What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term—the march of freedom and democracy which *will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history*, as it has left other tyrannies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people.²⁴¹ (Emphasis added).

And, thus, Reagan had not only repudiated communist economic theory and the human rights record of the USSR and its surrogates, but he had also predicted that Marxism-Leninism would soon be eradicated and along with it the totalitarian regimes that denied their peoples' freedom. But what role did Reagan play in the creation of this speech?

In the Reagan Archives there is no written proof of the President having written or re-written this address. However, at an oral history project at the 'Heritage Foundation' marking the 20th anniversary of this famous speech, White House speechwriter Anthony Dolan revealed that it was he who had written the Parliament address. He had done so despite the attempts of the so called 'pragmatists' who had wanted to tone down Reagan's rhetoric and who had blocked his speech from reaching the President's desk. Reagan, displeased with the various drafts presented him, was angered to find out that Dolan had written a speech that he had been excluded from seeing. Even after ordering the speech be given to him, the 'pragmatists' did not give the President the address, and it was only after the NSC advisor Bill Clark made some demanding phone calls that Reagan managed to view the draft. When he finally read it, he liked what he

²⁴¹ Address to Members of the British Parliament', 8 June 1982. *PPPR*.

saw, because as Dolan explained for the oral history, the speech was based on what Reagan had been saying for decades. He said:

Well, yes, it had my name on it, but what Reagan saw there—the context, the message, the lines themselves—like the one about the nuclear monopoly and the map of Europe- [these were things he had said] way back in '68 or '67. He easily recognized the newer stuff too, the doom of communism theme...that was there. No wonder he chose it, [because it had]...Reagan ['s] idioms and ideas.²⁴²

Thus, it can be said to be Reagan's speech—even if he did not write it. However, Reagan's final speech of condemnation against the USSR *was* written by Reagan and came in response to one of the most brutal attacks on Western civilians in the history of the Cold War.

1983: 'Murder in the Air'²⁴³

Reagan's moral invective against the Soviet Union reached its crescendo in 1983, the harshness of his tone causing the Soviets to compare him to Hitler and fearful that the President was set to start World War III. As mentioned in Chapter 3, in March of that year he labeled the USSR an 'Evil Empire' in a speech to Evangelical Pastors; words that immediately raised the pressure of East/West relations to 'boiling point'. While Reagan had insisted that the controversial term remain within the text, it was again ghostwritten for him. The second major ideological speech of that year, however, was written by Reagan and thus further strengthens the argument that Reagan

²⁴² 'Ash Heap of History: President Reagan's Westminster Address 20 Years Later' - Remarks by Tony Dolan (3 June 2002), Heritage Foundation, Washington DC, Accessed at: http://www.reagansheritage.org/html/reagan_panel_dolan.shtml

²⁴³ 'Murder in the Air' was the headline of *NewsWeek's* 12 September 1983 issue on the KAL-007 massacre, and was a clever reference to Reagan's 1940 film entitled with the same name.

operated from an ideological standpoint and that his other speechwriters took their cue from him, not the other way round. The speech in question was about the ‘Korean Air-line Massacre’.

The confrontation began on 1 September 1983 when the Soviet Air-Force shot down Korean Airlines flight 007 for allegedly breaching its air-space. What caused such universal outrage and condemnation was the fact that the plane was civilian, and 259 innocent people, including US Congressman Larry McDonald, were killed. Reagan received word of the attack while at his ranch in California, and reacted immediately with an anger rarely displayed by the usually sunny President. The first statement from the President reflected this rage. He said:

Our first emotions are anger, disbelief, and profound sadness. While events in Afghanistan and elsewhere have left few illusions about the willingness of the Soviet Union to advance its interests through violence and intimidation, all of us had hoped that certain irreducible standards of civilized behavior, nonetheless remained. But this event shocks the sensibilities of people everywhere.²⁴⁴

Reagan then said that the ‘terrorist act’ demonstrated the ‘stark contrast that exists between Soviet words and deeds.’²⁴⁵ The situation was considered so serious that the President’s handlers insisted that he cut his ‘working vacation’ short and fly to Washington immediately; a decision that Reagan called ‘heartbreaking’ in his diary, and which no doubt added to his fury.²⁴⁶

While the Soviets refused to apologize for their actions,²⁴⁷ Reagan continued to fume, and he put his feelings down on paper for a major address to the nation about the ‘massacre’.

²⁴⁴ ‘Impromptu Remarks to Reporters’, 2 September 1983; *PPPR*.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 175.

²⁴⁷ When on 3 July 1988 the USS *Vincennes* shot down Iran Air Flight 655, killing 290 passengers, President Reagan did not seek to cover-up or hide the accident, telling reporters that he was ‘saddened to report...a terrible human tragedy’ adding that ‘we deeply regret any loss of life’. *PPPR*.

After mulling over the situation while swimming in the White House pool, Reagan got out, and still in his swimming trunks, wrote out his address to the nation on a yellow legal pad.²⁴⁸ In it, Reagan sought to portray the Soviet Union as a barbaric state without any human feeling. As such, Reagan set up the USSR to look like a nation that stood apart from the rest of humanity. He wrote:

And make no mistake about it, this attack was not just against ourselves or the Republic of Korea; *this was the Soviet Union against the world and the moral precepts which guide human relations among people everywhere*. It was an act of barbarism, born of a society which wantonly disregards individual rights and the value of human life and seeks constantly to expand and dominate other nations.²⁴⁹ (Emphasis added).

Reagan articulated the nation's feelings of outrage against the USSR,²⁵⁰ but refused to de-rail arms negotiations talks as a result of the incident. As Reagan recalled in his memoirs, the downing of flight 007 'demonstrated how close the world had come to the precipice and how much we needed nuclear arms control.'²⁵¹ Most media commentary was positive about Reagan's 'moderate' response, however, his conservative critics said that Reagan was now the opposite of Teddy Roosevelt; for he 'spoke loudly but carries a very small stick'.²⁵² Also unhappy were the members of the Soviet Politburo.

²⁴⁸ Edmund Morris, *Dutch*, p. 493.

²⁴⁹ 'Address to the Nation on the Korean Air-line Massacre' 5 September, 1983; *PPPR*.

²⁵⁰ Out of the 887 phone calls to the White House, 308 praised the speech, while 489 demanded stronger action against Moscow; White House Office of Records Management; James Baker, Box 10513 Communications (2 of 4); *RPL*.

²⁵¹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 584.

²⁵² Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 59.

For the leaders in the Kremlin, Reagan's latest verbal assault was the last straw. On 28 September Secretary General Andropov said that Reagan 'risked war' with his 'hypocritical preaching about morals' with 'smears' and 'obscenities'. The Soviet leader asserted that Reagan had 'proclaimed a crusade against socialism as a social system'.²⁵³ Furthermore, Andropov audaciously alleged that the downing of KAL 007 was a 'sophisticated provocation masterminded by the United States'; a statement that angered Americans even more than the deed itself.²⁵⁴

The stinging criticism of the Kremlin, along with heightened threat of war,²⁵⁵ led Reagan to conclude that it was time for a change of tone. Reagan had accomplished his goal of confronting the USSR, and as Richard Perle told the author, this stage in his rhetorical approach towards the Soviets would have far reaching consequences, which were not clearly seen at the time:

The 'Evil Empire' speech and other speeches of a similar nature were intended to raise fundamental questions about the legitimacy of the Soviet dictatorship, and did. And I believe that was essential to ending the Cold War. It was essential to the Western victory. Because by silence, or worse, previous administrations had accepted the legitimacy of the Soviet government and even the empire.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ See 'Andropov Asserts US Plan on Missiles is Unacceptable', 28 September, 1983 and 'Andropov Statement: Signal to the US' 29 September, 1983. *The New York Times*.

²⁵⁴ Walter Laquer, 'U.S/Soviet Relations', *Foreign Affairs*, (1983), Vol.62., Iss.3. pp-561-586.

²⁵⁵ For a full study of Reagan's KAL 007 rhetoric and the Soviet response see Marilyn Young and Michael Launer, 'KAL 007 and the Superpowers: An International Argument', *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, (Annadale: August 1988) Vol. 74, Iss.3, p.271.

²⁵⁶ See Appendix C.

Reagan had raised fundamental questions about the Soviet Union and its ‘empire’, but having accomplished this goal, the rhetoric of condemnation shifted to the democratic ideal of constructive dialogue.

1984: Reagan Changes his Tone

1983 had been a dangerous year for US/Soviet relations, with the escalated rhetoric on both sides being a major cause of the heightened level of tension. Reagan himself recognized this, and at the close of that tumultuous year that had seen the deployment of INF missiles in Europe and the unveiling of SDI, the President decided that a change of tone was required.

Reagan’s fear that the Soviets could misunderstand his rhetoric as being a harbinger of an actual attack, led him to conclude that a major address on US--Soviet relations, one that demonstrated America’s peaceful intentions, was long overdue. As Reagan recorded in his diary on 18 November 1983, nuclear war and Soviet paranoia were on his mind:

George Shultz & I had a talk mainly about setting up a little in house group of experts on the Soviet U. to help us in setting up some channels. *I feel the Soviets are so defense minded, so paranoid about being attacked that without being in any way soft on them, we ought to tell them no one here has any intention of doing anything like that. What the hell have they got that anyone would want?...A most sobering experience with Cap W. & Gen. Vessey in the situation room—a briefing on our complete plan in the event of a nuclear attack. The Chiefs have been working on it for 2 yrs in reply to my request in October, 1981.*²⁵⁷ (Emphasis added).

²⁵⁷ Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 199.

As a result of his discussion with Shultz, the State Department commissioned Soviet expert Jack Matlock to begin the drafting process of a major speech, with the aim to deliver before 1984, to avoid any perception that it was an election year stunt. By mid-December Matlock had completed his draft, which in turn was processed by the State Department and its head, Secretary Shultz. Finally the speech landed on the President's desk who declared it 'pedestrian' and complained that it 'contained no new ground'.²⁵⁸ In the latter respect, Reagan was correct: elements of the address, with its heavy emphasis on dialogue as the best means of resolving differences, had been present in other foreign policy addresses, most notably his 9 May 1982 address to Eureka College. What Reagan perhaps did not appreciate was that this address would be 'a first' in that it would be free of the recriminations that had been included with his more 'peaceful' pronouncements of the past. After more back and forth discussion between Reagan and his speechwriters, the oration was ready for its delivery on 16 January 1984. And it came none too soon.

Reagan discovered in early 1984, to his horror, that 1983 had been the year when the Superpowers had truly moved 'five minutes' to the midnight of nuclear Armageddon. The NATO war game, code named 'Abel Archer' staged between 2—11 November 1983, was a dress rehearsal for a full scale nuclear attack on the USSR. To the Soviets, unnerved by Reagan's harsh rhetoric, the deployment of INF weapons, the invasion of Grenada and the unveiling of SDI, what was called a military exercise, they feared, was in fact preparations for total war. 'Operation RYAN'²⁵⁹ instructed foreign agents to gather all information that could support this hypothesis, and Soviet forces were placed on alert. When CIA director William Casey informed

²⁵⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, p. 81.

²⁵⁹ RYAN here was a Russian acronym standing for *Raketno-YAdernoe Napadenie*, meaning 'nuclear missile attack'.

Reagan in early 1984 that the Soviets had feared an imminent invasion,²⁶⁰ the President's face went white. He asked, 'Do you suppose they really believe that? I don't see how they could believe that—but it's something to think about.'²⁶¹ Reagan's instincts had been right—he knew it was time for the Superpowers to stand back from the brink. It was time to change the nature of their discourse.

In what would later be viewed as a major 'reversal' for the President,²⁶² Reagan outlined in his address on US/Soviet relations the need for a renewed dialogue with the USSR. Though noting that 1984 was a 'time of challenges to peace' Reagan said that 'America's highest aspiration has never wavered' and that the quest for a 'lasting peace that enhances dignity for men and women everywhere' must proceed. In order to achieve this peace, the Reagan Administration had invested the past three years in ensuring that 'America's deterrence is more credible', resulting in a 'safer' nation. However, while increasing the capacity to wage war was important to deter aggression, the achievement of peace required much more:

Deterrence is essential to preserve peace and protect our way of life, but deterrence is not the beginning and the end of our policy toward the Soviet Union. *We must and will engage the Soviets in a dialogue as serious and constructive as possible—a dialogue that will serve to promote peace in the troubled regions of the world, reduce the level of arms, and build a constructive working relationship.*²⁶³ (Emphasis added).

²⁶⁰ It has become a much publicized view that the Soviets did in fact interpret Able Archer as a possible harbinger to a NATO invasion of the USSR. For an alternative argument that counters this, see Vojtech Mastny, 'How Able was Able Archer? Nuclear Trigger and Intelligence in Perspective', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, (Cambridge: Winter, 2009). Vol. 11, Iss. 1, p.108.

²⁶¹ Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 67.

²⁶² See Beth A Fisher's *The Reagan Reversal* (University of Missouri Press, 2000).

²⁶³ 'Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations' 16 January 1984. *PPPR*.

Andropov had made clear in his statement the previous September that entering into a dialogue with Reagan was almost out of the question due to the President's abrasive rhetoric. Addressing this issue, Reagan said:

I have openly expressed my view of the Soviet system. I don't know why this should come as a surprise to Soviet leaders who've never shied from expressing their view of our system. But this doesn't mean that we can't deal with each other. We don't refuse to talk when the Soviets call us imperialist aggressors and worse, or because they cling to the fantasy of a communist triumph over democracy. *The fact that neither of us likes the other system is no reason to refuse to talk. Living in this nuclear age makes it imperative that we do talk.*²⁶⁴ (Emphasis added).

Reagan summed up the rationale for his speech, and his desire to resume arms reduction talks with the USSR by saying:

In our approach to negotiations, *reducing the risk of war, and especially nuclear war, is priority number one.* A nuclear conflict could well be mankind's last... As I've said before, my dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the earth.²⁶⁵ (Emphasis added).

Though many hands drafted the speech, it is very clear that Reagan was the principal author, as the main ideas—the abolition of nuclear weapons, the fact that America had the sole nuclear monopoly after World War II but did not attempt to 'dominate the world' and even a 'folksy' story about a fictional Russian and American couple meeting and discussing their children—were all his.²⁶⁶ The President summed up the speech in his diary that night, writing:

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ As Don Oberforfer notes, no-one but Ronald Reagan could have drafted the fictional story, contained in the speech, of a Russian couple, Ivan and Anya meeting Jim and Sally, an American couple, meeting and discussing hobbies, children, work etc and deciding to go out to dinner sometime. The point of the anecdote was that Russians and Americans, if they met with each other, would find that they had a lot in common. It was governments, not

The day really began when in the East room at 10:00 A.M when I went live on TV worldwide with [an] address on Soviet-U.S relations. The press, especially TV is now trying to explain the speech as politics. Etc. The speech was carefully crafted by all of us to counter Soviet propoganda that we are not sincere in wanting arms reductions or peace. It was low key & held the door open to the Soviets if they mean what they say about having peace to walk in.²⁶⁷

The door was indeed open, but the Soviets were, alas, still unwilling to walk in. Gromyko, a few days later in a speech in Stockholm summed up Reagan's ideas and agenda as: 'Maniacal plans...criminal and dishonest methods...pathological obsession'.²⁶⁸ Chapter 10 of this thesis will discuss in greater detail Reagan's attempts to be a 'peacemaker' during this period, but at this point, the question needs to be asked: what role did Reagan's wife, Nancy, play in the change of rhetoric in 1984?

The Role of Nancy Reagan

In almost every account of the marriage of Ronald and Nancy Reagan, it is argued that without Nancy, Ronald Reagan would never have become President. Running a political campaign or an administration takes organization, and perhaps just as importantly, it means having a strong antenna when it comes to the selection of staff who can best accomplish the objectives of winning and governing. Nancy had an uncanny ability to detect when people were more interested in self-promotion, than they were for working towards the promotion of her husband's

people, who started wars. See Dan Oberdofer *The Turn: From Cold War to a New Era* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), pp.75-76.

²⁶⁷ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 212.

²⁶⁸ As quoted in *Time Magazine*, 30 January 1983.

interests. As such, she was often behind the scenes, plotting to oust those whom she considered a liability to her husband's agenda. Policy largely did not interest her—her primary interest, was protecting her husband and seeing that he prospered as a candidate and as a President. As James G. Benze writes in his study on Nancy:

The first lady scripted various aspects of her husband's presidency, but never in her own interest. She was concerned not with specific policies, but with her husband's political success. She decided what was best for President Reagan's image, his reelection, and ultimately his legacy, and then convinced the President, often with the help of others, to heed her advice.²⁶⁹

The question arises, therefore, did this desire to promote her husband's image lead her to foray into the area of US/Soviet relations?

1984 was an election year, and Nancy Reagan knew that the one weak point that the Democrats were sure to exploit would be the President's apparent lack of success in dealing with the Soviets. It was around this time, according to administration insiders, that Nancy began pushing for movement on the Superpower dialogue. According to Mike Deaver, Nancy began asking him in 1983, 'What are we doing about the Soviet thing?'²⁷⁰ NSC Adviser Bud McFarlane further testifies:

I have enormous respect for Mrs. Reagan. She and I would talk often. She would come up with ideas about ways in which a foreign undertaking, a trip, a letter, or a public position would benefit the President domestically. In 1984, an election year, she was nudging that his dialogue with the Russians go a little faster; that we try to make more concessions...that we make visible signs of reaching out to the Soviet Union.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ James G. Benze, *Nancy Reagan: On the White House Stage*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005),p.140.

²⁷⁰ Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 91.

²⁷¹ Strober, *Reagan: The Man and His Presidency*, p. 55.

Nancy Reagan writes in her memoirs of often being unsuccessful when it came to influencing her husband's positions—be it on his visit to Bitburg in Germany, or firing David Stockman and Don Regan sooner—but she claims more success when it came to US/Soviet relations:

I was somewhat more successful in encouraging Ronnie to consider a more conciliatory relationship with the Soviet Union. For years it had troubled me that my husband was always being portrayed by his opponents as a warmonger, simply because he believed, quite properly, in strengthening our defenses. Jimmy Carter had made this charge in the 1980 campaign, and it stuck to Ronnie for years...

*I knew that 'warmonger' was never a fair description of Ronnie's position, but I also felt that this calling the Soviet Union an 'Evil Empire' was not particularly helpful in establishing a dialogue with the other side. The world had become too small for the two superpowers not to be on speaking terms, and unless that old perception about Ronnie could be revised, nothing positive was likely to happen. Some of his advisers wanted to keep up the tough rhetoric, but I argued against it and suggested that he tone it down... With the world so dangerous, I felt it was ridiculous for these two heavily armed superpowers to be sitting there and not talking to each other... So yes, I did push Ronnie a little.*²⁷² (Emphasis added).

But was Nancy's 'pushing' pivotal? In her own opinion, it was not. Nancy wrote: 'As always, Ronnie listened to the various points of view and then made the decision that he thought was best.'²⁷³ The evidence presented here (and in Chapter 10), would suggest strongly that the change in tone in 1984 was one that the President himself had decided upon through his own reading of the situation. In 1986, Reagan was ready to change the tone again.

²⁷² Nancy Reagan, *My Turn*, pp.63-64, 336-337.

²⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 64

Reagan Challenges Reform: 1986-1988

After beginning the process of making peace between the United States and the Soviet Union, Reagan used the remainder of his second term in office to challenge the Soviet leadership to allow political and religious freedoms. ‘Peace through Strength’, Reagan believed, had led the Soviets to ‘sue for peace’. With the likelihood of hostilities waning, Reagan hoped to use his personal relationship with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to press hard for the implementation of civil liberties for those living behind the Iron Curtain. Returning home from the Geneva Summit in November 1985, the President declared that his Administration’s policies had ‘caught the Soviet’s attention’ and stated that America had moved from being a reactor to world events to being a cause for revolutionary change: ‘We are in the forefront of a powerful, historic tide for freedom and opportunity, for progress and peace.’²⁷⁴

Though foreign policy experts had warned Reagan to keep human rights out of the discussion if progress were to be made, the President made the issue a centerpiece of his dealings with the USSR.²⁷⁵ Throughout 1986, Reagan continued to keep the pressure on Mikhail Gorbachev, beginning with a televised address to the Soviet people. In language never heard before over Soviet airwaves, Reagan spoke of his talks with Gorbachev in Geneva where he ‘discussed the American people’s strong interest in humanitarian issues’. Explaining America’s ideals, Reagan said:

Our democratic system is founded on the belief in the sanctity of human life and the rights of the individual—rights such as freedom of speech, of assembly of

²⁷⁴ ‘Radio Address to the Nation on the Soviet United States Summit Meeting in Geneva’, 23 November 1985; *PPPR*.

²⁷⁵ This emphasis surprised many at the time, as Reagan as a candidate for President had been sharply critical of Carter’s focus on human rights. See Tamar Jacoby, ‘The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights’, *Foreign Affairs*, (Summer 1986), Vol.64, Iss.5, pp. 1066-1086.

movement and of worship. It is a sacred truth to us that every individual is a unique creation of God, with his or her own special talents, abilities, hopes and dreams. *Respect for all people is essential to peace, and as we agreed in Geneva, progress in resolving humanitarian issues in a spirit of cooperation would go a long way to making 1986 a better year for us all.*²⁷⁶ (Emphasis added).

Reagan's address, which was broadcast without edit or refutation, received a positive reaction by the Soviet people.²⁷⁷ Gorbachev did not reply so favorably: in an 11 January 1986 letter he informed Reagan that human rights were an internal affair of the USSR and in fact the Soviets had always acted 'on the basis of humanism and taking into account the interests of the people concerned.'²⁷⁸ Still, some progress was made when Soviet dissident Anatoly Shcharansky was permitted an exit visa on 11 February. Reagan saw this development as a sign that his 'quiet diplomacy' and his public statements were achieving results. At the Reykjavik Summit held in October that year, Reagan asked for more, presenting Gorbachev with a list of 1,200 Jews seeking exit visas and stating that 'Soviet human rights policies were impeding the improvement of our relationship'.²⁷⁹ But Reagan's greatest challenge to the USSR came the following year, when the President, standing in front of the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, arguably made the best speech of his presidency.

President Reagan's Berlin Wall speech on 12 June 1987 represented the greatest challenge by an American leader to the Soviet Union to bring about real domestic and

²⁷⁶ 'New Years Address to the Soviet People', 1 January 1986; *PPPR*

²⁷⁷ See 'Muscovites Voice Positive Reaction', the *New York Times* 2 January 1986.

²⁷⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 650.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 675.

international reform. While echoing John F. Kennedy's 1963 Berlin address,²⁸⁰ Reagan's language was considered too provocative by many in the State Department when he contrasted the success of the 'free West' with the failures of the Soviet Union and the nations of the Warsaw Pact. Noting that in 'in the 1950s Khrushchev [had] predicted, 'We will bury you', Reagan pointed out that the West was enjoying 'a level of prosperity and wellbeing unprecedented in all human history' while the communist world experienced 'failure, technological backwardness' and 'declining standards of health.' The 'inescapable conclusion' of all this, he said, was that 'freedom leads to prosperity'. By using the dramatic backdrop behind him, Reagan illustrated that despite Gorbachev's twin reforms of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, freedom was not enjoyed by all. He stated:

Behind me stands a wall that encircles the free sectors of this city, part of a vast system of barriers that divides the entire continent of Europe. From the Baltic, south, those barriers cut across Germany in a gash of barbed wire, concrete, dog runs, and guard towers. Farther south, there may be no visible, no obvious wall. But there remain armed guards and checkpoints all the same—still a restriction on the right to travel, still an instrument to impose upon ordinary men and women the will of a totalitarian state.²⁸¹

Reagan stated that Gorbachev understood 'the importance of freedom' albeit in a 'limited way'. Examples of this included the release of several political prisoners, freer economic experimentation and more freedom of information. 'Are these the beginnings of profound changes in the Soviet State?' he asked, 'Or are they token gestures, intended to raise false hopes in the West, or to strengthen the Soviet system without changing it?' The Soviet Union, Reagan

²⁸⁰ For a comparison of the two Berlin Addresses see Michael E Meagher, 'John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan: The Challenge of Freedom', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, (2006), Vol.18, Iss.1, p. 11.

²⁸¹ 'Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin', 12 June 1987; *PPPR*.

noted, found itself at a crossroad and faced a choice: ‘It must make fundamental changes, or it will become obsolete’. And at that point in his speech, Reagan then ‘threw down the gauntlet’. With the Berlin Wall behind him, and thousands of West Germans before him, Reagan said in thunderous voice:

There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace. *General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!*²⁸² (Emphasis Added).

The audience cheered rapturously at what was to become the most famous ‘sound bite’ from the Reagan presidency.²⁸³ But again, what was Reagan’s role in the crafting of this speech?

Like the British Parliament address, the original drafts of the Berlin Wall speech are absent from the Reagan Archives, and so again history has to rely on the testimony of those who claim to have written the speech for answers to this question. And those who claim to have had a major role in doing so are numerous.²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the most credible claim of authorship

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Reagan wrote in his diary of the crowd: ‘I addressed tens and tens of thousands of people—stretching as far as I could see. I got a tremendous reception—interrupted 28 times by cheers’. Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 506.

²⁸⁴ Take for example John C. Kornblum’s claim in his piece, ‘Reagan’s Brandenburg Concerto’: ‘As new drafts filtered through to us at irregular intervals, it became clear that the logical conclusion to be drawn from our broader initiative was missing from the text. The President needed to be emphatic without being provocative. He needed, in our view, to issue a direct call to Gorbachev to open the Berlin Wall. After testing the idea with my Berlin staff, I sent it to the NSC as a personal proposal. I soon heard that the speechwriters were pushing the same basic notion, but that my own home, the State Department, was strongly against it. As we later found out, a heated battle over whether to include the challenge ultimately involved the Presidents most senior advisers. I learned that the President had decided personally to include the sentence in the speech when an NSC colleague reported as he descended from the delegation bus at the Brandenburg Gate: “Congratulations, your sentence made it in.” *The American Interest*, Washington, May/June, 2007, Vol. 2, Iss 5, p.114. Anyone reading this piece, without knowing the full history, could easily come away from it believing that Kornblum had written the sentence, ‘Mr. Gorbachev: Tear down this wall’. Unfortunately, it seems to be human nature that most people in government seek to take credit for the major accomplishments, while blaming others for any failings that occurred on their watch.

belongs to Reagan's speechwriter, Peter Robinson, and like Anthony Dolan's experience with the British Parliament speech, he too had to overcome numerous hurdles within the White House before the President gave the address. As Robinson recalls:

The speech was circulated to the State Department and the NSC three weeks before it was to be delivered. For three weeks, State and the NSC fought the speech. They argued that it was crude. They claimed that it was unduly provocative. *They asserted that the passage about the Wall amounted to a cruel gimmick, one that would unfairly raise Berliners' hopes.* There were telephone calls, memoranda, and meetings. State and the NSC submitted their own alternative drafts—as best I recall, there were seven...*In each, the call for Gorbachev to tear down the Wall was missing.*²⁸⁵ (Emphasis added).

But President Reagan especially liked the 'tear down the wall' line, and insisted that it would stay, arguing with the 'pragmatists':

'Now, I'm the President, aren't I?'

'Yes, sir!'

'So, I get to decide?'

'Yes, sir!'

'Well, then the line stays in.'²⁸⁶

And while Reagan did not write the speech, that central idea about the Berlin Wall coming down was his. After all, he had first called on the Soviets to 'tear down the wall' twenty years earlier, in a TV debate with Senator Robert Kennedy.²⁸⁷ Robinson freely admits that, 'We, his

²⁸⁵ Peter M. Robinson 'Tearing Down That Wall' *Hoover Digest* 1997, No.4.

²⁸⁶ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 401.

²⁸⁷ 'Town Meeting of the World: The Image of America and the Youth of the World, 15 May 1967,' National Archives, RFK Collection, File Unite TRAN-RFK-TEL-APP, Item 7G: *RPL*.

speechwriters, were not creating Reagan; we were stealing from him. Reagan's policies were straightforward—he had been articulating them for two decades.’²⁸⁸

In any event, the Soviet press agency *Tass* blasted Reagan for an ‘openly provocative, war-mongering speech’.²⁸⁹ And yet, when Reagan visited Moscow the following year, the theme of Reagan’s addresses, both public and private, continued to provide calls for radical reforms.

Challenging Reform From Within the ‘Evil Empire’

The Moscow Summit, the final between Reagan and Gorbachev, was held in the summer of 1988 (29 May-2 June). It was, above all else, a platform from which the President continued to challenge the Soviet Union to implement real reforms. However, by the time Reagan did visit the USSR, Gorbachev was facing internal revolt from party members who felt that his *perestroika* efforts were destabilizing and therefore extremely dangerous. He therefore welcomed Reagan’s support, who was careful to temper his lecturing tone with praise for Gorbachev’s efforts.

On the issue of religious freedom, Reagan’s remarks were straightforward and to the point: everyone in the Soviet Union had the right to worship without state interference. Visiting the then recently restored Danilov Monastery in Moscow on the second day of the summit, Reagan said that he hoped that its restoration was ‘not an end in itself’ but rather a sign of ‘a new policy of religious tolerance that will extend to all peoples of all faiths.’²⁹⁰ The President singled out the still banned Ukrainian Catholic Church, a thorny issue especially to his Orthodox

²⁸⁸ Peter M Robinson, op. cit.

²⁸⁹ ‘Raze Berlin Wall, Reagan Urges Soviets’, *New York Times*, 13 June 1987.

²⁹⁰ ‘Remarks to Religious Leaders at the Danilov Monastery in Moscow’, 30 May 1988; *PPPR*

audience, as an example where much more could be done.²⁹¹ On the same day that Reagan addressed the religious issue, he forcefully defended other human rights.

Addressing a group of Soviet ‘dissidents’ at the American Embassy, Reagan expounded his belief that human rights were universal, and consequently voiced his hope that the USSR would soon honor its obligations to its citizenry. The meeting had been organized in place of a visit to the home of Yuri and Tatyana Zieman—an appointment that, if kept, Reagan was informed, would doom their hopes for an exit visa.²⁹² So, the meeting at the American Embassy was substituted instead. Reagan was sensitive to the embarrassment the meeting posed to the Soviet leadership, and was careful to praise the release of ‘300 political and religious prisoners’ over the past three years and the increase in emigration from the USSR. However, despite this progress, he said that ‘the basic standards that the Soviet Union agreed to almost 13 years ago in the Helsinki Accords, or a generation ago in the Universal Declaration of Human rights, still need to be met’.²⁹³ Reagan then quoted ‘chapter and verse’ from that United Nations declaration and drew attention to the sections dealing with ‘Freedom of Religion’, ‘Freedom of Speech’ and ‘Freedom of Travel’. After speaking personally with the dissidents gathered, Reagan concluded:

²⁹¹ The issue of religious freedom was also raised privately with Gorbachev, with Reagan assuring the Soviet leader that his advice was off the record, and would be denied if it leaked to the media. As the Memcons record: ‘The President continued that he wished to take up another topic that had been a kind of personal dream of his. He had been reluctant to raise it with Gorbachev, but he was going to do it now anyway....Gorbachev could do something of benefit not only to him but to the image of his country worldwide. The Soviet Union had a church—in a recent speech Gorbachev had liberalized some of its rules—the Orthodox Church. The President asked Gorbachev what if he ruled that religious freedom was part of the peoples’ rights, that people of any religion—whether Islam with its mosques, the Jewish faith, Protestants or the Ukrainian Church—could go to the church of their choice...If Gorbachev could see his way clear to do what the President had asked, continued the President, he felt very strongly that he would be a hero, and that much of the feeling against his country would disappear like water in hot sun.’ White House Staff and Office Files, Executive Secretariat, NSC System Files, 8890497; *RPL*.

²⁹² Nancy Reagan, *My Turn*, p. 354. The couple did in fact receive their exit visas two months later, and emigrated to the United States, living in Boston.

²⁹³ ‘Remarks to Soviet Dissidents at Spaso House in Moscow’, 30 May 1988; *PPPR*.

I came here hoping to do what I could to give you strength. Yet I already know that it is you who have strengthened me, you who have given me a message to carry back. While we press for human rights through diplomatic channels, you press with your very lives, day in, day out, year after year, risking your jobs, your homes, your all. You have the prayers and support of the American people, indeed of people throughout the world.²⁹⁴

Reagan's final challenge to the Soviets came on his last day in Moscow. In what the *New York Times* proclaimed to be 'Reagan's finest oratorical hour'²⁹⁵ his address to students at the Moscow State University walked a tight rope between 'conciliation and subversion'.²⁹⁶ In it, Reagan spoke of a tomorrow transformed by new technologies and of the virtue of a way of life marked by freedom of choice. His speech spoke of the 'technological/information revolution' whose 'emblem' was the 'tiny silicon chip' that would 'fundamentally alter' the world over the next decade. 'One individual with a desktop computer,' he said would be able to command 'resources unavailable to the largest governments just a few years ago'. To an audience raised to think that capitalism was about exploitation, Reagan painted an alternative picture of adventure:

The explorers of the modern era are the entrepreneurs, men with vision, with the courage to take the risks and faith enough to brave the unknown. These entrepreneurs and their small enterprises are responsible for almost all the economic growth in the United States. They are the prime movers of the technological revolution.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Nancy Reagan, *My Turn*, p. 354.

²⁹⁵ "With Lenin Watching," *New York Times*, 1 June 1 1988.

²⁹⁶ See Wayne Howell, 'Ronald Reagan's Address at Moscow State University: A rhetoric of conciliation and subversion', *The Southern Communication Journal*, (Memphis: Winter, 2003), Vol.68, Iss.2,p.107.

²⁹⁷ 'Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University'; 31 May, 1988; *PPPR*.

The key to the future, Reagan opined, was ‘freedom of thought, freedom of information and freedom of communication’. And freedom, he pointed out, was about individualism, not government:

*Freedom is the right to question and change the established way of doing things. It is the continuing revolution of the marketplace. It is the understanding that allows us to recognize shortcomings and seek solutions. It is the right to put forth an idea, scoffed at by the experts, and watch it catch fire among the people. It is the right to dream—to follow your dream or stick to your conscience, even if you’re the only one in a sea of doubters. Freedom is the recognition that no single person, no single authority or government has a monopoly on the truth, but that every individual life is infinitely precious, that every one of us put on this world has been put there for a reason and has something to offer.*²⁹⁸ (Emphasis added).

Freedom: that was the essence of America’s ideological origins, and the essence of Reagan’s moral challenge to the USSR. The Moscow Summit’s significance was not in any substantial arms agreements signed (the START I Treaty was not finalized), but rather the fact that Reagan had gone there in the first place and had from within challenged the Soviet people to move from state control to individual freedom. Considering the fact that freedom was about to sweep Eastern Europe the following year, and that the USSR itself would implode and embrace Western style capitalism and an increased amount of civil liberties, Reagan’s words now seem prophetic. He was heralding a new era for the Soviet people that few could have imagined was just around the corner.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

Conclusions

The words *condemn*, *engage*, and *challenge*, could sum up the three phases of Reagan's ideological rhetoric against the USSR during his presidency. Of course, there were elements of all three at various times throughout Reagan's eight years in office, but in terms of the main *emphasis* of his speeches, this breakdown is apparent when looking at his major addresses and statements.

For the first three years of the Reagan presidency, the main focus of his statements against the USSR was that of condemnation. From his first press conference where he painted the Soviets as willing to 'commit any crime, to lie to cheat', to his statement that the communist system was 'some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written', Reagan demonstrated in 1981 that the diplomatic niceties of the *détente* era were a thing of the past.

In 1982 Reagan went further, asking the British Parliament, whether 'freedom' would 'wither in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil', or instead whether they would promote a campaign for democracy that would 'leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history'.

In 1983 this style of condemnation reached its zenith when the President labeled the USSR an 'Evil Empire', and relations hit an all time low following Reagan's self-written speech blasting the Soviets over the Korean Air-line 'massacre'; a speech where he painted the Soviets as unfeeling barbarians, stating that the attack was 'the Soviet Union against the world and the moral precepts which guide human relations among

people everywhere.’ Perhaps shaken with the thought that his rhetoric had made war more likely, (and nudged by his wife Nancy), Reagan changed his tone in 1984.

Reagan’s January 1984 speech on US/Soviet relations marked the beginning of a new stage in Reagan’s rhetoric, and was seen by most as a total ‘reversal’ from the fiery language used in the past. While George Shultz believes that Reagan’s speeches ‘never changed’²⁹⁹ at all, this thesis argues that the emphasis did in fact transform over time, for the sections of his speeches prior that mentioned dialogue were drowned out by the other parts that spoke in denunciatory tones. No longer sending out ‘mixed messages’, Reagan in his address demonstrated that he was willing to engage with the Soviets in a ‘constructive dialogue’. When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, Reagan had found his partner for this discourse, and that engagement was directed towards the cause of peace (as Chapter 10 will examine more closely). From engagement, Reagan moved to challenge.

Reagan was fortunate to be President at a time when the Soviet leadership was experimenting with internal reforms—the so called *glasnost* and *perestroika*—and he used this as leverage to push for an even greater transformation of Soviet society. Best summed up in the ‘Berlin Wall’ address, Reagan challenged Gorbachev to be ‘serious’ about reform; and if he was, then a process would begin leading to the dismantling of the divisions between East and West.

What this chapter demonstrates is that the rhetoric coming out of the White House during the Reagan years belonged to the President himself. In various cases, Reagan was

²⁹⁹ Interview with author, Hoover Institute, Stanford University, 5 October 2007.

‘Speech-Writer-In-Chief’, drafting his own addresses from start to finish, as was the case with his ‘Korean Air-Line Massacre’ speech. In other situations, like his first press conference as President, Reagan held forth his ideological view of the Cold War conflict without any written guidance: he was simply stating his opinions. When speechwriters did write his addresses, Reagan played a key role in editing them, often inserting new ideas or re-writing them to sound much better (a skill he had developed over many years of writing radio addresses and delivering speeches). Finally, most of Reagan’s speechwriters based their drafts on key ideas that the President himself had spoken of over past decades. As Robinson said, they ‘stole’ from the President, not the other way round. And when controversial phrases like ‘ash-heap of history’ and ‘tear down this wall’ were vehemently opposed by the State Department and the NSC, Reagan chose to ignore the advice of the ‘pragmatists’ and deliver the speech the way he wanted to. Thus, it can be concluded that the moral pronouncements of the Reagan presidency, which described the struggle with the USSR in ideological terms, were truly reflective of Reagan’s beliefs and were either his own personal work, or the work of others that had his own imprimatur.

As Robert W. Tucker noted in *Foreign Affairs* at the end of Reagan’s second term in office, the President was not the ‘rigid ideologue he was so regularly depicted as being’, rather he ‘adjusted his vision to the circumstances conditioning and limiting the conduct of the nation’s foreign policy.’ This ‘adjustment’ was not an abandonment of the

President's 'vision', rather, 'at the end of his presidency, Reagan could say, and apparently believe, that he had been entirely faithful to that vision.'³⁰⁰

From Reagan's rhetoric, this study will now turn to the issue of Missile Defense Technology, a subject that was one of the central features of Reagan's Soviet policy.

³⁰⁰ Robert W. Tucker, 'Reagan's Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, (1988/89), Vol. 68,. Iss.1, pp.12-13.

Chapter 5:

THE ORIGINS OF MISSILE DEFENSE TECHNOLOGY

“Advocates of the MAD policy (Mutual Assured Destruction) believed it had served a purpose: the balance of terror it created, they said, had prevented nuclear war for decades. But as far as I was concerned the MAD policy was madness. For the first time in history, man had the power to destroy mankind itself. A war between the superpowers would incinerate much of the world and leave what was left of it uninhabitable forever. There had to be some way to remove this threat of annihilation and give the world a greater chance of survival.”

-Ronald Reagan³⁰¹

Of all the policies and initiatives that Ronald Reagan championed during his eight years as President, there was none that he held more precious than his stated desire to achieve an effective defense against nuclear missiles. To save the United States from the ‘terror of the bomb,’ was to be Reagan’s lasting gift to his fellow citizens.

This chapter firstly reviews that the United States government began in 1983 a research program with the aim of accomplishing a technological breakthrough that would protect America from a nuclear weapons attack. It examines the origins of Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) technology, dating back to the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, and explores Reagan’s personal

³⁰¹ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.258.

attachment to the idea of missile defense and the possible influences on him in this regard. It also looks at the re-emergence of missile defense in the 1980 Republican Party Platform and questions whether prior to becoming President, it was Reagan or his aides, who were more enthusiastic about putting ABM back on the national agenda.

Missile Defense: Reagan Administration Policy

The development of missile defense technology was an enshrined goal of the United States Government in the 1980s. It was unveiled to the world on the night of 23 March 1983 when President Reagan, in a televised address to the nation on matters of national defense, told the watching audience that he had approved a program entitled the ‘Strategic Defense Initiative’ (SDI) that sought ‘to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive’.³⁰² To underscore the importance of this initiative, Reagan dedicated a segment of his second inaugural address on the topic (entirely written by the President), and on 21 January 1985 declared:

I have approved a research program to find, if we can, a security shield that will destroy nuclear missiles before they reach their target. It wouldn’t kill people; it would destroy weapons. It wouldn’t militarize space; it would help demilitarize the arsenals of Earth. It would render nuclear weapons obsolete.³⁰³

³⁰² ‘Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security’ 23 March 1983; *PPPR*.

³⁰³ ‘2nd Inaugural Address’, 21 January 1985; the address was entirely written by Reagan himself, with the speechwriting team only removing facts and figures he cited, asking instead that he focus on general themes. See the Presidential Handwriting File, BOX 17: FOLDER 325, 326: SECOND INAUGRAL, 21 JAN. 1985, *RPL*.

While many commentators considered Reagan's vision of making nuclear weapons 'obsolete' absurd, and believed the science behind it to be 'science fiction', it was not mere rhetoric for the American government. Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 85, signed on 25 March 1983, started an expensive ball rolling: some \$14.68 billion dollars was to be spent on research and development on missile defense between the years 1985-90.³⁰⁴ SDI was taken very seriously by the US government during the 1980s, to the extent that the National Security Council took the unusual and unprecedented step of releasing a 'fact sheet' detailing the reasoning behind the controversial program.

The 1985 National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 172 was the most comprehensive explanation ever volunteered by the Reagan Administration for SDI. The document, released publicly on 1 June 1985, stated that the American government sought to achieve President Reagan's 'vision' of a future where 'national security did not rest upon the threat of nuclear retaliation, but rather on the ability to defend against potential attacks'.³⁰⁵ Research was to be conducted, it said, in a manner 'wholly compatible with the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty' and indeed this would be a 'hedge' against Soviet advancement in ABM technology. Furthermore, it stated that 'the aim of SDI is not to seek superiority', and that the program was not 'offensive in nature'. Rather, the 'research program aimed at seeking better ways to ensure U.S. and allied security, using the increased contribution of defenses—defenses

³⁰⁴ Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, p. 312.

³⁰⁵ National Security Decision Directive 172 – 1 June 1985; Accessed at: <http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/offdocs/nsdd172.htm>

that threaten no one.’³⁰⁶ But the document also made clear that, while the program was not offensive in nature, it would greatly enhance America’s deterrent capability:

Successful SDI research and development of defense options would not lead to abandonment of deterrence, but rather to an enhancement of deterrence and an evolution in the weapons of deterrence through the contribution of defensive systems that threaten no one. We would deter a potential aggressor by making it clear that we could deny him the gains he might otherwise hope to achieve rather than merely threatening him with costs large enough to outweigh those gains.³⁰⁷

Ultimately, however, the Reagan Administration’s main aim with SDI was to give a sense of ‘peace and freedom’ to the American people, as hitherto there had been no defense against incoming missiles for the general population and only the ability to seek revenge through a reprisal nuclear attack. While ‘a general defense against ballistic missiles’ would have ‘technological options’ that would ‘certainly also increase the survivability’ of America’s ‘retaliatory forces’, the main emphasis of SDI was ‘to provide the basis for eliminating the general threat posed by ballistic missiles.’³⁰⁸ In this final regard, Reagan’s ABM system was far more ambitious in scope than the systems proposed by the Johnson and Nixon Administrations as the next section of this chapter will demonstrate.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

ABM under Presidents Johnson and Nixon

The American missile defense programs prior to the Reagan presidency were proposed not for the purpose of achieving an effective defense against ballistic missiles, but rather to match Soviet advances in this field so that America might in the future use its ABM systems as a bargaining chip in arms limitation negotiations.

America's ABM program began in earnest during the Johnson Administration, and as the President made clear it was a program he considered a useless waste of time and money. Announced by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara on 18 September 1967, the *Sentinel* program was publicly touted as a necessary expenditure to offset the threat of Chinese ballistic missiles. The reason why the USSR was not included as a factor was due to the limited nature of the deployment: critics could point out that all the Soviets needed to overwhelm such a system would be to launch more missiles at it. Also, McNamara explained that were the system to be deployed with the USSR in mind, it would spur a new arms race, which he considered insane saying: 'What the world requires in the 22nd year of its atomic age is not a race towards new armament' but rather a 'new race towards reasonableness.'³⁰⁹ President Johnson strongly agreed with McNamara, as his letter to Soviet leader Kosygin earlier that year had demonstrated. In it, Johnson advocated negotiations to achieve 'an understanding' which would 'curb the strategic arms race'. In particular, the President wished to stop a new arms race in the field of ABM systems. He wrote:

I think you must realize that following the deployment by you of an anti-ballistic missile system I face great pressures from the Members of Congress and from public opinion not only to deploy defensive systems in this country, but also to increase greatly our capabilities to penetrate any defensive systems which you might establish.

³⁰⁹ As quoted in 'McNamara Warns Soviet On Adding To ICBM Defense', *New York Times*, 19 Sept. 1967.

If we should feel compelled to make such major increases in our strategic weapons capabilities, I have no doubt that you would in turn feel under compulsion to do likewise. We would thus have incurred on both sides colossal costs without substantially enhancing the security of our own peoples or contributing to the prospects for a stable peace in the world.³¹⁰

Unfortunately for Johnson, the USSR was not prepared to engage in meaningful discussions with a ‘lame duck President’ during his final year in office, and thus decided to wait for his successor, Richard M. Nixon, to take the helm. And what Johnson had hoped for, Nixon was able to achieve.

President Nixon shared Johnson’s ‘game plan’ in the hope of achieving the same result: continue with ABM deployment, and use it as a bargaining chip to halt any widespread missile defense program by the USSR. When Nixon became President in 1969, there were those who warned that a continuance of ABM research and deployment could endanger arms limitation talks with the Soviets. Nixon considered them to be naïve, and plain wrong. He knew that the Soviets had begun the deployment of 40 ABMs around Moscow, in addition to installing advanced radar systems. Without any ABM system of their own, America could not negotiate away the Soviet’s ABM system, without having to give up something else; perhaps something ‘more vital’.³¹¹ Nixon thus proposed a reduced ABM program that he re-named *Safeguard*, and engaged in an all-out White House effort to secure the Senate’s support for funding. He achieved this, but only with Vice President Spiro Agnew casting the tie-breaking vote. As Nixon recounted: ‘I am absolutely convinced that had we lost the ABM battle in the Senate, we would

³¹⁰ Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 479-80.

³¹¹ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 416.

not have been able to negotiate the first nuclear arms control agreement in Moscow in 1972.³¹² The ABM system funded, Nixon had his bargaining chip, and he would use it to negotiate away its existence.

The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972) signed by President Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev hoped to cement permanently a ban on any large scale missile defense program. The treaty limited each nation to two sites for ABM deployment,³¹³ thereby leaving the rest of the population vulnerable to a possible nuclear attack. Nixon believed that this saved the United States a fortune, as he later wrote: ‘The ABM treaty stopped what inevitably would have become a defensive arms race, with untold billions of dollars being spent on each side for more and more ABM coverage’.³¹⁴ It also codified ‘Mutual Assured Destruction’ (MAD) as the basis for America’s security in the nuclear age. As Nixon recounted, the Treaty aimed to:

make permanent the concept of deterrence through ‘mutual terror’: by giving up missile defense each side was leaving its population and territory hostage to a strategic missile attack. Each side therefore had an ultimate interest in preventing a war.³¹⁵

MAD was the concept that were a nuclear power to launch an attack against another nuclear power, the other side would respond in a similar fashion, bringing about an equal level of destruction to the nation that had initiated the nuclear exchange. To order a nuclear strike,

³¹² Ibid. p. 418.

³¹³ See ‘TREATY BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS ON THE LIMITATION OF ANTI-BALLISTIC MISSILE SYSTEMS, Accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/treaties/abm/abm2.html>, The US later voluntarily reduced their number of sites to zero.

³¹⁴ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p.617.

³¹⁵ Ibid. p 618.

therefore, would be *suicidal*. A comprehensive missile defense program would make MAD less clear cut, for if a country had the ability to knock down incoming nuclear missiles, they might also be tempted to make a first strike without fear of reprisal.³¹⁶

Reagan was Governor of California when the ABM Treaty was signed, and any misgivings that he may have had about the policy were kept to himself. It was only when Reagan began to think of himself as the next Commander-in-Chief that he seriously looked at the issue of ABM technology and the concept of MAD. When Reagan began to think these matters through, others were there to take his musings and move towards making them policy.

Reagan's Visit to NORAD

In the many writings about Reagan and the origins of SDI, one event remains central in all explanations for the President's later enthusiasm for missile defense technology: his so called 'epiphany' on Cheyenne Mountain. On 31 July 1979, Reagan, still an undeclared candidate for the presidency, visited the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), situated at Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado. With him was Martin Anderson, an economics professor from the *Hoover Institute* and former adviser to President Nixon. As Anderson recounts in his book *Revolution*,³¹⁷ Reagan was given an extensive briefing on the purpose of NORAD, which Anderson described as 'the nerve centre of a far-flung, worldwide network of radar detectors that

³¹⁶ According to Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press in their article 'The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy', today even without a functioning missile defense program, the United States has the ability to launch of a first strike against Russia and China due to American nuclear superiority. This, they argue, spells the end of MAD. See *Foreign Affairs*. (New York: Mar/Apr 2006), Vol. 85, Iss. 2; p. 42.

³¹⁷ For Anderson's account of their visit to NORAD quoted here and below see Martin Anderson, *Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), pp. 80-86.

alerts us to any surprise attack'. After several hours of being informed about the respective strengths of the American and Soviet nuclear capabilities, Reagan and Anderson were brought into the command centre, where the reality of America's vulnerability to nuclear attack dawned on Reagan.

Standing before a large screen, several stories high, with a digital map of the United States displayed, Reagan received a briefing about how a nuclear attack would be tracked with the latest in technology. Anderson described it as being like out of a 'movie', with 'young men and women' monitoring radar screens, looking for 'the first sign of a nuclear attack.' As was explained to Reagan by General James Hill, any incoming nuclear missile would be detected by the radar system before them. At this point Reagan asked, 'And what would happen then?' Hill informed Reagan that nothing could be done to intercept the incoming weapon; all that they could do would be to alert the President, and watch as a major American city was destroyed. Reagan shook his head in dismay. For him, this was simply unacceptable.

On the flight back to California, Reagan pondered what he had seen at NORAD, and it left him feeling disturbed. He did not like the concept of a 'naked' United States, unable to defend against a nuclear strike. Of course Reagan knew that the ABM Treaty had put an end to the idea of a national missile defense program and that the United States relied on the theory of 'Mutual Assured Destruction' to ensure its security. But having stood before the actual screen that would display an incoming nuclear attack and discussing the possible scenarios that would then unfold, Reagan had had an awakening. Nuclear defense in his mind had moved from the *theoretical sphere to the plane of reality*. And considering that Reagan believed himself to be the next man to sit in the Oval Office, those scenarios took on an added weight of seriousness. After

all, it could be Reagan receiving that phone call from NORAD informing him that a ‘nuclear Armageddon’ was on its way.

Examining the options available for a Commander-in-Chief when informed of a nuclear attack on the US, Reagan pondered the need for a return to a missile defense program. Discussing what General Hall had briefed him about, Reagan said that a ‘President has two untenable options’ upon receiving the phone call from NORAD that a strike was imminent: ‘One, sit back and watch a major city be destroyed or two, order a counter launch that would kill millions of innocent Russian civilians.’ Reagan looked out the window and said, ‘There must be another way’. The other way, obviously was defense and Reagan said to Anderson that there had to be ‘some way of defending ourselves against nuclear missiles’. In response, Anderson raised the matter of the ABM Treaty, which placed severe limitations on such an endeavor. The two then discussed the possibility that since the 1972 ABM Treaty new technologies could make missile defense more plausible, and therefore, worth pursuing. Reagan agreed that it was an idea worth investigating, and instructed Anderson to get back to him about it. This conversation may have sown the seeds of what would become SDI four years later; in the very least, Reagan’s visit to NORAD gave him something to think about, even if he was as yet still uncommitted to missile defense.

Missile Defense and the 1980 Presidential Campaign

Reagan’s 1980 campaign for President was a tightly scripted affair; a script that included no discussion on missile defense technology. Reagan generally obeyed his manager’s directives to stay ‘on message’, deviating only once to talk about missile defense. Since Reagan had the

image of a ‘trigger happy cowboy’, it was decided that it would be better for Reagan to speak about the general themes of ‘Peace through Strength’ rather than going into the specifics of American nuclear strategy. However, Reagan’s accessibility to reporters during his bus tour through New Hampshire during the primary season meant that Reagan could be questioned in depth regarding nuclear policy. It was then, and only then, that Reagan spoke about his experience at NORAD and the possibility that missile defense technology might be an endeavor worth pursuing.

Aboard Reagan’s campaign bus in March 1980, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Robert Scheer had a rare, unscripted conversation with the candidate on the issue of nuclear missiles, and Reagan held forth his view that a security that rested on the MAD theory was unacceptable and that missile defense perhaps was a better alternative. Scheer asked Reagan how many Soviet missiles would reach the US in the case of a nuclear attack, and Reagan gave a figure of ‘87 to 96 percent’. When asked his source for this figure, Reagan informed his listener of his trip to NORAD, saying: ‘You know, we can track the missiles if they were fired, we can track them all the way from firing to know their time of arrival and their targets, and we couldn’t do anything to stop the missiles.’³¹⁸ Reagan said that he was amazed by these tracking abilities, which included ‘tracking a glove lost by an astronaut that is still circling the earth’, but that he was also struck by ‘the irony that here, with this great technology of ours, we can do all of this yet we cannot stop any of the weapons that are coming at us.’ Turning to the ABM Treaty and the concept of MAD which underpinned it, Reagan said:

They [the Soviets] violated and we kept to the promise that McNamara, in the original getting together [agreed to] and what resulted in doing away with our

³¹⁸ Robert Scheer, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush and Nuclear War* (New York: Random House, 1982), pp.232-34, for all below.

antiballistic missile system, at a time when we were ahead of them in technology on that. The idea was the Mutual Assured Destruction plan—MAD, the MAD policy, it was called—and what this policy said was that if neither country defended its citizenry, then neither country could afford to push the button, because they would know that in an exchange of weapons, both countries' populations would be decimated. And they didn't hold to that...We paid no attention to the fact that the Soviet Union had put a high-ranking general, who was on the Politburo, in a high command, in charge of civil defense. And they had come to the conclusion that there could be a nuclear war and it could be winnable—by them...*One of the first things I would do would be to turn to those who are knowledgeable in military affairs, knowledgeable in the weaponry that would be coming at us, and so forth, to find out what we could do.* Now, it could well be that maybe there is another defense, maybe there is a defense through having superior offensive ability to keep them from doing this. (Emphasis added).

Scheer would later observe that Reagan was 'longing for the ultimate anti-ballistic missile weapon', but nowhere in Reagan's somewhat rambling reply did he ever explicitly state this. Indeed, speaking of possessing 'superior offensive ability' to keep the Soviets from attacking is classic nuclear deterrence, not missile defense. Reagan was clearly cautious. Martin Anderson, on the other hand, was not hesitant at all: missile defense was going to be part of the Republican agenda, whether Reagan was 100% committed or not.

At the Republican National Convention of 1980, missile defense was again placed on the agenda, but it would take a long time for Reagan to pursue the idea with anything more than a passing interest. Anderson had not forgotten his conversation with Reagan following the NORAD visit the year earlier, and he confirmed in an interview with the author that the inclusion of missile defense in the party's platform, while his own work, was based on that conversation with Reagan.³¹⁹ The Republican 'plank' read that the US would pursue a 'vigorous research and development of an effective anti-ballistic missile system, such as is already at hand in the Soviet

³¹⁹ Interview with Author, 30 October 2006 at the Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley.

Union, as well as more modern ABM technologies'. Considering that this was but one sentence in a document of over 34,000 words, the plank passed almost unnoticed by the media. But, Anderson had put a lot of thought into missile defense and he did not want to leave it with a single sentence in the platform: he wished to lay the intellectual foundation for the Reagan team to proceed with a missile defense program as soon as their man became President.

In a 1980 campaign memorandum for Reagan, Anderson advocated a renewed effort to establish an ABM system. The document represents the first written policy paper on such a new missile defense program, and demonstrates that Anderson, again, was the main proponent. He began his memo with a brief history of the ABM programs saying: 'During the early 1970s there was a great debate about whether or not this country should build an anti-ballistic missile system'. The result of that debate was that 'the ABM lost, and is now prohibited'. However, Anderson asked whether 'it is now time to seriously reconsider the concept'. He gave his reasons as follows:

To begin with, such a system concentrates on defense, on making sure that enemy missiles never strike U.S. soil. And that idea is probably fundamentally far more appealing to the American people than the questionable satisfaction of knowing that those who initiated an attack against us were also blown away. Moreover, the installation of an effective protective missile system would also prevent even an accidental missile from landing. Of course, there is the question of feasibility...but there have apparently been striking advances in missile technology during the past decade or so that would make such a system technically possible.

If it could be done, it would be a major step toward redressing the balance of power, and it would be a purely defensive step. Taken in conjunction with a reasonable buildup in our conventional forces, and an acceleration in the development of cruise missiles, laser beam technology, and conventional nuclear missiles like the MX, the development of an effective protective missile system might

*go a long way toward establishing the kind of national security that will be necessary in the 1980s.*³²⁰ (Emphasis added).

Upon receiving this memo from Anderson, Reagan was at first dubious: ‘Can we do it?’ he asked. ‘Is the technology available?’ Reagan also questioned how long it would take to build such a system, and at what cost to the tax payer.³²¹ John Sears, Reagan’s campaign manager, similarly remembers Reagan as being highly skeptical of missile defense at the time. As he relayed to author Francis Fitzgerald:

There were a lot of ideal worlds in Reagan’s mind, and sometimes he lived in them. *But this one he’d argue himself out of quite quickly.* He’d quickly come back to reality...Of course, he was never for deterrence in the sense of two men with pistols pointed at each other’s heads. It was simply his instinct that we should get the edge in all places, and the idea of a missile defense appealed to him along these lines...He thought of it as a piece of military weaponry he was interested in developing.³²²

Still, the ABM proponents did not relent, and continued to lobby Reagan to support their hopes for a missile defense program. Senator Malcolm Wallop, a Republican from Wyoming, who had sent Reagan a draft of his *Strategic Review* article on the benefits of missile defense technology in 1979, followed the matter up with Reagan when the two met at a barbeque hosted by Senator Laxalt of Nevada in 1980. Reagan, ever the gentleman, praised the Senator’s article and promised that if elected, he would investigate the issue. However, this was without the assurance

³²⁰ Policy Memorandum No. 3, ‘Reagan For President’, Los Angeles, Calif., August 1979, courtesy of Martin Anderson and cited by Francis Fitzgerald in *Way Out There In the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), p. 101.

³²¹ Anderson, *Revolution*, p 86.

³²² Fitzgerald, *Way Out There In the Blue*, p.102.

that he would proceed with an ABM program.³²³ Similarly, Daniel O. Graham, a friend of Richard Allen, and former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, briefed Reagan on the findings of the ‘Team B’ and went further than his briefing to propose that Reagan create a space based defense system. Reagan, according to Graham, was ‘very interested’ and ‘started asking questions’. But, Allen was not pleased: for as much as he himself supported ABM technologies he did not want the candidate talking about them.³²⁴ It does not seem as though Allen had to worry: Reagan was not talking about ABM systems anyway, as he only had a passing interest in the matter. It is clear that no-one, not even Anderson, held much sway in influencing Reagan to adopt a posture for missile defense. Accordingly, some have speculated that Reagan’s later zeal for SDI had its origins not in Reagan’s political past, but rather in his former career as a Hollywood actor. It is this notion that is explored next herein.

SDI: A Hollywood Connection?

Reagan’s craft was acting, and his background was Hollywood. For most of Reagan’s working life, his daily routine had revolved around movie sets, costumes, lights, cameras and above all else, learning one’s lines. Reagan’s entrance into politics had only come when his acting career was all but over, and his election as Governor of California came at an age when most men are contemplating retirement. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that his years in Hollywood had a profound and lasting impact on his life and continued to be a reference point when he left ‘Tinsel Town’ for Sacramento, and then Washington. As many people noted, when President

³²³ William J. Broad, *Teller’s War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp.102-3.

³²⁴ Donald R. Baucom, *The Origins of SDI, 1944-1983*(Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992),p.132.

Reagan told stories from his past to make a point, it was inevitably a story from his days as an actor, and rarely from his days as Governor of California. Did Reagan find inspiration for the SDI program not from a military briefing book but rather from a Hollywood script? Some would say yes.

The main advocate of this theory, Michael Rogin, a political scientist at the University of California at Berkeley, proposed in the mid-1980s that President Reagan's background as a Hollywood movie star had had a profound impact on his thinking, and that SDI may have originated from Reagan's love of the cinema.³²⁵

Reagan used lines and images from movies regularly. During the New Hampshire debate in the Presidential campaign of 1980 when the moderator instructed the technician to 'turn Mr. Reagan's microphone off', Reagan shot back, 'I'm paying for this microphone, Mr. Breen!'— words originally spoken by Spencer Tracy who played a Presidential candidate in Frank Capra's 1948 movie *State of the Union*. Later, as President, Reagan started to compare himself to Sylvester Stallone's movie character 'Rambo'³²⁶, and quoted Clint Eastwood's famous line, 'Go ahead: make my day'.³²⁷ But looking at SDI in particular, Rogin began his research into the Hollywood connection by first examining in detail all the movies that Reagan had starred in, for

³²⁵ As cited by Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There In the Blue*, pp.22-23.

³²⁶ Reagan joked at a fundraiser: 'By the way, in a few weeks a new film opens: "Rambo III." You remember, in the first movie Rambo took over a town. In the second, he single-handedly defeated several Communist armies. And now in the third Rambo film, they say he really gets tough. [Laughter] Almost makes me wish I could serve a third term. [Laughter]' 'Remarks at the Annual Republican Congressional Fundraising Dinner May 11th, 1988', *PPPR*.

³²⁷ 'Remarks at a White House Meeting with Members of the American Business Conference April 15th, 1986' *Ibid*. Reagan further said, 'I got that line from Clint Eastwood. Although now that the voters of Carmel, California, elected him mayor, I suppose I should say, Mayor Eastwood. I have to confess that I'm amazed that a Hollywood actor who co-starred with a monkey could ever make it in politics'. *PPPR*.

if Reagan was to be using lines from a script, it made sense that it would be those scripts that he had been compelled to memorize.

While watching Reagan's 1940 movie 'Murder in the Air', a Warner Brothers spy movie in which Reagan played the role of a secret agent who was commissioned to protect the 'Inertia Projector' weapon, Rogin found an uncanny resemblance to SDI's purpose and the language Reagan would later use to describe it. In the film, the 'Inertia Projector' uses supersonic technology to paralyze all enemy aircraft and it is claimed that in doing so it 'not only makes the United States invincible in war, but, in doing so, promises to become the greatest force for world peace ever discovered'. Reagan would later describe SDI in a similar vein, writing: 'If I had to choose the single most important reason, on the United States side, for the historic breakthroughs...in the quest for peace and a better relationship with the Soviet Union, I would say it was the Strategic Defense Initiative...'³²⁸ Rogin also discovered another movie about missile defenses, namely Alfred Hitchcock's 1966 film, *Torn Curtain*, from which Reagan undoubtedly drew material from.

In *Torn Curtain*, Paul Newman's character, 'Professor Michael Armstrong', uses language directly linked to Reagan's 1983 SDI speech. In one scene, 'Armstrong' promises: 'We will produce a defensive weapon that will make all nuclear weapons *obsolete*, and thereby abolish the terror of nuclear warfare'. The term 'obsolete' would make its way into Reagan's 1983 SDI speech when one of the speechwriters re-wrote the main section relating to it, to declare that SDI, if successful, would render nuclear weapons 'impotent and *obsolete*'. The speechwriter? Ronald Reagan. The unconventional source for this term did not go unnoticed in

³²⁸ Reagan *An American Life*, p.548.

the White House, as various Hitchcock fans picked up immediately from where Reagan had lifted it from.

Were Hollywood movies the source for Reagan's thinking about missile defense? The record would suggest not: if Reagan was so enamored with the idea of missile defense because of these movies, then he would have been a strong supporter of ABM systems for decades before becoming President. As this account demonstrates, even in the year of his election to the presidency, Reagan remained uncertain about a missile defense program. However, a strong case can be made that the *language* Reagan later used to describe SDI, found inspiration from his background in Hollywood.

Conclusions

This chapter has established that an American missile defense program did not originate during the Reagan presidency, but rather found its genesis during the Johnson and Nixon Administrations. However, as the historical record testifies, both Johnson and Nixon had no desire to create a national missile defense system, and their programs—*Sentinel* and *Safeguard*—were established as ‘bargaining chips’, so that the US could negotiate away their existence with the USSR. Inherent in this thinking was a reliance on the MAD doctrine for security, and a belief that ABM technologies would spur on an expensive arms race, which would be counterproductive. The Reagan Administration's stated objective of a nationwide missile defense program moving away from MAD, therefore, was a dramatic departure from precedent.

The origins of Reagan's 1983 embrace of defensive technology can be found only in musings on the topic following his 1979 visit to the NORAD facility in Colorado. There, Reagan

saw the reality of America's vulnerability to a ballistic missile strike—a vulnerability that caused him to question whether better technology would make a defensive program more feasible. However, they remained only ruminations, and despite the intensive efforts of Martin Anderson and others to convince Reagan to jump aboard the 'missile defense wagon', he refused to do so. Consequently, the following chapter will investigate how SDI later came to such prominence in the Reagan Administration, and will ask: did the missile defense proponents finally convince Reagan, or did he convince himself?

Chapter 6

THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE

“The Strategic Defense Initiative was not a ‘bargaining chip’ and we were going to stick with it no matter what the Russians wanted.”

-Ronald Reagan³²⁹

The term ‘fanatical’ cannot be applied to Ronald Reagan regarding his pursuit of any part of his domestic or international policies, save one: the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). When it came to SDI, Reagan *was* fanatically attached to the program with a zeal that none could diminish nor take away; not even when the stakes were the highest; not even when Reagan was offered a nuclear-free world in exchange for his ‘dream’ of missile defense.

As the preceding chapter demonstrates, Reagan had no such passion for an ABM program before becoming President, and as this chapter documents, during the first two years of his presidency, he remained uncommitted to the idea. But, by March of 1983 something had changed, and the man who was indifferent to missile defense suddenly became its most ardent advocate. It was at that time when Reagan circumvented the entire system of checks and balances that exists within the executive branch, and announced to the world that missile defense was going to become the centre-piece of his strategy to make nuclear weapons ‘impotent and

³²⁹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 608.

obsolete'. Reagan, who usually allowed decisions to come to him, stunned his advisers by this assertive action and the news caught the international community, and the Soviets in particular, off guard. This chapter determines why Reagan became the most enthusiastic and fervent proponent of missile defense, and will detail how he remained dedicated to the cause for the remainder of his presidency, despite the most heated of exchanges with Mikhail Gorbachev.

Rumblings within the Administration

During the Reagan years, those within the administration felt empowered by the President's passivity to undertake whatever action they felt was best if they had received but the slightest nod of approval from Reagan, and missile defense was no exception. As Reagan aide John Sears related, the President largely gave his subordinates a free hand:

You could do almost anything you wanted and you didn't have to check with anybody. You could do all these amazing things...Reagan wasn't involved...He let everybody—as long as they stayed within a little bit of framework—do anything they wanted...What he was doing in his speeches was stating limits in the form of principles. He didn't like to retreat from those, but in the application of them he was ready for anybody around him to tell him, 'Well, this is an exception.' Or 'This is a little different application.' And he'd say, 'OK, fine!' As long as you stayed within certain limits—and there were limits—he was very malleable, very malleable.³³⁰

Candidate Reagan's musings about his abhorrence for a security that was based on the MAD doctrine led others to conclude that, as President, Reagan would pursue a missile defense program, despite the fact that whenever the topic was raised, Reagan himself would 'shoot down' the idea by questioning its costs and the possibilities of existing technology. However,

³³⁰As quoted in Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There In the Blue*, p. 103.

with a condescension that often treated America's oldest President as a mere *Dauphin* to be handled by his court,³³¹ members of Reagan's Administration engaged in a concerted effort to get missile defense back on the agenda, with the hope of eventually convincing the President to put aside billions of dollars of tax payers' money to fund what was then only considered a 'science fiction fantasy'.

Despite the need to restore existent military power, both conventional and nuclear, and despite the President's own emphasis on implementing first an 'economic stimulus program', within weeks of Reagan's inauguration missile defense enthusiasts within the Administration began putting together what would be the foundations of SDI. It began, as many things did during that period, with Richard Allen.

As the President's National Security Adviser, Richard Allen held the position once occupied and made famous by Henry Kissinger, and before Al Haig as Secretary of State had destroyed his ambitions,³³² Allen was determined to use that position to enact massive changes, just as Kissinger had done a decade before him. Again enlisting General Daniel Graham as his expert in the field, Allen had Graham give a presentation to Chief Counselor to the President, Edwin Meese III on missile defense. Graham, at that time was heading a non-profit missile defense lobby group called 'High Frontier', whose members included the famous nuclear

³³¹ Don Regan, Reagan's Chief of Staff was once asked what the biggest problem in the White House was. He replied: 'Everyone there thought he was smarter than the President'. When asked if this applied to himself, Regan replied: 'Especially me'. As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. xvi.

³³² Al Haig tolerated no incursion into the field of foreign affairs. Furthermore Allen was sidelined by Reagan's 'troika' of Meese, Baker and Deaver. Ultimately, a scandal surrounding the acceptance of money and gifts, helped bring down the embattled NSC advisor, who was forced to resign. As Haig recalled; 'According to the remorseless standards of judgment that apply in such cases, Allen was therefore regarded by his colleagues as irrelevant. In time, I'm sorry to say, I came to regard him in that light too.' As quoted in David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2005),p.224.

scientist Edward Teller³³³ and former undersecretary of the Army Karl Bendetsen. Graham's presentation was a preview of an article he was writing for the 1981 spring issue of *Strategic Review* entitled, 'Toward a New U.S Strategy: Bold Strokes Rather Than Increments'.³³⁴ In that article, Graham spoke of what he hoped for from a Reagan presidency: an end to security based on MAD, and a rejection of the 1970s policy of détente which he labeled a 'graceful accommodation to the power of adversaries'. As the title of the article suggests, Graham also condemned an incremental arms race that would be self defeating (as the Soviets could catch up with relative ease) and called instead for a 'bold' move in the area of space weaponry that would leave the Soviets so far behind, that they would be unable to match American technical superiority any time soon. Graham's overall pitch impressed Meese, even if his example of a spaced based system involving 'space cruisers' in constant orbit awaiting a Soviet missile launch, did not. After the meeting, Meese asked Allen to prepare a memo on space defenses, which Allen did, arguing that Reagan could use the issue to rally the American people behind his leadership with the chant, 'Defense, defense!'.³³⁵ Meese then gave the go ahead to proceed, albeit in an unconventional manner.

Though two of the most powerful men in the White House, the Chief Counsel to the President and the National Security Adviser, both backed missile defense research, they advocated an investigation into its feasibility by experts *outside* of government. As Martin Anderson explains in his book, the usual procedure would have been to place the matter before

³³³ Teller (1908-2003) known as the 'father of the hydrogen bomb' for his involvement in the 'Manhattan Project', remained a vocal supporter of missile defense technology for the remainder of his life. For an excellent biography on the scientist see Peter Goodchild's, *Edward Teller: The Real Dr. Strangelove*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³³⁴ Lieutenant General Daniel O. Graham, 'Toward a New U.S Strategy: Bold Strokes Rather Than Increments,' *Strategic Review*, Spring 1981, pp.-9-16.

³³⁵ Baucom, Donald R, *The Origins Of SDI 1944-1983* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), p. 141.

the Defense Department to study the issue in depth, and they would then make a judgment as to whether or not they wished to re-visit ABM technology nearly a decade after they had shelved it. The chances of the Pentagon coming back with a positive view, however, seemed slim. Consequently, an outside committee funded by private donations had to be used, and which group would be better utilized than the ‘High Frontier’ lobbyists already in existence? Meese helped them out by asking Reagan’s campaign supporters to make additional payments towards this new endeavor and had regular meetings with them throughout 1981 to gauge the progress of their investigations. Meanwhile, as mentioned in Chapter 2, NSDD-12, which came into effect in October 1981, included a small section on developing ‘air and space defenses’—a clear sign that Allen and Meese were hoping that the President would react favorably to the ‘High Frontier’ investigation then under way. By the end of 1981, the commission had canvassed various experts in the field, written a comprehensive report and was prepared for a face to face meeting with the President to sell its proposal.

The meeting was a flop. After weeks of silence from the White House following the tabling of their report in November, Edwin Meese gave into complaints and hastily arranged a fifteen minute audience with the President. Graham and Bendetsen were called on 7 January 1982 and were told to come to the Oval Office the following day—Edward Teller, for some inexplicable reason, was not invited. Armed with a condensed version of their report for Reagan to read (one and a half pages, as instructed) the two came to the Oval Office with high hopes. But their presentation was nothing new: the Soviets, they claimed, were on the verge of a significant advancement of anti-ballistic missile technology, and should the United States not begin its own research and development effort, the Soviets would possess a ‘first strike capability’ that would seriously undermine the strategic balance between the Superpowers. The

defense posture of the United States, they said, should be to move beyond ‘mutual assured destruction’ and towards ‘assured survival’. This could only occur if the President took a momentous step towards this future by taking the course that they promoted: a full blown and intensive government funded project that would give America the ability to defend itself against nuclear attack.

The President was gracious, and listened intently. However, as he had done during the campaign, he raised two roadblocks: existing technological potential and costs. The meeting broke up with Reagan as uncommitted as ever: he promised to consult with Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, thus putting the issue back in the Pentagon where Graham and Bendetsen knew that investing in ABM had already been ruled out.³³⁶ Disappointed, the two left the White House wondering why the conservative Republicans in office were less interested in missile defense than Jimmy Carter had been. It would be over a year later that they would find that their hopes had not been as displaced as they then imagined: Reagan was going to ‘do a 180’ and become the President that they had hoped and envisioned he would be.

1983: SDI Emerges

There are two accounts of just how missile defense was put back on the agenda, and both revolve around a meeting the President had with the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff (JCS). According to Reagan’s account, it was he who, somewhat out of character, presented the military with a proposal and asked them to get to work on it. This is how Reagan recalls the event in his memoirs:

³³⁶ Broad, *Teller’s War*, pp. 114-15.

Early in my first term, I called a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—our military leaders—and said to them: ‘Every offensive weapon ever invented by man has resulted in the creation of a defense against it; isn’t it possible in this age of technology that we could invent a defensive weapon that could intercept nuclear weapons and destroy them as they emerged from their silos?’

They looked at each other, then asked if they could huddle for a few moments. Very shortly, they came out of their huddle and said, ‘Yes, it’s an idea worth exploring’. My answer was, ‘Let’s do it.’ So the SDI was born....³³⁷

Caspar Weinberger, in his memoirs, has a different recollection of how SDI came to be, and again, it surrounds a meeting with the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff. He wrote:

My own feeling is that the issue was finally and completely decided in the President’s mind after a meeting in the Cabinet room that he and I had with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on February 11, 1983. At that meeting we discussed the ABM Treaty, my own basic objections to it, and the vulnerable position in which I thought it had left us. My concerns had only grown as we learned more and more about the Soviet’s unilateral program to develop very comprehensive strategic defenses—ones that threatened increasingly to render our missiles ineffective.

At that meeting of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral James Watkins and General Jack Vessey, the Chairman, both advised the President of the importance in their eyes of our developing a defensive system. Admiral Watkins, Chief of Naval Operations, and now Secretary of Energy, summed it up in a memorable phrase; I knew from the President’s immediate reaction that it would stay in his mind as the ultimate and complete justification for proceeding with such a system.

After discussing the possibilities of our obtaining such a system, Admiral Watkins asked rhetorically, ‘would it not be better if we could develop a system that would protect, rather than avenge, our people?’

‘Exactly,’ said the President. I knew then that the President would want us to work intensively to obtain that system. Admiral Watkin’s phrase had summed up most succinctly and simply the great hopes that the development of such a system would bring.³³⁸ (Emphasis added)

³³⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, pp. 547-548.

³³⁸ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, p. 304.

Weinberger's account has the President *responding* to what Admiral Watkin's said; not the other way round. Watkins, it seems, had met with Edward Teller in early January and had run past the idea of missile defense to the other Chiefs, who had concurred with him to include the matter as one of five options dealing with America's strategic position to present the President with.³³⁹ Reagan's diary account, written the day of the meeting, seems to agree that it was Watkins and not the President who floated the idea at the meeting. He wrote:

An almost 2hr. lunch with Joint Chiefs of Staff. Most of time spent on MX & the commission, etc. *Out of it came a super idea.* So far the only policy worldwide on nuclear weapons is to have a deterrent. What if we tell the world we want to protect our people, not avenge them; that we're going to embark on a program of research to come up with a defensive weapon that could make nuclear weapons obsolete? I would call upon the scientific community to volunteer in bringing such a thing about.³⁴⁰ (Emphasis added).

'Out of it came a super-idea', Reagan wrote, not 'they responded to my idea'. Did Reagan's gift of storytelling prompt him to exaggerate his role in the formulation of SDI so as to make himself the main protagonist, the 'leading man' of the drama? Perhaps not. According to Anneleise Anderson, a former member of the Reagan Administration who has co-written a biography on the President, both accounts are correct: Reagan raised the idea with the Joint-Chiefs- of Staff who several months later came back to him agreeing that it was time to look anew at missile defense technology. According to Anderson, Edwin Meese confirmed this as he was present at

³³⁹ Baucom, *Origins*, p.190.

³⁴⁰ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p 130.

both meetings.³⁴¹ Furthermore, Shultz mentions this version of events in his memoirs, (though his account is vague).³⁴² Also, the day following the announcement of SDI, Reagan said:

I've been having this idea, and it's been kicking around in my mind for some time here recently. And constantly I have thought about the fact that the nuclear missile seems to be one of the only major weapon systems in history that has never produced or brought about a defense against itself. *And I brought this up one day in a meeting [at] which the Chiefs of Staff were present and others, and we talked about it and discussed it and then discussed it some more.*³⁴³ (Emphasis added).

If one ascribes to the theory that the earliest account is generally the most authentic, then these remarks would seem to confirm that Reagan did originally raise the matter with the JCS. Furthermore, in a 1986 letter to his friend Laurence Beilenson, Reagan again gave his version of events, describing how the JCS responded to his idea to 'devise a weapon that could destroy missiles as they came out of their silos'.³⁴⁴ Whatever the case, Reagan took the idea and ran with it. As soon as the military brass gave him the 'thumbs up', he wanted to announce the idea to the world at the earliest possible opportunity. And he did just that.

³⁴¹ Interview with Author, 4 October 2007, Hoover Institute, Stanford University, California.

³⁴² Shultz merely says, "In December 1982, at one of the president's periodic meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he had asked them whether they thought a system of strategic defense was feasible. After a few days' consideration, their answer was that with today's technology, there was genuine promise". *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 263. Even this vague account contradicts Reagan's, which states that the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff gave him an immediate response.

³⁴³ 'Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues', 25 March 1983; *RPL*.

³⁴⁴ Reagan, *A Life in Letters*, p.429.

The SDI speech: Reagan's Role

Reagan deserves full credit for making missile defense the major issue it became during the 1980s, because it was he and no other member of the Administration that made the idea operational policy. It was Reagan's Hollywood skills that moved the spotlight onto an issue that had until then been a rather esoteric matter. Reagan raced ahead, and used the powers of the presidency to force everyone else to catch up with him. The reality is that Reagan had taken what was something of an offhand optional musing and turned it into a 'revolution in strategic affairs' as Shultz termed it at the time.³⁴⁵

The Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff had not intended for Reagan to seize so quickly on missile defense following their presentation, and what followed shocked them. It seems that missile defense was raised in a rather hypothetical fashion, and that Reagan had misinterpreted their interest as a green light to move ahead with a Presidential initiative. According to later interviews with participants Admiral Watkins, General Vessey and General E. C Meyer, they were taken by surprise by the subsequent actions of the President, as they had had no intention of presenting an overhaul of America's nuclear strategy. General Vessey recalled: 'There was no program definition. It was the idea that defenses might enter into the equation more than in the past'. That mere suggestion took on 'a life of its own', and as General Meyer later observed, there had been no study into how missile defense would be achieved: 'I don't think any of us had a clear vision of what form this strategic defense would take. The issue needed to be debated at the very highest level by people concerned with policy and people concerned with technology'.³⁴⁶ But there would be no debate about the merits of the issue: the idea had been

³⁴⁵ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 250.

³⁴⁶ Hedrick Smith, *Power Game: How Washington Works*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), pp. 609-10.

firmly planted in the President's mind and try as many would, it could never be dislodged. Reagan had been elected President—everyone else had merely been appointed and could be fired by him at will. Therefore, when the President told his staff to prepare the world for his announcement on missile defense, they did as they were told. Reagan was excited about the idea, and wanted to speak out about it as soon as possible. And speak out he did.

The lead up to the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) speech was something of a singular example of Reagan acting in a very Nixonian fashion: defense and foreign policy were the domain of the President, and Reagan's orders would be executed secretly and exactly as he instructed. Reagan was 'in the driver seat', and just as Nixon had employed his NSC adviser Kissinger to conduct clandestine negotiations with the Chinese leading up to the China initiative (leaving Secretary of State Rogers in the dark),³⁴⁷ so too Reagan used his NSC adviser Bud McFarlane to secretly prepare an announcement of his missile defense initiative (also leaving his Secretary of State, George Shultz, in the dark). This was out of character. As Martin Anderson said of Reagan's usual management style: 'He makes no demands and gives no instructions...He made decisions like an ancient king...He just sat back in a supremely calm manner and waited until important things were brought to him. And then he would act, quickly, decisively, and usually, very wisely'.³⁴⁸ This time, however, Reagan was making demands and giving instructions, and he was in no mood to wait.

Following the assessment by the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff that ABM technology was an option worth investigating, Reagan instructed McFarlane to start drafting an insert into an

³⁴⁷ For the best account of Nixon and Kissinger's elaborate efforts to keep Rogers in the dark, see Margaret MacMillan's *Seize the Hour: When Nixon Met Mao* (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 2006).

³⁴⁸ As quoted in Richard Reeves, *Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2005), p. 61.

upcoming defense speech that would include the announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative. McFarlane balked. Suddenly realizing that the President was deadly serious, he began to make objections and advocated putting the proposal through various hoops: like getting Brent Scowcroft's Commission on MX basing to liaise with Congress on the matter, or sending it through the usual bureaucratic processes of the State and Defense Departments. Reagan knew that any such action would stall SDI for many more years; vetoing the suggestion, he ordered the draft done ASAP. Obeying the Presidential directive, McFarlane commenced the drafting, leaving the two men most responsible for its ramifications—Shultz and Weinberger—out of the loop. They were in for a shock.

President Reagan proceeded with his SDI speech leaving America's allies out of the picture, and his Secretaries of State and Defense in the dark. George Shultz had dined with President Reagan on the evening of 12 February 1983 and listened as the President discussed his abhorrence for the MAD doctrine and his desire to one day protect America from nuclear missiles with the eventual goal of achieving total nuclear abolition. Shultz, according to his own account of the dinner, did not reply to the President's ideas; rather, he records thinking of the 'huge, perhaps insuperable problems' that a missile defense system would present.³⁴⁹ Reagan knew how to read his audience, and Shultz's concern must have registered on his face, because Reagan then decided not to include his own Secretary of State in the drafting of the address announcing SDI. Shultz only found out about the speech on 21 March—two days before Reagan was set to deliver it. And when he did find out about it—not from Reagan but from NSC staffer Larry Eagleburger—he 'blew his top'. 'We don't have the technology to do this!' he thundered. To Bill Clark he questioned the assessment of the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff, saying: 'They are in no

³⁴⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p.246.

position to make what amounts to a scientific judgment!’ Shultz was also worried about the effect on the Western Alliance and their lack of inclusion in what he termed a complete change of the ‘whole strategic view and doctrine of the United States’. ‘This is so sweeping that it must be carefully considered’ he said. ‘It could hit the allies right between the eyes. This is the year when we especially need a cohesive alliance in our negotiations.’³⁵⁰ It would be Secretary of Defense Weinberger, who was in the unenviable position of informing the allies what was in store for them.

Unfortunately for Weinberger, he was actually at a NATO conference accompanied with Richard Perle when he received word of the impending speech less than 24 hours before its delivery. Again, he received the news not from the President, but from one of his ‘friends’ from the White House who gave him a ‘hurried and surreptitious call’.³⁵¹ To say that Shultz and Weinberger were ‘blindsided’ by the President is an understatement.³⁵² When Perle was asked by the author about this incident and the belief that Reagan had acted this way to prevent SDI from being ‘killed’ by the interagency process, he replied:

Well, he was probably right about that I was probably wrong. Although I still think that we could have... Weinberger could have been authorized, but wasn’t, to say ‘The President is going to announce...’ Now if he’d said that much in advance it would have leaked out of the NATO ministers meeting and it wouldn’t have been a good thing. We should have timed it for simultaneous release. That is Weinberger should have said, ‘In a few minutes the President is going to give a speech in which he is going to say the following...’³⁵³

³⁵⁰ Ibid.pp. 249-250.

³⁵¹ Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, p. 306.

³⁵² Vice President Bush was also left out of the loop. His chief of staff, Admiral Daniel Murphy said to Bush upon seeing a draft of the speech: ‘We’ve got to take this out! If we go off half-cocked on this idea, we’re going to bring on the biggest arms race that the world has ever seen!’ Bush agreed, but did nothing; see Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 143.

³⁵³ See Appendix C.

Weinberger managed to contact a few NATO defense ministers before the speech, but not enough: they were left as angry about the snub as he was. But Reagan did not want anyone scuttling his speech, and his ‘hands on’ role extended to editing the draft himself.

President Reagan’s re-write of the Defense speech from techno-speak to flowing language reflected the true genius of the ‘great communicator’ and demonstrated that he wanted total message control. Various drafts of the speech, which dealt with matters of defense, made its way to his desk, and as he noted in his diary, he had to ‘do a lot of re-writing’ to ‘change bureaucratese into people talk’.³⁵⁴ For example, the section dealing with the nuclear freeze movement had somewhat bluntly stated that their goal would make America ‘less, not more secure’. Reagan crossed it out and substituted it with the more thoughtful: ‘I know that all of you want peace, and so do I. I know too that many of you seriously believe that a nuclear freeze would further the cause of peace. But a freeze now would make us less, not more, secure....’ Reagan also crossed out an entire paragraph and substituted it with his thoughts on war:

Now this is not to say that the Soviet Union is planning to make war on us. Nor do I believe a war is inevitable—quite the contrary. But what must be recognized is that our security is based on being prepared to meet any contingency... We can’t afford to believe we will never be threatened. There have been two world wars in my life time. We didn’t start them and indeed did everything we could to avoid being drawn into them. We were ill-prepared for both....³⁵⁵

Reagan made several other corrections and re-writes that significantly lifted the standard of the speech and gave it its most memorable phrases. For example, a sentence dealing with the need

³⁵⁴ Reagan, entry for 22 March 1983, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 139.

³⁵⁵ ‘Presidential Handwriting File’, Box 9, Folder 155-156: *RPL*.

for nuclear arms reduction had originally said, ‘We simply must succeed in this endeavor’. Reagan crossed this out and wrote instead, ‘We are engaged *right now* in negotiations with the Soviet Union to bring a mutual reduction of all weapons’; an addition which demonstrated that America was already taking steps to achieve this outcome. Clumsy sentences like: ‘In short, how much better it would be if we could begin to shift from a strategy of deterrence with offensive weapons to a strategy of forward defense’ were excised entirely from the speech as was the hindering sentence: ‘Let me emphasize again, such defense is no near term panacea’. Similarly: ‘It will take years, indeed decades of efforts’ was replaced with: ‘It *may* take years, *even* decades...’.³⁵⁶ But the most important part of the speech that Reagan re-wrote dealt with SDI itself.

Reagan’s re-write of the key section of the speech that dealt with the announcement of SDI demonstrates that the speech was truly Reagan’s. He took what was uninspiring, and made it work. The original had read: ‘I call upon the Nation, our men and women in uniform, our scientists and engineers, our entrepreneurs and industrial leaders, and all our citizens—to join with me in taking a bold new step forward in defense to ensure a more peaceful and stable world of the future’. This was replaced with the masterful: ‘I call upon the scientific community, who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents to the cause of mankind and world peace; to give us the means of rendering these weapons, *impotent and obsolete*’.³⁵⁷

As Kissinger later noted in *Diplomacy*, the words, ‘impotent and obsolete, must have had a chilling ring in the Kremlin’.³⁵⁸ Why? Because the USSR was a Superpower because of its

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid

³⁵⁸ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 778.

nuclear stockpile, and if these weapons were made redundant, they would cease to be much more than a failed—morally and financially—bankrupt state. In short, they would *cease to be a Superpower*.

As technical infeasibility would continue to demonstrate, SDI's potency was the idea of what it could be, not what it was.³⁵⁹ SDI was a psychological lever for diplomacy with the Soviets, and it was with words that Reagan wielded his sword. And with the SDI speech, the most cutting words came from Reagan himself. For this he deserves most of the credit, as he does for the tenacity with which he continued to hold onto his beloved program, for the remainder of his presidency.

Ignoring the Critics

As stated above, Reagan was a stubborn man with firmly held convictions, and once he was convinced about something, he rarely, if ever, changed his mind.³⁶⁰ Reagan's grip on SDI was the greatest example of this personality trait, and he would not let go of it, no matter the criticisms or the incentives. The criticisms came first.

Reagan's SDI speech registered like a nuclear bombshell in the USSR, and they minced no words in their denunciation of it. Condemnations came first through the various state sponsored mouthpieces. *Tass*, the government office of communication, was quoted as saying that SDI was: 'a new attempt by the United States to achieve superiority in strategic arms over

³⁵⁹ According to Daryl G. Kimball, American missile defense as it stood in 2007 could only provide a rudimentary defense against a very limited ballistic missile attack. See 'Of Missiles and Missile Defenses', *Arms Control Today*, (Washington: Oct. 2007), Vol.37, Iss.8, p.3.

³⁶⁰ Observation of Martin Anderson; interview with author, 30 October 2006.

the Soviet Union and to upset the existing rough balance of power'. The Government newspaper *Izvestia* said, the 'destabilizing idea' of accelerating research on new defenses against missiles was slipped in 'just before the curtain'. Furthermore, it reported: 'The speech thus underscored that the White House has no desire of retreating from its unrealistic positions' and 'this stubborn unwillingness to get out of the rut of the Cold War increasingly transforms Washington into a dangerous breeding ground for thermonuclear confrontation.'³⁶¹ But these sharp words were nothing compared to what the Soviet leader Yuri Andropov had to say on the matter. As the *Washington Post* quoted him saying:

My answer will be short and forthright: The incumbent US administration continues *to tread an extremely perilous* path. The issues of war and peace must not be treated so flippantly. All attempts at ...military superiority over the Soviet Union are futile. The Soviet Union will never allow them to succeed. It will never be caught defenseless by any threat. Let there be no mistake about it in Washington. It is time that they stopped devising one option after another in the search of the best ways of unleashing nuclear war in the hope of winning it. Engaging in this is not just irresponsible, *it's insane...Washington's actions are putting in jeopardy the entire world.*³⁶² (Emphasis added).

Such protests had little to no effect on Reagan, who said: 'I didn't expect them to cheer'.³⁶³ Also not affecting Reagan was the torrent of criticism that swept in from the Democrats in Congress, and the media, most of whom agreed with the *New York Times* that labeled it a 'pipe dream'.³⁶⁴ Opinion polls however, showed that the vast majority of Americans were solidly behind the

³⁶¹ Serge Schemann, 'Soviet Sees a Treaty Violation in Arms Proposal by Reagan', *New York Times*, 24 March 1983, A9.

³⁶² 'Andropov Accuses Reagan of Lying About Soviet Arms' *Washington Post*, 26 March 1983.

³⁶³ As reported by NBC correspondent, Chris Wallace; White House News Summary, 25 March 1983; *RPL*.

³⁶⁴ The *New York Times*, 27 March 1983.

President,³⁶⁵ as were most of Reagan's conservative base. A simple letter to the President reflected this:

Dear Mr. President,

That was the best statement I have ever heard from any President.

With respect and best wishes,

*Barry Goldwater.*³⁶⁶

Reagan, it seemed, had hit his mark, and had devised a policy that seemed to be the 'answer to all his prayers'. SDI would solve the issues surrounding MX basing, would pull the rug out from under the nuclear freeze critics,³⁶⁷ and would consolidate support from his conservative base. It was an initiative that Reagan was most proud of, and one that he was not about to budge from, as demonstrated by his performance during the subsequent Superpower summits held in Geneva and Reykjavik.

The Geneva Summit: Reagan Holds His Ground on SDI

It seems that with the announcement of SDI the Soviet and American arms negotiators had two very different objectives. For the Soviets, it was to get rid of SDI at all costs. For the Americans,

³⁶⁵ The majority of those polled were surprised to discover that there was absolutely no defense: they had always just presumed that there was. See Paul Lettow's, *Ronald Reagan And His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, p. 113.

³⁶⁶ WHORM Subject File, SP731-SP774 #133768, RPL.

³⁶⁷ As Bryan C. Taylor argues about Reagan's SDI speech, '...this rhetoric effectively neutralized Freeze rhetoric because it appropriated the movement's concern with the morality of the arms race and appeared to share its commitment to ending that frustrating and frightening condition'. See 'The Means to Match Their Hatred: Nuclear Weapons, Rhetorical Democracy and Presidential Discourse', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: December, 2007). Vol. 37, Iss. 4, p.667.

it was to use SDI as a lever, a bargaining chip that could get the Soviets to make as many concessions as possible. It appears that the Americans had more success than the Soviets in their strategy: arms reduction talks, halted after the November 1983 INF deployment, resumed in early 1985 and without the earlier preconditions set by the Soviets—namely that SDI research and INF deployments cease. But the Soviets thought that they might have a better chance to convince Reagan to do away with SDI when the first Superpower summit held between Reagan and a Soviet leader occurred in Geneva in November 1985. After all, the brilliant Mikhail Gorbachev would be the man up against Reagan, and as widely expected, he would ‘run circles’ around the ageing ex-actor President. Unfortunately for the Soviets, they had badly misjudged America’s President.

Superpower summits were always an opportunity for each leader to meet with their counterpart on the opposite side of the ideological divide, discuss matters of bi-lateral importance and test their opponent’s mettle: to see what they really believed. Many times it was a game, where each leader spoke cryptically and wore many masks. But in the case of the Reagan/Gorbachev dialogue, each man spoke their mind freely, and there could have been no doubt where each stood on SDI or the fact that Reagan would never, under any circumstances, give up his research program.

As the transcripts from the Summit demonstrate, SDI dominated the conversation from the first plenary session onwards. Tuesday, 19 November 1985 was a gray, cold and gloomy day in Geneva, but nothing could have dampened the enthusiastic debate that began between Reagan and Gorbachev on the subject of missile defense technology. Gorbachev’s initial presentation had avoided specific topics, and focused instead on the broad issue of improving bi-lateral

relations. Reagan, however, began the dialogue on SDI and made his position very clear. As the ‘Memcons’ read:

The President continued that today he wanted to talk about one specific question. Gorbachev had said that the United States had indicated an interest in achieving a first strike capability by having an anti-missile shield which would destroy missiles before they hit the target.³⁶⁸ The United States did not know whether this would be possible. The United States had a research program. The Soviet Union had the same kind of program. The United States has some hope that it might be possible. If both sides continue their research and if one or both come up with such a system then they should sit down and make it available to everyone so no one would have a fear of a nuclear strike. A mad man might come along with a nuclear weapon. If we could come up with a shield and share it, then nobody would worry about the mad man. He didn’t even want to call this a weapon; it was a defensive system.³⁶⁹

Gorbachev’s response to Reagan’s presentation was to ask whether he should be given an opportunity to respond now, or stick to the schedule. Reagan, a man devoted to punctuality, replied that as it was lunchtime, they should stick to the timetable, but promised that Gorbachev would have the floor when they re-adjourned. When they did, Gorbachev spoke of his absolute distaste for SDI. As the ‘Memcons’ record, Gorbachev said:

[We] Soviets think SDI can lead to an arms race in space, and not just a defensive arms race but an offensive arms race with space weapons. Scientists say any shield can be pierced, so SDI cannot save us. So why create it? It only makes sense if it is to defend against a retaliatory strike. What would the West think if the Soviet Union was developing these weapons? You would react with horror.

³⁶⁸ That America could achieve a first strike capability with SDI was the primary reason for Soviet opposition to the project—above and beyond the financial costs that creating their own missile defense program would entail. Gromyko had said to Shultz: ‘SDI is not defensive. If you develop a shield against ICBM’s, you could launch a first strike.’ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 238.

³⁶⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, November 19, 1985, Plenary Session 11:27am-12:15pm. p. 4. *RPL*.

Gorbachev then said that the USSR's missile defense program was done for 'peaceful purposes' while the US had 'military aims'. How this distinction was made, Gorbachev did not elaborate. But he did threaten two things if the US continued with SDI: one, no reduction of any weapons; and, two, a 'response'. The promised 'response', was not made clear, but was most likely a threat to deploy more Soviet nuclear missiles to counter an ABM system. With all this talk of future systems of defense, and counter measures, Gorbachev painted an apocalyptic picture of a world doomed by computer technology:

It will require automatization which will place important decisions in the hands of computers and political leaders will just be in bunkers with computers making the decisions. This could unleash an uncontrollable process. You haven't thought this through; it will be a waste of money, and also will cause more distrust and more weapons.³⁷⁰

Reagan followed by slamming Soviet foreign adventurism in Third World conflicts, and by giving a convoluted 'Chinese fable' about fighting with 'spears and shields' which he likened to SDI. Gorbachev replied that 'weapons' floating in space, be they shields or spears, were military.³⁷¹ Reaching an impasse at this point, Reagan invited Gorbachev to join him one-on-one at the pool house for a private discussion. Here, too, the conversation was centered on SDI.

The 'Fireside Chat' that Reagan would later paint as an important turning point in the thawing of the Cold War, was in fact marked by something of a terse exchange over SDI. Seated before a roaring fire, Reagan handed Gorbachev a Russian version of the US arms proposal on eliminating INF weapons in Europe and a 50% reduction of their nuclear arsenals, to be applied globally. Gorbachev read the papers over for a few minutes, and then began raising his

³⁷⁰ Second Plenary Session, *Ibid.*, p.3.

³⁷¹ Edmund Morris, *Dutch*, p.566.

objections. Not surprisingly, they centered on SDI. Why, Gorbachev asked, was there no mention of the January 1985 agreement, which placed arms reduction talks side-by-side with a discussion about ‘halting an arms race in space’? Where had the ‘interrelationship’ gone? Gorbachev noted that ‘here it seems to have evaporated’.³⁷² Reagan again repeated his mantra that he ‘did not see these defensive weapons as constituting a part of the arms race’ as ‘they would be shared with everyone involved in nuclear weapons’.³⁷³ Gorbachev was not convinced: if Reagan did not believe him when he promised that the Soviet Union would never be the first to launch a nuclear attack on the US, then why should he believe Reagan’s promise to share SDI technology? Reagan respectfully pointed out that neither Gorbachev nor he would forever be leaders of their countries, and therefore could not make those types of guarantees. Emphatically, Gorbachev asked: ‘If the goal was to get rid of nuclear weapons, why start an arms race in another sphere’?³⁷⁴ As the ‘Memcons’ record, Reagan gave quite a convincing reply:

The President asked Gorbachev to remember that these were not weapons that kill people or destroy cities, these were weapons that destroy nuclear missiles. If there were agreement that there would be no need for nuclear missiles, then one might agree that there would also be no need for defenses against them. But he would also urge Gorbachev to remember that we were talking about something that was not yet known, and that if it were known, that would still be years away. Why then should we sit here in the meanwhile with mountains of weapons on each side?³⁷⁵

Unfortunately for Reagan, it seemed that he was talking to a man as obstinate as himself; Gorbachev replied that they should: ‘announce to the world that President Reagan and General

³⁷² Memcons Reagan-Gorbachev Afternoon Tete-ate, November 19, 1985, 3:40pm-4:45pm , Ibid., p. 2.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid p. 4

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

Secretary Gorbachev had declared firmly in official statements that both countries would refrain from research, development, testing and deployment of space weapons and that such agreement would be subject to appropriate verification'.³⁷⁶ Reagan pointed out that: 'in this city of Geneva all of the countries that had participated in World War I had met and had reached agreement not to use poison gas warfare. Nevertheless, all had kept their gas masks'. Gas masks were the insurance in case nations reneged on their agreement, and SDI was an insurance policy against future use of nuclear weapons. Gorbachev stated that on a human level he understood how SDI could have: 'captivated the President's imagination', but he had to be realistic—since any defense shield could be overcome by bombarding it with more missiles, SDI could only work with a first strike. That is, the US would strike the USSR, taking out most of its silos, and the few Soviets missiles left to be launched would be stopped by the 'shield' of missile defense. At this stage, Reagan decided to break up the meeting, but not before adding that 'people overwhelmingly wanted this defense'.³⁷⁷

SDI, obviously, was not to be decided at the Geneva Summit. Furthermore, the Soviets were surprised by the Reagan that they had encountered and concluded that there were, in fact, 'two Reagans'. A Soviet foreign policy advisor present for the Summit said:

[Reagan] was inattentive when the subject didn't interest him. He let it go. But as soon as Shevardnadze or Gorbachev touched some point of interest to the President he immediately came out with an extremely good, spontaneous delivery. He would deliver a good piece, strong on conviction, strong on facts, emotionally charged. He was another guy immediately.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.4.

³⁷⁷ Ibid. ,p.6.

³⁷⁸ Said by Sergei Tarasenko, assistant to Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze; as quoted in Adriana Bosch's, *Reagan: An American Story*, (New York: TV Books, 2000),p.264.

Despite Reagan's emphatic defense of SDI, Gorbachev did not think that the matter was finished. In Reykjavik he would try his hand again, and put everything on the table in the hope that Reagan would fold on missile defense.

The Reykjavik Summit: the Showdown on SDI

The Reykjavik Summit, held in October 1986, represented a final, last ditch attempt by the Soviet Union to halt an arms race in the field of anti-ballistic missile systems, and it all hinged on Reagan's acceptance of their generous arms reduction offer in exchange for SDI. Reagan did not budge. His rejection was not so much a belief in extant technology—SDI was then and now largely non-operative—but rather because his vision of a non-nuclear world was poles apart from Gorbachev's.

This section of the thesis will not seek to examine in detail the arms reduction proposals detailed in Chapter 8, but will merely look at Reykjavik to demonstrate that the continuance of SDI as an American defense objective was truly the result of Reagan's personal attachment to the policy.

As can be seen from the transcripts of the Geneva Summit, Mikhail Gorbachev's overall aim in US/Soviet arms negotiations was to bring a complete halt to anti-ballistic missile research. Already at Geneva he called for an agreement that would limit ABM research to the laboratory. Reagan was non-committal, and called for discussions to continue on nuclear arms reduction and missile defense simultaneously, but separately. Reagan never had any intention of doing away with his now beloved SDI, and hoped that Gorbachev was not serious when he threatened to terminate any arms reduction treaty if SDI continued. The general theme of Geneva that each

side sought to project was one of dialogue and renewed hopes for peace; it was not the setting for a showdown on SDI. Reykjavik, however, was the place and Gorbachev planned the showdown of all showdowns.

Summits between the Superpowers were traditionally scripted long in advance by bureaucrats, who set the agenda, wrote the talking points, and largely completed the final communiqué, without the leaders having had much say at all. Reagan, despite his background in the movie industry where he was merely handed a script and read without objection, was completely against this process. It was he who reformed the schedule at Geneva to make the meeting as much as possible a spontaneous interaction between himself and the General Secretary, with a blanket ban on press briefings until proceedings were completed.³⁷⁹ It was a format that appealed greatly to Gorbachev, who despite lacking the executive authority of Reagan (he served at the pleasure of the Politburo, who expected full involvement) embraced it. The Geneva summit had been a success: Gorbachev had seen that Reagan, like himself, was a man who wanted action. Also, they had had frank discussions and had not held back. Gorbachev had agreed with Reagan's observation that they would be able to achieve what those below them could not, and it was in this spirit that he called Reagan to the snap summit held in Reykjavik in the winter of 1986. Reagan, who had been frustrated by the failure of arms negotiators to make any headway since the last time he sat down with Gorbachev, welcomed a return to summitry, and despite the short notice, he was ready. Depending on one's point of view, what followed was either Reagan's finest hour, or his biggest life failure.

³⁷⁹ The ban on press briefings was aimed at stopping the summits from being media circuses, with each side trying to score points before the world's press. Freed from the 'spin cycle', the leaders could get down to business.

Meeting in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik in a small room overlooking the sea, Gorbachev laid down a set of proposals that were astonishing in their breadth, but all of which depended on an American renunciation of SDI. 11 October 1986 was the big day, and negotiations began a little after 10:30 in the morning. Firstly, Gorbachev agreed to the 50% reduction of strategic weapons, as spoken about in Geneva. Secondly, on the question of INF, Gorbachev agreed to complete European elimination with the concession that the question of French and British arsenals would be dropped. The issue of Asian INF weapons could be debated separately. On SDI, Gorbachev called for a strict adherence to the ABM Treaty for ten years, limiting any research to the laboratory. Shultz could not believe his ears: these were major concessions to the American position; much more than he had ever dreamed was possible. Reagan was less impressed. 'The point is that SDI should make the elimination of nuclear weapons possible' he said.³⁸⁰ With Reagan unmoved, it fell to Gorbachev to sweeten the deal; to put all his cards on the table in the hopes that Reagan would fold. What occurred the next day was, undoubtedly, a moment in Cold War negotiation history when the stakes could not have been higher: Reagan's resolve would be tested.

Reagan's absolute devotion to SDI was demonstrated as never before when he turned down his cherished dream of total nuclear abolition in order to keep the missile defense program alive. It was a heartbreaking, maddening moment for the man who had worked more than any other for a world without nuclear weapons, but it was something that Reagan felt he could not be swayed on. Following the proposals tabled the day earlier, the negotiating teams from each side had stayed up all night seeking to bring the two sides together. They had made much progress, but not enough, and Reagan and Gorbachev were disappointed. Nonetheless, they both met again

³⁸⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, October 11, 1986, 10:40am-12:30 pm, p. 7.

on the morning of 12 October and began once more. They were both in for the ‘ride of their lives’.

First off, the floor belonged to Reagan, and in addition to stating the American position on INF and START, he laid out where the US stood on SDI. In Reagan’s view, there were three matters that needed consideration. Firstly, how would they ‘synchronize’ SDI and the elimination of ballistic missiles? Secondly, what were the ‘conditions and time frame’ for an increased reliance on ‘strategic defenses’? And finally, what to do with the ABM treaty until the first two objectives—the abolishment of ballistic missiles and the deployment of missile defense—were achieved?³⁸¹

Gorbachev replied that in preparing the Soviet position, he had ‘taken into account the President’s attachment to the SDI program’.³⁸² Furthermore, the 10 year confinement of research to the laboratory was ‘not a strict limitation on SDI’, in fact it would ‘pose neither political, practical nor technical impediments to the President’s program’.³⁸³ The ten year limitation was necessary to bring about the reductions discussed earlier: without the limitation, there could be no reduction. With this Reagan began to lose his cool.

Raising his voice in anger, President Reagan began attacking Gorbachev’s attachment to the ABM Treaty, an attachment he considered ludicrous. Exposing for perhaps the first time his utter disdain for the ABM Treaty and the theory of MAD which underpinned it, Reagan asked why any limitations on SDI research were required. As the ‘Memcons’ record, Reagan’s language was argumentative:

³⁸¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Sunday, October 12 1986, 10:00am-1:35pm, p. 3.

³⁸² Ibid., p. 8.

³⁸³ Ibid., p. 9.

Why the hell should the world have to live for another ten years under the threat of nuclear weapons if we have decided to eliminate them? The President failed to see the magic of the ABM regime, whose only assurance of safety was the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction. It would be better to eliminate missiles so that our populations can sleep in peace. At the same time, the two leaders could give the world a means of protection that would put the nuclear genie back in his bottle. The next generation would reap the benefits when the President and General Secretary were no longer around.³⁸⁴

Gorbachev commented that it was 'clear' that Reagan would 'not give up SDI' and that is why he had sought to 'accommodate it'.³⁸⁵ The ten year adherence to the ABM treaty was necessary, and Gorbachev added, 'the Soviets had proposed a package, and that individual elements of their proposals must be regarded as a package'.³⁸⁶ Reagan said that it need not be this way, and Gorbachev responded by saying that the 'connection had been disrupted'. Reagan asked whether they had to depart 'with nothing'. Gorbachev said that if acceptance of the package could not be made, then 'that was the case',³⁸⁷ and moved the discussion to humanitarian concerns, and other loose-end topics. Then, for no apparent reason, the two sides agreed to a break and a final meeting. It would be the most dramatic moment in US/Soviet diplomatic relations since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The two sides came back from their break at 3pm and compared the different proposals on nuclear reduction and SDI, finding that their differences were profound. The American position held to Weinberger's plan of abolishing all ballistic missiles within a ten year period: the first half in the first five years, and the second half in the remaining. During this period, the

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. p.16.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

US was free to test SDI in accordance with the ABM Treaty. After the ten year period, they were free to deploy. The Soviet proposal incorporated the ten year period that the Americans sought, and instead of ballistic missiles it spoke of the abolition of all 'strategic nuclear missiles'. During this ten year period, SDI research was to be confined to the laboratory, and after the ten year period talks would begin about what to do next. For America it might be to proceed with SDI, while for the USSR other options might be pursued. Upon hearing this Reagan said that it seemed that they were very 'close' to an agreement. But the two were not. Secretary Shultz interjected that Gorbachev was talking about all nuclear weapons, while the US was only talking about ballistic missiles. There was also some confusion as to what would happen to the ABM Treaty after the ten year period. After more back and forth between Reagan and Gorbachev it was agreed that there be another break, and this one, lasting an hour between 4:30pm and 5:30pm saw Reagan's team agree that the limitation of SDI to the lab was unacceptable.

Meeting with his advisers in the 'bubble', so as to avoid electronic surveillance, Reagan asked everyone around him for their view on the ten year limitation to the lab. Shultz said that it should be accepted, with the details worked out later. Richard Perle, who was present as an adviser, did not think it could work, and said so. According to author Jay Winik, Reagan was hoping that Perle's support would have given him political cover with the conservatives. In an interview with the author, Perle rejected this assessment of Reagan's question:

He wasn't, at that moment, he certainly wasn't thinking about that. He was thinking about whether SDI could continue. He believed in SDI. He believed that a defense against ballistic missiles was the practical and moral way to maintain stable deterrence.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁸ See Appendix C.

Reagan had made up his mind: Gorbachev's position was unacceptable. He went into the final meeting and hoped that one last ditch attempt could convince Gorbachev to back down.

Reagan presented his proposal; Gorbachev noted that 'laboratory' had been left out. Was this on purpose he asked? Reagan replied that yes, it 'had been left out on purpose'. Turning to the text's differentiation between 'ballistic' and 'strategic' weaponry, Reagan agreed with Gorbachev that all types of nuclear weapons in the triad of air, land and sea, could be covered. Reagan was then explicit saying that it 'would be fine with him if we eliminated all nuclear weapons'. Gorbachev replied 'we can do that. We can eliminate them'. Reagan replied: 'Let's do it'.³⁸⁹

Gorbachev was then insistent: SDI had to be confined to the lab. Reagan was beginning to get very angry. The 'Memcons' record Reagan's feelings at this time and quote him saying:

We had come a long way, and what the hell difference did it make. Ten years down the road some country might come along with a madman who wanted to build nuclear weapons again. The President said they could be proud of what they had done. We may not build SDI in the end; it might be too expensive, for instance. But he had promised the American people he would not give up SDI. The Soviets now have ten years. We have an agreement we can be very proud of.³⁹⁰

Gorbachev was not budging and neither was Reagan. The President said that he 'would not destroy the possibility of proceeding with SDI' as 'he could not confine work to the laboratory'.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p.11.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p.12.

Gorbachev asked if this was the President's 'final position'. Reagan replied 'yes'.³⁹¹ The talk then turned emotional.

Gorbachev waived the prospect of being a 'great President' before Reagan, and asked him to sign on the dotted line. 'If this were not possible' he said, 'they could say goodbye'. After all, Reykjavik represented a 'last opportunity', and if Reagan agreed with him, then the 'world would cheer'. Reagan, Gorbachev said, had come to the summit and merely pocketed Soviet concessions without making 'a single, substantial, major step' in his direction.³⁹² Reagan said that the Right Wing in his country would 'kick his brains out' if he agreed to what Gorbachev proposed and asked him to 'do this one thing' for him, to do this 'favor'. Gorbachev would not back down, and neither would Reagan. The meeting was over. Reagan got up and walked out on Gorbachev.

For perhaps the only moment in world history, the real possibility of eliminating all nuclear weapons had been raised, but shot down. A world without nuclear weapons was on offer, but the price tag—a 10 year limitation on SDI that could lead to its demise—was too high a price for Reagan to pay. For a man who believed passionately in nuclear abolition, it is clear that when it came to SDI, Reagan's attachment was so absolute that he could not give it up. There could be no more doubts about Reagan's involvement with US policy in this regard. Of all the initiatives of his government, Reagan's identification with SDI was the greatest: he was its principal proponent and its fiercest guardian. Whether Reagan's actions at Reykjavik were his finest moment, or his biggest blunder, is open to debate. What is not debatable is that for Ronald Reagan, SDI had fused itself to him, and the two were almost a single entity.

³⁹¹ Ibid., p.13.

³⁹² Ibid ,p.14.

Conclusion

The Strategic Defense Initiative's origin within the Reagan White house remains somewhat murky, with differing recollections and accounts about how it came to be. However, what is not in doubt was President Reagan's attachment to the concept following a meeting with the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff in February, 1983. Having received the go-ahead to pursue missile defense technology, Reagan moved quickly to formulate a speech announcing in grandiose terms his vision of a world protected from the threat of the bomb. He promised an initiative that could render nuclear weapons 'impotent and obsolete'. As archival evidence demonstrates, the main parts of that historic speech were written entirely by Reagan, as was the sizable segment of his second inaugural address which further expanded on his belief in SDI.

At the Geneva Summit Reagan steadfastly and passionately defended his dream for SDI, notwithstanding Gorbachev's pleas that 'an arms race in space' be halted at its 'inception'. In Reykjavik Reagan again stood by his initiative, despite being offered the biggest arms reduction package in the history of the Cold War. When the ante was upped to include total nuclear abolition in exchange for SDI research being limited to the lab for just 10 years, Reagan, with great anguish, simply said no. There can be no doubt whatsoever from pursuing the evidence, that SDI was truly a Reagan policy and that he, more than anyone else in his Administration, was responsible for its pursuit and its continuation.

Today, over twenty years since Reagan refused to give up his missile defense program, the United States continues to spend billions of dollars in research and development on the project to make Reagan's dream a reality.³⁹³ The Bush Administration pulled out of the ABM

³⁹³ SDI, originally designed to counter a Soviet nuclear threat, changed its focus over time as the Cold War ended, with the US government directing the program towards smaller threats posed by 'rogue nations'. For an overview of

Treaty in December 2001 so that limited deployment could proceed,³⁹⁴ much to the consternation of Russia, which remains as opposed to missile defense now as it was during the Gorbachev era. However, with the emerging threat of ballistic missile capability from ‘rogue nations’ like Iran and North Korea, the NATO alliance is firmly committed to the establishment of an effective SDI program.³⁹⁵ Missile defense remains a Reagan legacy, as does his quest for nuclear arms reduction, which will be investigated in the following two chapters.

SDI's development since 1983 see, Matthew Mowthorpe's 'President G.W. Bush and Missile Defense in the Aftermath of 9/11' *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*. (Washington: Fall 2004), Vol. 29, Iss. 3, pp. 327-338.

³⁹⁴ In explaining his government's decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty, President Bush said, "The 1972 ABM Treaty was signed by the United States and the Soviet Union at a much different time, in a vastly different world. One of the signatories, the Soviet Union, no longer exists, and neither does the hostility that once led both our countries to keep thousands of nuclear weapons on hair trigger alert, pointed at each other... Today, as the events of September the 11th made all too clear, the greatest threats to both our countries come not from each other or other big powers in the world but from terrorists who strike without warning or rogue states who seek weapons of mass destruction." 'Remarks Announcing the United States Withdrawal From the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty' (13 December 2001) *Public Papers of President George W Bush*.

³⁹⁵ At the April, 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration, NATO heads of state and government said they "recognize the substantial contribution to the protection of Allies from long range ballistic missiles to be provided by the planned deployment of European-based United States missile defense assets. We are exploring ways to link this capability with current NATO missile defense efforts as a way to ensure that it would be an integral part of any future NATO wide missile defense architecture." Additionally, the statement said, "Bearing in mind the principle of the indivisibility of Allied security as well as NATO solidarity, we task the Council in Permanent Session to develop options for a comprehensive missile defense architecture to extend coverage to all Allied territory and populations not otherwise covered by the United States system for review at our 2009 Summit, to inform any future political decision." As quoted in 'NATO Considering Link Between Alliance, U.S. Missile Defense Systems,' *Defense Daily International*, (Potomac: 11 April), Vol. 9, Iss. 15.

Chapter 7

NUCLEAR REDUCTION

“I intend to search for peace along two parallel paths: deterrence and arms reductions. I believe these are the only paths that offer any real hope for an enduring peace.”

-Ronald Reagan³⁹⁶

The nuclear bomb, it can be argued, became in many ways the defining feature of the Cold War conflict. Because of its existence, the Superpowers refrained from direct military confrontation with each other, choosing instead to fight proxy wars through other nations, for example, Korea and Vietnam. The existence of nuclear stockpiles created a standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union and thereby brought a certain level of stability to their relationship, as each understood that to launch a nuclear attack would be to invite a counter attack; an attack that would be mutually suicidal. Though a small number of nuclear weapons were enough to obliterate the major cities of each nation, fears still abounded, that if the other side possessed more nuclear weapons, they would be tempted to launch a pre-emptive first strike. Consequently, an arms race developed costing trillions of dollars over the decades and heightening the fear of nuclear war. While talks between the Superpowers during the Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Carter years sought to limit nuclear arsenals, the Reagan Administration rejected a mere limitation of

³⁹⁶Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation on Strategic Arms Reduction and Nuclear Deterrence’, 22 November 1982. *PPPR*.

the arms race, supporting instead the policy that the nuclear powers must actually reduce extant stockpiles. Furthermore, President Reagan advocated an even more radical proposition: the total abolition of all nuclear weapons.

This chapter firstly demonstrates that the Reagan Administration's official policy throughout the 1980s was that the nuclear stockpiles had to be reduced and that the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons was a stated goal towards which all its negotiations were directed. From there, it examines the other Cold War administrations that preceded Reagan's, and will endeavor to ascertain if nuclear arms reduction and elimination were ever seriously considered by these. Next, returning to the central question of this thesis—Reagan's personal role in the formulation of his government's Soviet policy—his view towards nuclear arms limitation and reduction prior to becoming President is investigated, in particular his criticism of the SALT II Treaty in the late 1970s. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to uncover possible influences on Reagan in this regard. Finally, it is argued that while Reagan was certainly not a lone voice criticizing arms limitation, his belief that nuclear weapons should be abolished was unique among conservatives of that era.

Nuclear Arms Reduction: Official Administration Policy

State of the Union addresses are the vehicle by which presidents lay out a national vision and set the agenda for the year to come. In his 1984 address, President Reagan used the platform to testify to America's peaceful intentions towards the USSR and to announce his government's destination point for nuclear arms reduction talks. He said:

Tonight, I want to speak to the people of the Soviet Union, to tell them it's true that our governments have had serious differences, but our sons and daughters have never fought each other in war. And if we Americans have our way, they never will.

People of the Soviet Union, there is only one sane policy for your country and mine, to preserve our civilization in this modern age: *A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The only value in our two nations possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then, would it not be better to do away with them entirely?*³⁹⁷ (Emphasis Added).

This view, that nuclear weapons should one day be completely eliminated, became an official foreign policy goal of the Reagan Administration when it was incorporated into the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 153 on 1 January 1985. The document, a collaborative effort by the President, the National Security Council and the Departments of Defense and State, presented a 'roadmap' for this objective. It stated:

During the next ten years, the US objective is *a radical reduction in the power of existing and planned nuclear arms*, as well as the stabilization of the relationship between offensive and defense nuclear arms, whether on earth or in space. We are even now looking forward to a period of transition to a more stable world, with *greatly reduced levels of nuclear arms* and an enhanced ability to deter war based upon...the increasing contribution of non-nuclear defenses against offensive nuclear arms. *This period of transition could lead to the eventual elimination of all nuclear arms, both offensive and defensive. A world free of nuclear arms is an ultimate objective to which we, the Soviet Union, and all other nations can agree.*³⁹⁸ (Emphasis added).

The document further stated that 'for the long run...both sides seem to be agreed that with respect to nuclear weapons as a whole, the objective should be their total elimination. This

³⁹⁷ Reagan, 'State of the Union Address' 25 January 1984; *PPPR*.

³⁹⁸ National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 153 As accessed at: <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-153.htm>

should be worldwide and agreed to by all nations.’³⁹⁹ For the first time in the history of the Cold War, the total abolition of all nuclear weapons had become not just a utopian dream sounded out by Presidents, but an actual working goal. On the path to the realization of this goal, the Reagan Administration also advocated nuclear arms reduction.

In contrast to the administrations which had preceded it, the Reagan Administration ruled out talks that sought to limit an arms race, and advocated instead a dialogue with the Soviet Union with the aim of achieving a real reduction of each nation’s respective nuclear arsenals. Talks about nuclear arms and their limitation had only truly begun in earnest during the period of Nixon’s détente (1969-1974), and had resulted in the SALT I Treaty, signed during the Moscow Summit of 1972. President Jimmy Carter, building on the work of Nixon and Ford, negotiated the SALT II Treaty, signed in 1979. Both treaties had placed limits on the growth of the arms race, without actually stopping it; let alone reducing the amount of nuclear weapons on each side. To Reagan, this approach seemed counterproductive as it permitted the continuance of the balance of terror and thereby increased the likelihood of a nuclear war. Therefore, he insisted that his government’s policy would be to only negotiate an arms control treaty with the Soviets that would see the standing down and destruction of nuclear weapons. In his second inaugural address, entirely written by Reagan, the President articulated his strategy for peace, and while reiterating the need for a strong ‘defense capability’ he advocated the usefulness of a diplomacy that could further his nuclear abolitionist views. He said:

There is only one way, safely and legitimately, to reduce the cost of national security, and that is to reduce the need for it. And this we are trying to do in negotiations with the Soviet Union. *We’re not just discussing limits on a further increase of nuclear weapons; we seek, instead, to reduce their number. We seek*

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

*the total elimination one day of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth.*⁴⁰⁰
(Emphasis Added).

Reagan's dream of a world free of nuclear weapons was bold and visionary. Though he was not the first President to imagine or even articulate such an outcome, (as the history of American Presidents and nuclear abolition confirms below), he was the first President to actually believe that he could accomplish such an audacious feat.

History of American Anti-Nuclear Beliefs at the White House

Throughout the history of the nuclear age, American Presidents had understood the grave danger that the existence of nuclear weapons posed to humanity, and spoke from time to time about their desire to see nuclear power used for peaceful purposes, limiting the spread of nuclear weapons and even their future abolition.

President Eisenhower's vision for a world in which the nuclear 'genie' was already 'out of the bottle', was that the international community should unite in the common purpose that nuclear energy be employed solely for benign enterprises.⁴⁰¹ On 8 December 1953, Eisenhower gave his 'Atoms for Peace' speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations. In it, he condemned the continuance of a nuclear arms race which would 'confirm the hopeless finality of

⁴⁰⁰ 'Second Inaugural Address', 21 January 1985 *PPPR*. As the original draft in the Reagan Archives demonstrates, Reagan wrote the address out in its entirety. See PRESIDENTIAL HANDWRITING FILE BOX 17: FOLDER 325, 326: SECOND INAUGRAL; *RPL*.

⁴⁰¹ Eisenhower, in his memoirs, takes full credit for the Atoms for Peace speech, stating that the draft produced for him only 'left the listener with only a new terror, not a new hope'. Accordingly, Eisenhower 'hit upon the idea of actual physical donations of isotopes from our then unequaled nuclear stockpile, to a common fund for peaceful purposes'. As quoted in Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change: The White House Years, 1953-1956*, (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p.252.

a belief that two atomic colossi are doomed malevolently to eye each other indefinitely across a trembling world'. Eisenhower said that the United States 'would seek more than the mere reduction or elimination of atomic materials for military purposes',⁴⁰² and proposed that the nuclear powers of the world contribute fissionable materials in a joint venture of peace.

According to Eisenhower's model, the nuclear powers, acting under the aegis of the International Atomic Energy Agency, would send nuclear material and scientists to study what uses for the common good nuclear atoms could be expended. For example, the energy shortages of the world could be solved and thus 'the contributing powers would be dedicating some of their strength to serve the needs rather than the fears of mankind'.⁴⁰³

Eisenhower's speech received a thunderous shout of approval by the UN members gathered, however it has been argued that Eisenhower's plan actually led to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, for by expanding the knowledge of how to harness nuclear energy, it inevitably led to a continuance of the enrichment program leading to weapons grade material.⁴⁰⁴ And because Eisenhower had downplayed nuclear abolition as a 'mere' thing, it's clear that a world free of nuclear weapons was never seriously considered. Eisenhower's successors, Kennedy and Johnson, worked for a nuclear test ban treaty and sought to limit the arms race, but it was not until Eisenhower's Vice President, Richard M. Nixon, sat in the Oval Office, that nuclear

⁴⁰² 'Address Before the General Assembly of the United Nations on Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, New York City.' 8 December 1953; *Public Papers of President Dwight D. Eisenhower*.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ See Peter R. Lavoy 's article 'The Enduring Effects of Atoms for Peace' for *the Arms Control Association*, December 2003; Accessed at http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2003_12/Lavoy.asp

abolition would again be stated publicly as a goal towards which the US government should work towards.

President Nixon famously signed the first nuclear arms limitation treaty with the Soviet Union and even at one time spoke of a world without nuclear weapons; but the evidence indicates that Nixon believed that nuclear weapons were a permanent reality. Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger are remembered for their practice of *realpolitik*, and when it came to nuclear weapons there was no exception. As stated above, on his visit to the Soviet Union in 1972, Nixon and Soviet leader Brezhnev signed the SALT I Treaty, an interim agreement by both Superpowers to cap the number of nuclear weapons that could be produced. Also signed at Moscow was the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), which banned a national missile defense program in the belief that leaving their populations vulnerable to a nuclear attack would be the best guarantee that nuclear weapons would never be launched. Nixon's statesmanship worked at slowing the arms race in the interests of greater trade and cooperation, but nonetheless recognized that nuclear weapons would remain and actually contribute to the cause of peace by deterring war. However, on the night Nixon announced his resignation from the presidency, 8 August 1974, in addition to reviewing his various claims of contributions to world peace, he spoke of a future without nuclear weapons. As he explained to his chief speech writer Raymond Price during the drafting process:

We have ended America's longest war, but the goals ahead are ultimately greater and more important. We've started to limit nuclear arms between the US and the USSR. *But our goal must be not just limitation of nuclear arms, but these terrible weapons that could destroy civilization as we know it must be destroyed. What*

*I'm getting at is reduction, not just limitation—so the terrible danger as we know it must not hang over the world.*⁴⁰⁵ (Emphasis Added).

Farewell addresses can be moments when leaders take the opportunity to share their true feelings, but they can also be an extremely emotional experience, even under the best of circumstances. Did Nixon's emotions get the better of him? Apparently they did, as in the 1980s he condemned Reagan's goal of a nuclear free world writing: 'If we are to meet our responsibilities in the 21st century, we must disabuse ourselves of some seductive myths about how the real world works: We are not going to be able to abolish nuclear weapons.'⁴⁰⁶ Nixon's nuclear abolitionism, therefore, was merely a utopian dream. It was never operational policy, never a realistic goal. But can the same be said of Nixon's successor, President Carter, who also spoke about nuclear abolitionism?

President Jimmy Carter's inaugural address, which advocated nuclear arms reduction and eventual elimination, may have been inspired by Nixon's farewell address, but was he as insincere as his predecessor was in turning high sounding rhetoric into a reality? When running for the presidency, Carter had promised that he would promote a 'government as good as its people',⁴⁰⁷ and the speech he gave immediately upon assuming the Executive Office was full of

⁴⁰⁵ Raymond Price, *With Nixon* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 343. Nixon's directive made its way into the resignation speech when he said, 'Together with the Soviet Union we have made the crucial breakthroughs that have begun the process of limiting nuclear arms. *But we must set as our goal not just limiting but reducing and finally destroying these terrible weapons* so that they cannot destroy civilization and so that the threat of nuclear war will no longer hang over the world and the people.' 'Address to the Nation Announcing Decision To Resign the Office of President of the United States.' 8 August 1974, *Public Papers of President Richard Nixon*.

⁴⁰⁶ Richard Nixon, 'On World Leadership's Indispensable Ingredient' *Life Magazine* (October, 1987), p. 31.

⁴⁰⁷ Later the title of a book by Carter that was a compilation of his major speeches throughout his political life, *A Government As Good As Its People* (Little Rock: University of Arkansas Press, 1996)

down to earth platitudes. Turning to the nuclear question (which his daughter Amy would later consider the most important⁴⁰⁸) Carter said:

The world is still engaged in a massive armaments race designed to ensure continuing equivalent strength among potential adversaries. We pledge perseverance and wisdom in our efforts *to limit the world's armaments* to those necessary for each nation's own domestic safety. And we will move this year a step toward our ultimate goal—*the elimination of all nuclear weapons from this earth*. We urge all other people to join us, for success can mean life instead of death.⁴⁰⁹ (Emphasis added).

'I will never lie to you'⁴¹⁰ was another promise that Carter made during the campaign, and to be fair to him, he did send his Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to Moscow with an arms control proposal that included actual nuclear arms reductions, only to be rebuffed by Brezhnev.⁴¹¹ But Carter's easy acceptance of 'no' for an answer, and the secondary proposal of another arms *limitation* treaty, demonstrates that nuclear arms reduction was merely the initial offer and that Carter was more accurate when he promised in his inaugural address to '*limit the world's armaments*'.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁸ President Carter said during the Presidential Debate with Ronald Reagan, 'I had a discussion with my daughter, Amy, the other day, before I came here, to ask her what the most important issue was. She said she thought nuclear weaponry - and the control of nuclear arms'. 'Presidential Debate in Cleveland 28 October 1980' *Public Papers of President Jimmy Carter*. (This led to supporters of candidate Reagan making signs saying, 'Amy for Secretary of State', or simply, 'Ask Amy'.)

⁴⁰⁹ Jimmy Carter, 'Inaugural Address' 20 January 1977, *The Public Papers of President Jimmy Carter*.

⁴¹⁰ As quoted by John Herber's article 'Without Watergate, the Campaign is Part Illusion' *The New York Times* 26 March, 1976.

⁴¹¹ See Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p. 46.

⁴¹² *Ibid.* p., 215.

In this regard Reagan was different from all his predecessors: he truly wanted to eliminate all nuclear weapons and sought to achieve this feat. He rejected totally the idea that there could be a SALT III Treaty: for him, it would be nuclear arms reduction or nothing.

Reagan's Anti-Nuclearism

Reagan's anti-nuclear views stretched back to the dawn of the nuclear age, and remained with him up to and including his time as President of the United States. While fiercely conservative when it came to the fight against communism, Reagan in Hollywood was a liberal Democrat like most of his fellow actors. As such, he often engaged in political rallies or supported causes that were left of centre. One of these concerned the American acquisition and use of the nuclear bomb. Reagan, recognizing the huge threat that this weapon posed to humanity, and fearing the onset of a nuclear arms race, was willing to go on record for his opposition to nuclear weapons. In December of 1945, Reagan had intended to speak at an anti-nuclear rally in Hollywood, where he was set to read a poem that he had written against the bomb. Being under contract by Warner Brothers, however, proved a hindrance: reading a poem was a 'performance', and therefore a violation of his contract. The real reason behind it, however, was political: the 1940s were still a time in America when movie stars were told to keep their political opinions to themselves, and the studio did not want Reagan upsetting Washington D.C. But it did not stop Reagan from being against nuclear weapons, and he supported the somewhat naïve idea that the US should yield the bomb to the United Nations, which would regulate the technology for peaceful purposes.⁴¹³

⁴¹³ See Lecture by Paul Lettow, 'President Reagan's Legacy and U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy' at the *Heritage Foundation*, 20 July 2006. Accessed at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/hl953.cfm>

Naïve or not, the evidence shows that Reagan was thinking about the bomb from the genesis of the nuclear age, and to him nuclear weapons were an evil that ought to be abolished.

Committed to the fight against a ‘one world communist’ state, Reagan’s nuclear abolitionist views were not heard again publicly until the 1970s, when Reagan was attempting to be the one person in America who could potentially launch a nuclear war. Perhaps the enormity of that responsibility gave Reagan pause for thought, and his hatred for the bomb again came to the fore.

At the 1976 Republican National Convention Reagan spoke from the heart on an issue that meant more to him than any other: the threat of nuclear war. The background to the speech was that Reagan had narrowly lost his party’s Presidential nomination to the incumbent, Gerald R. Ford. After his acceptance speech, Ford, hoping to unite a badly fractured party, invited Reagan up to the stage for a speech. The Reagan camp, seated far up the back of the auditorium, was taken off guard, not expecting the invitation. Reagan, turning to his wife Nancy said: ‘What am I going to say? I don’t know what to say!’⁴¹⁴ To the chant of ‘We want Ron’, Reagan made his way to the stage and gave an impromptu address, focusing especially on the nuclear issue.

Reagan began by saying that he had been recently asked to write a letter for a time capsule that would be opened in the year 2076, America’s Tri-centennial. ‘They suggested’, Reagan said, ‘I write something about the problems and issues of the day.’ Reagan shared how driving down the beautiful Californian coastline, and thinking through those problems, he had concluded that the greatest threat of 1976 remained the nuclear bomb. He stated:

⁴¹⁴ Nancy Reagan, *My Turn*, p.198.

We live in a world in which the great powers have poised and aimed at each other horrible missiles of destruction, nuclear weapons, that can in a matter of minutes arrive at each other's country and destroy, virtually, the civilized world we live in.

And suddenly it dawned on me, those who read this letter a hundred years from now *will know whether those missiles were fired. They will know whether we met our challenge. Whether they can have the freedoms that we have known up until now will depend on what we do here.*

Will they look back with appreciation and say, 'Thank God for those people in 1976 who headed off that loss of freedom, who kept us now a hundred years later free, who *kept our world from nuclear destruction?*'

This is our challenge; and that is why...we must go forth from here united, determined that what a great general said a few years ago is true: there is no substitute for victory.⁴¹⁵ (Emphasis added).

But what was the 'victory' that Reagan spoke of? Was it merely the election of Ford in his own right as President, with a continuation of the policies that Reagan had been so critical of during the Presidential primaries? Was it a military victory over the Soviet Union, which in the nuclear age was an impossibility? Taking into account the spirit of the speech and Reagan's later abolitionist views expressed while President, it could be inferred that 'victory' for Reagan was a world without nuclear weapons. On the path to this world, Reagan wished to begin the process of not merely slowing the nuclear arms race, but achieving actual arms reductions.

The change of US policy from seeking nuclear arms limitations agreements to actual reductions in nuclear weaponry came primarily from Reagan. As already stated, throughout the 1970s, the Nixon, Ford and Carter Administrations had sought through arms control talks to limit the growth of the arms race, placing ceilings on various types of missiles. Nixon and Carter had negotiated the Strategic Arms *Limitation* Treaties. The thinking behind this was all wrong to

⁴¹⁵ 'Transcript of Reagan's Remarks to the Convention' *The New York Times*, 20 August 1976.

Reagan. As recounted by Reagan aide Martin Anderson, during a flight in the late 1970s Reagan turned to those with him and said, ‘How about instead of the SALT talks we have the START talks?’ Inquiring what START stood for, Reagan explained: ‘Strategic Arms *Reduction* Talks’.⁴¹⁶ Reagan was not the first American leader to propose nuclear arms reduction, but he was the first to coin the new acronym that all arms negotiations during his presidency were conducted under. Those who were with Reagan privately knew that he was thinking ahead, and that he was thinking ‘outside of the box’. But Reagan also publicly shared his views on arms control in his radio addresses, and here too he gave a ‘blueprint’ that was to be used during his presidency.

Reagan’s Arms Control Positions

From Reagan’s radio addresses of the 1970s, which he often used to weigh in on President Carter’s arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union, we can see the main elements of what would later become the American position for the START talks.

Jimmy Carter had been hard at work, seeking to achieve a SALT II Treaty with the Soviets, but despite his best of intentions, he received widespread criticism from political opponents, even from members of his own political party. And of course, Carter could always rely on Reagan to undermine him on the airwaves. That is not to say that Reagan did not support the overall agenda of arms control. He did believe strongly that the Superpowers should meet and negotiate a treaty on nuclear arms, but he laid down criteria of an acceptable treaty that set him apart from the Carter Administration. These differences were not merely an exercise in

⁴¹⁶ Interview with author, Reagan Presidential Library, 30 October 2006.

polemics: Reagan's outline of what an arms control treaty should include became the guidelines for American negotiators for the START Talks of the 1980s.

Firstly, Reagan advocated nuclear arms reduction. 'Do arms limitation agreements—even good ones—really bring or preserve peace?' Reagan asked his listeners in 1978. Answering his own question, he said 'History would seem to say no'. Reagan then pointed out that following World War I the London Treaty of 1930 had placed limitations on the weight of battleships and other naval vessels, which only resulted, he said, 'in improved technology' and the emergence of 'aircraft carriers' the result of which was 'an ability to strike first—as we found out at Pearl Harbor.' Perhaps more dangerously, Reagan said 'The treaties also tended to lull the people of our own land and of Great Britain so that Hitler's military buildup took place with most of us refusing to admit it was happening.'⁴¹⁷ Limitations did not work, Reagan argued, and instead he proposed not a limitation of armaments, but a true reduction. As he said in an address entitled 'SALT II' in December of 1978:

I'm sure all of us would like nothing better than to see the two great superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, agree to *a real and effective reduction of armaments*; a reduction that would not be one sided, one that would increase not decrease, our hope for lasting peace.⁴¹⁸ (Emphasis added).

A second major feature of Reagan's arms control agenda was that the terms of the treaty must be subject to a stringent, on the ground, verification. It was Reagan's contention that the Soviets simply could not be trusted to abide to the letter of their agreements, and indeed he alleged that the Soviets had flagrantly violated the SALT I Treaty. Reagan said:

⁴¹⁷ Reagan, 'SALT II', (11 September 1979); Radio Addresses, Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts Box. 37; *RPL*.

⁴¹⁸ Reagan, 'SALT II' (12 December 1978); Radio Addresses, *Reagan: In His Own Hand*. pp-86-88.

The SALT II agreement... must be accepted on faith. The whole matter of 'right to verify whether promises are being kept' has been scrapped. No wonder Gromyko describes negotiations as 'businesslike and useful'. Translated from the Russian that means 'Uncle Sam has been skinned again'.⁴¹⁹

America had 'been skinned' because satellite surveillance, to Reagan, simply was not good enough:

Yes our reconnaissance satellites can keep a reasonable count on how many missiles the Soviets have on hand. But there is no way without on-site inspection (which the Russians will never agree to) to verify whether the Soviets are indeed complying with the treaty. Satellites cannot tell us whether the treaty is being violated with regard to new guidance systems, or how many warheads each missile contains.⁴²⁰

In addition to the criteria of seeking actual nuclear reductions that could be verifiable, Reagan endorsed three other 'specific' elements which he considered essential to the success of any arms control agreement:

- 1) 'To establish *equal* nuclear capabilities for the US and the Soviet Union';
- 2) To 'Stabilize the situation between the two countries so that neither would be tempted to strike first during an international crisis'; and
- 3) 'Reduce the effect of nuclear weapons on world politics'.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Reagan, 'SALT' (8 November 1977); Ibid, p.76.

⁴²⁰ Reagan, 'SALT II, (13 March 1978); Ibid., p.78.

⁴²¹ Reagan, 'SALT II' (2 October 1979); Ibid., p.91.

These, Reagan said, were the original objectives that the American delegation had sought to achieve with the Soviets. SALT II met none of these criteria and Reagan asked, ‘Why then should our Senate waste even five minutes debating the SALT II agreement?’⁴²² Reagan rejected the SALT II Treaty, and using a pun he said, ‘Too much salt we’re told is bad for us—causes hardening of the arteries or something. We may be getting another kind of *SALT* right now, and it could be fatal.’⁴²³ But where was Reagan getting his ideas from? Who was influencing him?

Influences on Reagan

When it comes to evaluating Reagan’s nuclear abolitionist views, a researcher would be hard pressed to find any major political figure who *seriously* advocated the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons. As stated above, other Presidents had spoken of it, but it was never an actual operational policy. Certainly no conservative publication, the type that Reagan devoured, ever contained pieces on why America should ‘ban the bomb’. Unless further evidence is brought to light, it would seem that Reagan’s belief that the world powers should take the road of nuclear abolition was his own personal opinion, which he had arrived at through his own contemplation on the nuclear question. The same cannot be said when it comes to evaluating Reagan’s views on arms control treaties, as the amount of commentary on the SALT II Treaty in the 1970s, the majority of which was negative, is voluminous. From studying Reagan’s radio addresses on the topic, it is easy to track ideas back to their origin, as Reagan was prone to quote verbatim from his sources.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Reagan, ‘SALT’ (8 November 1977); Ibid., p.75.

First and foremost, Reagan's skepticism of treaties found its source in a book entitled *The Treaty Trap: a History of the Performance of Political Treaties by the United States and European Nations*,⁴²⁴ written by Laurence W. Beilenson. The author, a friend of Reagan's since their time working together at the Screen Actors Guild, was by profession a lawyer. Reagan quotes from Beilenson on various occasions during his radio addresses, and in a 1975 address says: 'What Laurence Beilenson wrote in his book, *The Treaty Trap* is true: Nations that place their faith in treaties and fail to keep their hardware up don't stick around long enough to write many pages in history.'⁴²⁵ Reagan learnt much from Beilenson, but he did not limit himself to one source.

Another major source of information for Reagan came from members of the Defense community, past and present. Reagan was a firm supporter of the military, and while a believer that civilians should remain in control lest a 'military dictatorship' should arise,⁴²⁶ he nonetheless held that when it came to security issues, they were the authority on the matter, not politicians. America's failure to win a decisive victory in Korea and Vietnam, he said, was due to Presidents Truman and Johnson not giving the military the freedom to pursue their objectives.⁴²⁷ Likewise, when it came to the Soviet Union, Reagan turned to the analysis of the military to help form his opinions concerning arms control.

One of the sources that Reagan turned to was President Nixon's initial Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird. During Nixon's first term, when détente was conceived and birthed

⁴²⁴ Laurence Beilenson, *The Treaty Trap: a History of the Performance of Political Treaties by the United States and European Nations* (Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, 1969).

⁴²⁵ 'Peace', April 1975: Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts; *RPL*.

⁴²⁶ Reagan, 'Chiefs of Staff', (15 July 1978), *Ibid*, p.71.

⁴²⁷ Reagan, 'The Military', (27 September 1977), *Ibid*, p.70.

successfully, Laird had headed the Pentagon, and while not involved with the inner workings of Nixon and Kissinger's foreign policy, he nonetheless had supported the SALT I Treaty. However, he had reevaluated his position considerably by the time Carter was negotiating the successor treaty, SALT II, charging that the Soviets had not lived up to their side of the bargain. Reagan quoted from an article that Laird had written, in which he said:

The evidence is incontrovertible that the Soviet Union has repeatedly, flagrantly and indeed contemptuously violated the treaties to which we have adhered... This evidence has been withheld from the Congress, the press and the public. I believe there is no longer any excuse for denying the American people and their representatives facts whose suppression profits only our enemies.⁴²⁸

In addition to quoting Laird, Reagan was keen to cite those *within* the Carter Administration who were breaking rank with the President; especially if they were military.

One such case was the Pentagon's Chief-of-Staff, General Brown, who used the moment of his departure from government to take a swipe at his Commander-in-Chief, charging the President with failing to secure America by a weakened military potential; SALT II was obviously, many believed, a dangerous document. Commenting on the matter, Reagan said, "It is no secret that this President has overridden the advice of the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff or ignored their opinion on various occasions."⁴²⁹ Reagan took the military's opinions seriously, as he did those members of Carter's own political party who broke rank to denounce Carter's arms negotiations.

⁴²⁸ Reagan, 'SALT TALKS I', (13 March 1978) Ibid., p.77.

⁴²⁹ Reagan, 'Chiefs of Staff', (15 July 1978); Ibid, p.71.

Criticism of a President from the opposition is to be expected, but when it comes from within party ranks, it is generally a sign that some very serious disagreements over policy are occurring. This was the situation that faced President Carter when he attempted to negotiate the SALT II Treaty with the Soviets, and Reagan was eager to exploit the mutiny within the Democratic Party, in support of his own conservative agenda. Chief among the defectors was Senator Henry ‘Scoop’ Jackson, a Democrat from Washington state and former competitor against Carter for his party’s Presidential nomination.

Jackson was an expert on all matters military—and had actually been Nixon’s first choice as Secretary of Defense.⁴³⁰ However, he became the staunchest opponent of détente in the United States Senate, becoming a constant headache for President Nixon and Ford with his linkage of Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status for the USSR with the issue of Jewish immigration.⁴³¹ When Carter came into office, the issue became arms control. He was considered something of a menace to those in the White House, holding important Superpower relations hostage for the perceived advancement of his own Presidential aspirations.⁴³² To Reagan, however, he was a hero: a man of integrity willing to stand up to the appeasers of the ‘Evil Empire’. (As President, Reagan honored Jackson after his death by posthumously giving him the Presidential Medal of Freedom on 26 June 1984.)⁴³³ Reagan dedicated an entire radio address to recounting Jackson’s

⁴³⁰ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p.338. Reagan also seriously considered him for the same position in 1980, interview with Richard Perle, 15 November 15, 2007. See Appendix C.

⁴³¹ See article by Leslie H. Gelb ‘Congress Isn’t Giving Anything’ in *The New York Times*, 30 September, 1973

⁴³² Jackson was a candidate for the Democratic Party’s Nomination for President in 1976 and considered running against Carter in 1980.

⁴³³ At the ceremony presenting the medal to Jackson’s widow, Reagan said, “Henry Jackson absorbed within himself the three great strains of thought that go to the making of a noble foreign policy: a love of freedom; a will to defend it; and the knowledge that America could not and must not attempt to float along alone, a blissful island of democracy in a sea of totalitarianism.” Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the Family of the Late Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington *PPPR*.

strident opposition to the SALT II Treaty in 1979, and in particular a vehement attack Jackson had made on President Carter on the eve of his Summit with Brezhnev. Reagan said:

When historians look back at the debate over SALT II, I suspect a certain speech by Senator Henry Jackson will be among the most quoted documents. The speech I am referring to is the Senator's address on SALT II to a Democratic political group in June, in which he compared American policy towards the Soviet Union today to Great Britain's policy of 'appeasement' towards Hitler's Germany in the 1930s.⁴³⁴

Reagan might have been impressed by Jackson's attacks, but the *New York Times* was not, which commented on the same speech: 'Where is the decency that once dictated respect for a President as he carried out negotiations abroad even if the results merited challenge upon his return? In politics and diplomacy, there are some things worse than error.'⁴³⁵ In the nuclear age, however, error could be catastrophic, and Reagan thought that the disloyalty towards the President by members of his own party was a display of political courage: putting patriotism above partisanship. Another rebel within the Democratic Party that Reagan cited for his arguments was a Congressman from California, by the name of Charles Wilson.

Wilson, (later made world famous by Tom Hanks' portrayal of him in the 2007 movie *Charlie Wilson's War*)⁴³⁶ had visited the American arms negotiating team in Geneva, and

⁴³⁴ RADIO ADDRESSES Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 1: Speeches and Writings, Radio Broadcasts Sen. Jackson on Salt II, JULY 9, 1979 Box 35; RPL..

⁴³⁵ 'Unguided Missile' *The New York Times*, 29 June 1979.

⁴³⁶ The film, Alan Nadel argues in his review, gave a simplistic interpretation of the role of the Afghanistan conflict in the ending of the Cold War. Nadel writes, 'What *Charlie Wilson's War* does, it does with verve, wit, compassion, and reasonable accuracy. But what it leaves out—the intricate relationship between global power and national policy making; the gravitation to dark allegiances that irrationally survives the policy of containment; the dense enigma of ethnic cleansing and arbitrary nationhood—may tell us much more about the simplistic narratives of causality we still seem to crave while stumbling haplessly into a world of terrifying complexity.' 'Charlie Wilson's War', *The Journal of American History*, (Bloomington: June, 2008), Vol.95., Iss.1,p.286.

returned to the United States as an ardent critic of the Carter Administration's position. In a March 1978 radio address, Reagan reported on what Wilson had said, saying:

He described the Soviet team as made up of tough, hardnosed negotiators who've been doing this same job since 1969 when SALT I was passed. By contrast, our team has only two members with previous experience in any kind of Soviet negotiations...He was equally forthright in declaring that our negotiators seemed more interested in helping Jimmy Carter redeem a campaign promise than in protecting American interests.⁴³⁷

Reagan was listening to all these dissenters, and he was also learning: as President he would appoint a Democrat, Paul Nitze, as his chief arms negotiator, despite reservations from arch-conservatives, because Nitze was the most experienced in the field.

As these radio addresses demonstrate, Reagan was obviously drawing inspiration and information from a coalition of conservative politicians and military figures from both political traditions.

Conclusions

As the evidence above demonstrates, when it came to nuclear arms control, Ronald Reagan believed that a reduction of armaments, not a limitation, should be the objective of the US government in its talks with the USSR, and that such an agreement should be verified by on-site inspections. Furthermore, Reagan believed that the nuclear bomb was inherently pernicious, and therefore ought to be abolished. His criticism of the SALT II Treaty in the late 1970s provides

⁴³⁷ 'SALT II', (13 March 1978), Ibid., p.77. Reagan's address most likely was based on Wilson's article Reader's Digest, 'SALT II-Blueprint for Disaster,' (April 1978),pp. 89-92.

evidence about Reagan's thinking on the matter, and his quotes from various experts from both political parties, demonstrates that he was influenced by these members in holding these opinions. However, no evidence has come to light to show that when it came to the question of nuclear abolition, that Reagan was influenced by anybody, as his viewpoint was heretical to the conservative political establishment, despite the times when other Presidents, most notably Nixon and Carter, had sounded out the idea.

Reagan was a man who had the 'courage of his convictions', and despite the conventional wisdom being that nuclear weapons were a necessary evil to maintain deterrence, Reagan as President would choose instead to follow his own beliefs and push for a world free from the 'terror of the bomb'. As the following chapter will demonstrate, this 'revolutionary' idea would be resisted by those within his own Administration, but Reagan held fast to his convictions, and came closer than anyone before, or since, to achieving his goals.

Chapter 8

THE NUCLEAR BOMB: REDUCTION AND ELIMINATION

“The only value in possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they can't be used ever. I know I speak for people everywhere when I say our dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the Earth.”

-Ronald Reagan⁴³⁸

The presidency of Ronald Reagan achieved more in terms of nuclear arms reduction than any before or since, and it also came tantalizingly close to pulling off what was once considered an impossibility: the total abolition of all nuclear weapons. That Reagan achieved such momentous feats seemed unbelievable to many commentators and historians of the day. After all, was not Reagan merely a ‘washed up movie star’? Did he not merely read the ‘talking points’ provided him by the White House staff on three-by-five inch cards? Was he not ‘hopelessly naïve’ when it came to the mechanics of arms control?

Yet, as the preceding chapter demonstrates, Reagan held quite a nuanced view on nuclear arms control prior his election to the presidency. Furthermore, Reagan had some very strong views on nuclear weapons, which he considered to be dangerous, an unnecessary madness, and

⁴³⁸ ‘Address Before the Japanese Diet in Tokyo’ 11 November 1983; *PPPR*.

ultimately, evil.⁴³⁹ Reagan's dream when he assumed office, therefore, was for a world free of the menace of 'the bomb'.⁴⁴⁰ Few at the time knew of Reagan's abolitionist views, and as they slowly emerged, most dismissed them as nothing more than a utopian dream. Yet, Reagan's vision and objectives prevailed. The American government and the international community were to learn over the eight years of the Reagan presidency that he was, in the words of Martin Anderson, 'warmly ruthless', and when he set his mind to a goal, no-one was going to stand in his way.⁴⁴¹

This chapter examines how Reagan implemented his policy of a de-nuclearized world, through nuclear arms reductions, and how he pursued his ultimate objective of a world without nuclear weapons. It examines the various proposals that were floated by Reagan's team within government, and investigates how the President navigated between the various opinions, choosing the course that best reflected his own philosophy. Furthermore, Reagan's negotiations with Mikhail Gorbachev are presented in some detail, with the aim of establishing the level of Reagan's involvement in the intricacies of nuclear arms reduction. The overall question posed is: was Reagan master of America's arms control agenda, or was he captive to the arms control experts?

⁴³⁹ Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan*, p.60.

⁴⁴⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.550.

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Author, 31 October, 2006: *Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California*. Anderson also compared Reagan to a 'soft pillow', on the outside, but if you 'punch that pillow, you will find a strong bar of steel in the middle'.

Nuclear Arms Reduction: The Zero-Option

Reagan had made clear prior his campaign for the presidency that any treaty that permitted the continuance of the arms race was useless. The only treaty that he would ever sign with the Soviets would be one that actually reduced the stockpile of nuclear weapons possessed by each Superpower. Only in this way could the world move away from the terror of the bomb, which Reagan said was ‘keeping the world on the precipice of disaster’.⁴⁴² The opportunity to present this stance began with the continuing NATO crisis surrounding INF missiles in Europe.

As stated earlier, Reagan had inherited from President Carter the dilemma of how to respond to the Soviet Union’s attempts to upset the nuclear balance in Europe. The Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles was seen as a ploy to drive a wedge between the United States and Western European nations via nuclear blackmail. The Soviet Union, being a totalitarian state, did not need the approval of its citizens to deploy new weapons, but its leaders understood very well that this was not the case in Western Europe. Fanning the flames of nuclear hysteria among the general European population and promoting a ‘nuclear freeze’ that would cement Soviet nuclear superiority, Moscow hoped to use public opinion against the democracies in order to topple any government that dared to deploy new nuclear weapons in response. Reagan had to tread carefully in 1981 if he were to keep the NATO alliance a cohesive unit and defeat the Soviets at their own propaganda game. The evidence shows that the Reagan Administration rose to the challenge.

The Reagan White House response to the INF crisis—the unveiling of the so-called ‘Zero-Option’ in November 1981—was a diplomatic masterstroke that blunted much of the nuclear freeze movement’s arguments and began the process that would lead to the first nuclear

⁴⁴² Reagan, *An American Life*, p.267.

arms reduction treaty in history. Richard Perle, known as the ‘Prince of Darkness’ in the halls of power, surprisingly was the author of the concept.⁴⁴³ In an interview with the author, Perle explained his reasoning behind his proposal:

Well, the idea had been kicked around, but, mostly when people referred to it before we tabled it as a proposal *it meant ‘zero’ for us*. Nobody, I don’t know of anyone who was suggesting that the SS-20 program be abandoned. Yes, it seemed to me that we were in a very difficult political position *because there was a great deal of opposition to our deployment*.

And I didn’t think that it was an entirely valuable deployment. The system seemed vulnerable to me. In theory, they achieved survivability by their mobility but in practice it seemed to me very unlikely that we could utilize their mobility because to do that we clearly were not to keep these weapons in constant motion, so it was intended that they would be at fixed places and move on alert. Well, when you start moving large numbers of nuclear weapons on alert, you create a crisis if there hasn’t been one already. And if there has been one already the argument is against deepening the crisis by moving them.

So I thought we were deploying sitting ducks. And there was an illusion that they were survivable. And in the context of deterrence the last thing you want is to provide the incentive to the other side to act preemptively. *So I was quite happy to be rid of those weapons if we could get rid of the SS-20s.*⁴⁴⁴

Furthermore, Perle reflectively rejects the idea that it was a mere propaganda ploy saying: ‘No it was a real proposal with an unusual characteristic which was, if we didn’t get it [Soviet acceptance] we were still ahead of the game because it would help us politically. And if we did get it, we were ahead of the game, because I didn’t think the weapons were very useful.’⁴⁴⁵ Moreover, by proposing ‘zero’ INF weapons in Europe, Reagan was seen as the reasonable

⁴⁴³ Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, p.303.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with Author, 15 October 2007, Chevy Chase, Maryland. See Appendix C.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

player in the drama. This created the image that the United States did not want to deploy new weapons, and its intentions were entirely peaceful.

As mentioned earlier, Secretary of State Alexander Haig vehemently opposed the ‘Zero-Option’, as he explained in his memoirs:

The fatal flaw in the Zero-Option as a basis for negotiations was that it was not negotiable. It was absurd to expect the Soviets to dismantle an existing force of 1,100 warheads, which they had already put into the field at the cost of billions of rubles, in exchange for a promise from the United States not to deploy a missile force that we had not yet begun to build and that had aroused such violent controversy in Western Europe.⁴⁴⁶

Perle, in an interview with the author, commented on Haig’s position:

Well, the State Department’s reaction was typical. They are always interested in getting an agreement. And this was such a bold and aggressive proposal that they immediately concluded that there was no chance. And therefore, if we proceeded with this, there would be no agreement.⁴⁴⁷

Perle understood all that Haig argued, but believed that the proposal had huge merit in that it would take the heat off the Reagan Administration while allowing it to move forward with plans to deploy American INF weapons on European soil. Reagan was no political naïf; he too understood that it was a public relations bonanza. However, he also believed firmly that ‘zero’ INF weapons in Europe was a goal worth achieving; after all, it played into his dream for a treaty that actually reduced nuclear weapons. As Reagan recounted in his diary, the announcement of the ‘Zero-Option’ was an event that the world stopped to watch:

⁴⁴⁶ Haig, *Caveat*, p. 229.

⁴⁴⁷ See Appendix C.

Today was the big day—the speech to the National Press Club. It really was to the world. I'm told it was the largest network ever put together—all of Europe, China & I don't know how many other places. It has been wonderfully received worldwide except for Russia—*Tass* is screaming bloody murder. I asked Russia to join us in total elimination of all medium range nuclear weapons in Europe. Funny—I was talking peace but wearing a bullet proof vest. It seems Kadaffi [sic] put a contract on me & some person named Jack was going to try for me at the speech. Security was very tight.⁴⁴⁸

Reagan was serious about the 'Zero-Option', and as the seven years following his announcement of the proposal demonstrate, he continued to work at it long after the original public relations strategy no longer held any importance.

Sticking with Zero

If the 'Zero-Option' was merely propaganda designed to give the United States a cover for INF deployment, then the proposal would have been dropped the instant that NATO began installing the controversial weapons in 1983. Instead, Reagan kept the 'Zero-Option' alive over many years until it was finally codified in a treaty.

November 1983 was the deadline for arms negotiators from the US and the USSR to resolve the SS-20 crisis. If a solution could not be found, then the US would go ahead with the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles. Six months before D-Day, Reagan reiterated that 'zero' was the American stance on European INF weapons, telling reporters that this was a position that would not change following deployment: 'I believe that deploying on schedule, when the time comes later this fall,' he said, 'will be the thing that will bring the Soviets

⁴⁴⁸ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 50.

legitimately into negotiations.’⁴⁴⁹ Though at times hopelessly idealistic, Reagan could also be a clear eyed realist: he understood that the Soviets only negotiated in good faith when confronted with a strategic challenge. If a ‘Zero-Option’ was to be negotiated, then Reagan would first have to deploy the weapons. And deploy he did.

Despite massive protests and widespread anxiety that deployment would produce a heightened risk of nuclear confrontation between the Superpowers, President Reagan was single-minded in his determination to match the INF threat posed by the Soviets with his own counter-threat. ‘Peace through Strength’ meant that deterrence had to be achieved. When the deadline came, Reagan was not about to allow a further delay: he gave the go-ahead for deployment to begin. In response, the Soviets made good on their pledge, and dramatically walked out on the Geneva Arms Talks on 23 November 1983, saying that ‘no date’ had been set for their resumption.⁴⁵⁰ Throughout the world an amplified feeling of fear was palpable, as many believed that the likelihood of a nuclear conflict between the Superpowers was at its greatest since the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, Reagan took the opportunity to again paint America as the crusader for peace and arms reduction.

Following the NATO deployment of INF weapons in November 1983 and the cancellation of Superpower arms talks, President Reagan made an impassioned plea for the Soviets to join him in the cause of nuclear arms reduction. Instead of reproaching the Soviets for their refusal to take seriously the ‘Zero-Option’, or glorifying his own resolve in going ahead with the threatened deployment, on the morning of the Soviet walkout, Reagan chose instead to

⁴⁴⁹ ‘Interview With Foreign Television Journalists’, 26 May 1983; *PPPR*.

⁴⁵⁰ ‘Soviet Break Off Parley in Geneva on Nuclear Arms’, *The New York Times*, 24 November 1983.

take the tone of the humble peacemaker. Rejecting what he called ‘false pride’ on behalf of the American delegation, Reagan told the White House press corps:

I don’t think that I’m surprised by what they did this morning, but I am disappointed. And I can’t believe that it’s going to be permanent. We’ll be ready to continue negotiations at any time that they want to come back....We will do everything that we can to bring them back.⁴⁵¹

The formal statement from the White House that day read:

The United States will never walk away from the negotiating table. Peace is too important...We have no higher priority than the reduction of nuclear weapons...The people of the world deserve and want our negotiations to succeed. We look forward to the day when the Soviet Union hears their call and returns to the INF negotiating table.⁴⁵²

Many considered Reagan’s words, and the White House statement, to be merely a ‘performance’ aimed at blunting criticism for their provocative deployment of INF weapons on the doorstep of the USSR, while hardliners applauded his actions. Deterrent capability was being achieved, the nuclear imbalance was being addressed and the Soviet Union was being put in its place.⁴⁵³ Reagan agreed with those latter sentiments, but for him it was a necessary evil that he did not enjoy. The President seemingly was genuinely dedicated to achieving zero INF weapons in Europe as he continued to insist that America’s position had not changed; the US was willing to

⁴⁵¹Reagan at South Portico of White House’, 23 November 1983; *PPPR*.

⁴⁵²White House Statement on Soviet Withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Negotiations’, 23 November 23, 1983, *Ibid*.

⁴⁵³ According to Jay Winik, on the day of the deployment Perle was seen with a ‘smile’ on his face, as others popped open a bottle of Champaign, *On the Brink*, p. 294 In an interview with the author, Perle said of Winik’s account, ‘I don’t recall that, but I was certainly very pleased that deployment went forward. Not because I liked the weapons but because failure to deploy would have been such a catastrophe for NATO. So this was a hurdle that we had to surmount.’ 15 November 2007, Chevy Chase, Maryland. See Appendix C.

codify with the USSR the total dismantling of the nuclear weapons in question. In the face of harsh Soviet criticism, Reagan remained steadfast.

From the time of the INF deployment to the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev as Soviet leader, President Reagan continued to push for the ‘Zero-Option’. As mentioned in Chapter 2, on 16 January 1984, Reagan astounded many commentators by an apparent reversal in US foreign policy concerning the Soviets when he gave a speech that emphasized the importance of dialogue. One of the issues raised in the speech was the INF ‘Zero-Option’, which Reagan linked to his detestation of nuclear weapons:

A nuclear conflict could well be mankind's last. And that is why I proposed over 2 years ago the Zero-Option for intermediate-range missiles. *Our aim was and continues to be to eliminate an entire class of nuclear arms. Indeed, I support a Zero-Option for all nuclear arms. As I've said before, my dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the Earth.*⁴⁵⁴ (Emphasis added).

However, despite this ‘olive-branch’ extended to the Soviet leadership, Reagan received a brusque letter from Soviet leader Andropov on 28 January 1984 which said:

If one must state today that the *affairs between our two countries are taking on, to put it frankly, an extremely unfavorable shape*, then the reason for it is not our policy—we did not and do not want it to be so... *We are prepared to accept very deep reductions both of the strategic and European weapons... However, the United States has destroyed the very basis on which it was possible to seek an agreement...* Let us be frank, Mr. President, there is no way of making things look as if nothing happened. There has been a disruption of the dialogue on the most important questions. *A heavy blow has been dealt to the very process of nuclear arms limitation.*⁴⁵⁵ (Emphasis added).

⁴⁵⁴ ‘Address to the Nation and other countries on US-Soviet Relations’, 16 January 1984, *PPPR*.

⁴⁵⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.592.

Within two weeks of this letter, Andropov was dead. But did this represent an opportunity for a ‘fresh start’ with his successor, Konstantin Chernenko? In his Saturday radio address on 11 February, Reagan again asked the Soviets to return to the arms negotiation table, saying:

*America is ready. We would welcome negotiations. And I repeat today what I've said before: We're prepared to meet the Soviets halfway in the search for mutually acceptable agreements. I hope the leaders of the Soviet Union will work with us in that same spirit. I invite them to take advantage of the opportunities at hand to establish a more stable and constructive relationship. If the Soviet government wants peace, then there will be peace.*⁴⁵⁶ (Emphasis added).

In his diary, Reagan wrote of his aspiration to meet with the new Soviet leader and ‘talk to him about our problems man-to-man and see if I could convince him there would be a material benefit to the Soviet’s if they would join the family of nations’.⁴⁵⁷ However, on the very next day, 23 February, Reagan was bitterly disappointed when he received a letter from Chernenko which said:

I would like, Mr. President, that you and I have a clear understanding from the very beginning on the central matter of the relations between the USSR and the USA. *We are convinced that it is impossible to begin to correct the present abnormal, and, let's face it, dangerous situation and to speak seriously of constructive moves, if there is a continuation of attempts to upset the balance of forces and gain military advantages to the detriment of the security of the other side...*⁴⁵⁸ (Emphasis added).

⁴⁵⁶ ‘Radio address on US/Soviet relations’, 11 Feb. 1984, *PPPR*.

⁴⁵⁷ Diary entry for 22 February 1984:, Reagan, *The Reagan's Diaries*, p. 220

⁴⁵⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 593.

Meanwhile, the Soviets continued in their attempt to drive a wedge between the US and its European allies, and on 4 May Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi suggested a halt in INF deployments if the Soviets resumed negotiations. Reagan was opposed to giving into Soviet threats, and wrote the Italian PM, opposing what Shultz called a ‘significant break without any consultation with our NATO position’.⁴⁵⁹ The Dutch coalition government, similarly, decided to delay a vote on INF deployment when the realization occurred that there were not enough votes to approve the action at that time.

Relations had stalled, and Reagan was convinced that the Soviets were attempting to sabotage his chances of re-election by rebuffing his every move towards them. As Reagan noted in his diary after reading a harsh letter from Chernenko: ‘They are going to be cold and stiff for awhile. But we must not become supplicants. We’re trying to get agreement on a few lesser matters’.⁴⁶⁰ But Chernenko understood that he could not continue being obstinate forever, and he reached two critical conclusions that permitted the resumption of the Geneva Arms Talks. First was the realization that, barring a miracle, Reagan would be overwhelmingly re-elected President over Walter Mondale in 1984. The second was that Andropov’s position that the US would first have to remove its INF weapons as an ‘entry fee’ into negotiations was simply never going to happen.⁴⁶¹ As such, in 1984 the Soviets slowly moved towards Reagan’s position.

The Soviet strategy during the first half of 1984 had been to paint Reagan as a leader in the mold of Hitler, who would bring about a nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union if he were re-elected president. Was this merely character assassination, or did the Soviets actually

⁴⁵⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p.475

⁴⁶⁰ Diary entry for 23 March, 1984: Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 227.

⁴⁶¹ Dusko Doder and Louise Branson, *Gorbachev: Heretic in the Kremlin*, pp 111-112.

fear a second Reagan term? Whatever their motivations, it was a stratagem that was counterproductive. Therefore, in August of that year, Secretary Shultz began to receive ‘feelers’ from the Soviet foreign ministry that Andrei Gromyko wished to meet with Reagan during his trip to New York in September for the opening of the UN. Such diplomatic visits had been standard practice prior to the invasion of Afghanistan, after which such meetings had been cancelled. When Shultz raised the possibility of a Reagan/Gromyko Summit and warned that it would take place without any change regarding Afghanistan, Reagan dismissed concerns and said, ‘It’s the right thing to do. Try to work it out’.⁴⁶² Reagan recorded his reasoning for approving the meeting in his diary on 28 July 1984:

I lunched with Bud [McFarlane] and George S[hultz] & we looked at the Soviets from several directions. *I approved asking Gromyko to the W.H* if he comes as he usually does to N.Y for the U.N General Assembly opening.

*I have a feeling we’ll get nowhere with arms reductions while they are suspicious of our motives as we are of theirs. I believe we need a meeting to see if we can’t make them understand we have no designs on them but think they have designs on us. If we could once clear the air maybe reducing arms wouldn’t look so impossible to them.*⁴⁶³ (Emphasis added).

The meeting took place on 28 September 1984, with a full flurry of media attention. Reagan tackled the issue of nuclear arms reduction talks, and proposed a formula that would include both defensive and offensive technologies. Gromyko spoke of the dangers of each Superpower sitting on a mountain of weapons, and surprised Reagan by saying that the Soviet Union wished to

⁴⁶² Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p.480.

⁴⁶³ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 259.

reduce their numbers. Reagan responded to this by saying, 'My dream is for a world where there are no nuclear weapons'.⁴⁶⁴

The Reagan/Gromyko mini-summit broke the ice, and paved the way for a full resumption of nuclear arms reduction talks. Eleven days after Reagan's triumphant re-election, on 17 November, the Soviets agreed to a resumption of arms reduction talks. A letter from Chernenko arrived which said, 'We are prepared to seek most radical solutions which would allow movement toward a complete ban and eventually liquidation of nuclear arms'.⁴⁶⁵ Announced publicly on 22 November, Thanksgiving Day, it was a victory for Reagan personally, and proof that the Soviet Union felt it needed to reign-in America's re-armament program. For Shultz, it was a sign that 'we were smack in the middle of what was ever more clearly shaping up to be the endgame of the Cold War'.⁴⁶⁶ However, there was still a long way to go.

On 8 January 1985 Secretary Shultz and Foreign Minister Gromyko met in Geneva and agreed to the terms of the resumed arms control talks. Firstly, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) would not be the sole point of discussion, as the Soviets had originally wished. And secondly, the United States was not required to remove their INF missiles or even halt further deployments as an entry fee for negotiations. Instead, the talks would proceed looking at so called 'strategic' weapons (long range, ICBM missiles), short range missiles (INF), and 'space

⁴⁶⁴Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 484.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.500.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 501.

weaponry' (meaning SDI). On 22 January, one day after his second inauguration,⁴⁶⁷ Reagan met with his arms control negotiators, and released a statement to the world which said:

I view the negotiating commitments we undertook two weeks ago with the Soviets in Geneva with the utmost seriousness. *I have no more important goal than reducing, and ultimately, eliminating nuclear weapons...*I look forward to working closely with our negotiating team in the months ahead.⁴⁶⁸ (Emphasis added).

And Reagan did work closely with his arms negotiators, pushing them towards an agreement that would see massive reductions in nuclear armaments, with the eventual goal of total elimination.

As Reagan recorded in his diary about a meeting held on 4 March 1985:

We had an NSC meeting with our arms talks leaders looking at various options for how we wanted to deal with the Soviets. It's a very complicated business. *I urged one decision on them—that we open talks with a concession. Surprise! Since they have publicly stated they want to see nuclear weapons eliminated entirely, I told our people to open by saying we would accept their goal.*⁴⁶⁹ (Emphasis added).

The talks scheduled for 12 March, however, were disrupted when the Soviet leader Chernenko, after a long illness, died on 11 March. Seizing the initiative of yet another change in leadership, Reagan immediately wrote to the new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, and proposed a Superpower Summit to be held in Washington 'at your earliest convenient opportunity'.⁴⁷⁰ Gorbachev replied

⁴⁶⁷ As 20 January 1984 fell on a Sunday, Reagan had a private swearing in at the White House. The following day Reagan had the public swearing in and inaugural address, albeit inside the Capitol Rotunda due to the freezing conditions outside.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Statement on the Soviet-United States Nuclear and Space Arms Negotiations', 22 January 1985; *PPPR*.

⁴⁶⁹ Diary entry for 4 March, 1985; Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 305.

⁴⁷⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 612

on 24 March, agreeing to a Summit, ‘the question of the place and time’ left for further discussions. The letter was largely philosophical, with an emphasis on letting each social system exist undisturbed, but Gorbachev did note that in terms of the Superpower dialogue, ‘the central priority area is that of security’. Addressing the Geneva arms reduction talks directly, Gorbachev wrote:

The negotiations under way in Geneva require the foremost attention of the two of us. Obviously we will have to turn again and again to the questions under discussion there. At this point I do not intend to comment on what is going on at the talks—they have just started. I shall say though, that some statements which were made and are being made in your country will, with regard to the talks, cause concern. I would like you to know and appreciate the seriousness of our approach to the negotiations, our firm desire to work though positive results there. We will invariably adhere to the agreement on the subject and objectives of those negotiations. The fact that we were able to agree on this in January is already a big achievement and it should be treated with care.⁴⁷¹

Gorbachev’s conciliatory tone was not to last, however. In June he sent Reagan a letter calling for a complete halt on SDI research in addition to a total moratorium on nuclear weapons testing. It was a deft propaganda move: the Soviets had just completed their round of nuclear testing, and the Americans were just beginning a new round of theirs. Gorbachev was going to be a wily opponent, confirming what Reagan had written in his diary in April: ‘I believe that Gorbachev will be as tough as any of their leaders. If he wasn’t a confirmed ideologue he never would have been chosen by the Politburo.’⁴⁷² In July Gorbachev stepped up the pressure all the more, condemning Reagan’s qualified support for the SALT II Treaty, and lambasting the INF deployment. He wrote:

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. p. 614.

⁴⁷² Diary entry for 19 April 1985, Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p.317.

The US deployment in Western Europe of new missile systems designed to perform strategic missions is a clear circumvention, that is, noncompliance by the American side with regard to the SALT II treaty. In this, Mr. President, we see an attempt by the United States to gain a virtual monopoly on the use of weapons in a situation for which our country has no analogs.⁴⁷³

It was a strange thing for Gorbachev to say, considering that the NATO deployment was in response to the Soviet SS-20 deployment, and thus a very strong analogy did in fact exist. Gorbachev also demanded a complete halt of the ‘Star Wars program’ which he said was ‘destabilizing’, ‘dangerous’ and if ‘not corrected’ would be met with a militant Soviet response: ‘We shall have no choice but to take steps required by our security and that of our allies’, he said. Gorbachev also claimed to have an insight into Reagan’s strategy, saying:

Why mince words, the objective is quite different: to cast aspersions on the policy of the Soviet Union in general, to sow distrust towards it and to create an artificial pretext for an accelerated and uncontrolled arms race. All this became evident to us long ago.⁴⁷⁴

The letter from Gorbachev might have been viewed as a new freeze in the Cold War, had it not also included a major diplomatic breakthrough: his agreement to a Superpower Summit, to be held in Geneva in November 1985.

⁴⁷³ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 621.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 622.

Negotiating Positions Leading up to Geneva

The lead-up to the Geneva Summit confirmed that Gorbachev was serious about changing his country's foreign policy towards the West, however his positions remained flawed in that they were generally one-sided and self-serving.

The major change began with the announcement on 5 July 1985 that the Soviet foreign policy establishment was to receive a major shakeup: Andrei Gromyko, who had been foreign minister for decades, was appointed to the ceremonial post of President of the USSR (as he had wanted), and Eduard Shevardnadze replaced him as the Foreign Affairs minister (an outcome that Gromyko had not anticipated).⁴⁷⁵ Shevardnadze's appointment, a man who had nil experience in international relations, was a sign that Gorbachev planned on being his own Foreign Affairs minister.⁴⁷⁶ When Shevardnadze came to the White House on 27 September 1985, he had brought with him the Soviet position paper for the upcoming arms control negotiations.

Gorbachev's proposal to Reagan on nuclear arms reduction constituted a breakthrough in that it was the first time that the Soviets spoke about nuclear arms *reduction* and not just *limitation*. But as the saying goes, 'the devil was in the details'. The Soviet's proposed a 50% reduction of 'offensive strategic weapons to a level of 6,000 charges', and defined this as an explosive weapon that would hit the territory of the other side. As Shultz informed the President,

⁴⁷⁵ Shevardnadze said that his appointment as Soviet Foreign Minister was 'the greatest surprise of my life', as quoted in Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 119.

⁴⁷⁶ Serge Schmenann accurately wrote at the time that Gromyko's 'promotion' was Gorbachev's attempt to take control of foreign policy, further evidenced by the appointment of Shevardnadze, 'a novice he was expected to be an executioner of Gorbachev's policies rather than the formulator of his own'. See his article, 'Having it His Way: Gorbachev Shakes Up the Kremlin and Sets A Date With Reagan', *The New York Times*, 7 July 1985.

the proposal 'was clever' but was 'weighted heavily' against the United States. As Shultz explained in his memoirs:

The 6,000 charges would include the intermediate-range missiles we had deployed in Europe but not Soviet missiles of similar range, since these would hit our allies, not the United States. It would cover all such weapons on carriers at sea, but the Soviets had no carriers. Our bomber weapons would be covered, but the Soviets had relatively few of these weapons. It would ban our Midgetman but permit the Soviets SS-24s and SS-25s. The 6,000 limit would not touch 70 percent of the Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles.⁴⁷⁷

Reagan was still suspicious of the Soviets, and wrote of his meeting with Shevardnadze in his diary:

He's a personable fellow, but we had our differences. My goal was to send him back to Gorbachev with a message that I really meant 'arms reductions' and I wasn't interested in any détente nonsense. For the 1st time they talked of real verification measures.⁴⁷⁸

What Shultz took away from the proposal was that it did include the arms reductions goal that Reagan insisted upon, even if 'the specifics were not remotely acceptable'.⁴⁷⁹ As such, it was a breakthrough in terms of principle that could be worked on at the Geneva Summit.

In the meantime, Reagan replied to Gorbachev with his own counter-proposal. On 31 October, the President wrote to Gorbachev laying out his negotiating position. On the 50% reduction of strategic weapons, Reagan stated that his government 'agrees with the objective'. But, he said: 'Our proposal builds on this, applying the fifty per cent principle in a manner that is

⁴⁷⁷ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, pp.576-77.

⁴⁷⁸ Reagan, Diary entry for 27 September 1985, *The Reagan Diaries*, p.356.

⁴⁷⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p.557.

both equitable and can enhance stability.’ On INF, Reagan said: ‘I continue to firmly believe that the best outcome would be the complete elimination of intermediate range missiles on both sides,’ but he mentioned that he was willing to negotiate how that would be accomplished. Reagan ended his letter by saying that he was ‘looking forward’ to his meeting with Gorbachev in the hope that it would ‘be able to set our countries on a less confrontational and more cooperative course in the years ahead’.⁴⁸⁰

The Geneva Summit: 50% Reduction Agreed To

The Geneva Summit of 1985 saw, for the first time in the history of the Cold War, a real dialogue between the Superpowers on the issue of nuclear arms reduction. It began on the morning of 19 November and lasted three days. Those three days were a turning point in the Reagan presidency, and the beginning of real progress to halt the arms race and reduce the stockpile of nuclear weapons of both Superpowers.

Reading the transcripts of the Geneva Summit, it is clear that nuclear arms reduction was an issue of utmost importance, with Gorbachev interested in the mechanics of arms control, while Reagan took a more philosophical approach. It was Gorbachev, in the first plenary meeting, who turned to the specifics of arms reduction. As the ‘Memcons’ record for the ‘Plenary Session’ of ‘11:27AM-12:15pm’, Gorbachev concluded his ‘overview of the world’s situation’ by saying:

...the Soviet Union believes that the central question is how to halt the arms race and to disarm. For their part the Soviet Union would not put forward proposals

⁴⁸⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, pp. 630-31.

which would be detrimental to the United States. They are for equal security. If anything detrimental to the United States was proposed, this would not be acceptable to the Soviet Union because it would not make for stability. The Soviet Union has no ulterior motives. What the President said about equal security, no superiority and movement toward halting the arms race were the conditions for building a cooperative relationship.⁴⁸¹

Reagan began his reply by noting again that ‘if the two sides are to get down to reducing the mountains of weapons, that both must get at the cause of the distrust which had led to them.’⁴⁸²

The ‘Memcons’ report that the President continued:

...This is the first time that the United States is seeking with the Soviet Union *to actually reduce the mountains of these weapons*. The other meetings, 18 so far, *merely addressed regulating the increase in these weapons*. In 1980 the President had said he could not support this approach. He would *stay as long as needed with the policy of insisting on reductions*.⁴⁸³ (Emphasis added).

Reagan then returned to the issue of who was to blame for the arms race, and pointed the finger squarely at the Russians who had spoken of ‘a one world communist state’ and had further increased tensions by ‘inspiring revolutions around the world’. Reagan also pointed out that the Soviet military capability was superior to that of America, being ‘the largest in history’. And so, the matter again rested on ‘trust’, for:

If the two sides just get in bargaining over a particular type of weapon we will just go on trying to keep advantages. But if we can go on the basis of trust, then those

⁴⁸¹ Plenary Session, 19 November 1985, 11:27am-12:15pm; Executive Sec. National Security System Files, Box 45, RPL, p.5.

⁴⁸² Ibid.,p. 6.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

mountains of weapons will disappear quickly as we will be confident that they are not needed.⁴⁸⁴

Reagan was doing what he did best: leaving the details aside and sticking to the big picture. ‘We don’t mistrust each other because we are armed,’ he said to Gorbachev, ‘we are armed because we mistrust each other. It’s fine that the two of us and our people are talking about arms reductions, but isn’t it also important that you and I should be talking about how we could reduce the mistrust between us?’⁴⁸⁵

Geneva: The Second Plenary Meeting

Gorbachev, during the second plenary meeting of the Geneva Summit, rejected Reagan’s charge that the USSR enjoyed a nuclear superiority and called for a reduction of each nation’s respective stockpiles. Calling attention to the fact that in the 1960s the US enjoyed ‘four times as many strategic delivery systems’ than the USSR, he said it was natural that they took steps to ‘establish parity’. And that level of parity, he said, still existed as the ‘ISS in London’ had concluded. But, Gorbachev elaborated:

[The] Soviet Union wants parity at a lower level. We are for equal security and agreed to embark upon the negotiations in Geneva. We must meet each other half way if we are to find a way to reduce strategic weapons. We know the US can meet any challenge from us and we can meet any challenge from you. But why not make a step which would permit lowering the arms level?⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., p.7.

⁴⁸⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.13.

⁴⁸⁶ ‘Second Plenary Meeting 19 November, 1985’, Executive Sec. National Security System Files, Box 45, *RPL*, p.2.

However, Gorbachev made clear that any possible reduction of nuclear weapons was contingent upon the US agreeing to a total cessation of the SDI program. ‘If the US embarks on SDI,’ Gorbachev said, then there would be ‘no reduction of offensive weapons’.⁴⁸⁷

Reagan’s remarks following those of Gorbachev spelt out the difference of opinion regarding various regional conflicts, and the President said that SDI should not be a hindrance to negotiating arms reductions. When Gorbachev asked what they should instruct their arms negotiators to achieve, Reagan responded by saying ‘that they could be given guidelines to reduce nuclear weapons, say, by 50%.’⁴⁸⁸ But neither side was budging on the issue of SDI.

In the private one-on-one meeting that followed immediately after, Gorbachev again argued that the US must halt a new ‘arms race in a new sphere’ with a declaration that ‘both countries would refrain from research, development, testing and deployment of space weapons and that such an agreement would be subject to appropriate verification’.⁴⁸⁹ Reagan pointed out that any possible SDI program ‘was not yet known, and that if it were known, it would still be years away.’ Reagan then asked, ‘Why then should we sit here in the meanwhile with mountains of weapons on each side?’⁴⁹⁰ Agreement on SDI would not be made at the Geneva Summit, but the two Superpowers did commit themselves to nuclear arms reduction. As the Joint Soviet--American statement at the conclusion of the Summit read:

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., p.3.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p.5.

⁴⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation: Reagan-Gorbachev Afternoon Tete-a-Tete, November 19, 1985; 3:40PM-4:45PM; Pool House at Fleur d’Eau, Versoix, Switzerland’, Executive Sec. National Security System Files, Box 45. p.4, *RPL*.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

Noting the proposals recently tabled by the US and the Soviet Union, they called for early progress, in particular in areas where there is common ground, *including the principle of 50% reductions in the nuclear arms of the US and the USSR appropriately applied*, as well as the idea of an interim INF agreement.⁴⁹¹ (Emphasis added).

In Reagan's remarks to the world's media following the release of this statement, he said that 'the real report card on Geneva will not come in for months or even years, but we know the questions must be answered'.⁴⁹² In particular, Reagan asked, 'Will we join together in sharply reducing offensive nuclear arms and moving to non-nuclear defensive strengths for systems to make this a safer world?'⁴⁹³ The answer was 'yes'—but Geneva was only a beginning, and there were 'many miles to go'.

Climbing to another Summit: 1986

Despite the goodwill and high expectations generated by the Geneva Summit, relations between the Superpowers remained somewhat rocky in 1986, and no movement was made in agreements on nuclear arms reductions. It seemed to some commentators that each side was 'playing to the crowd', making bold statements and even bolder proposals, but what was lacking was a sincere effort to find an agreement that was mutually acceptable.

The propaganda moves began in earnest in January 1986 when Gorbachev announced publicly a three-tiered proposal that included the elimination all INF weapons in Europe, an end

⁴⁹¹ 'Joint Soviet-United States Statement on the Summit Meeting in Geneva', 21 November 1985; *PPPR*.

⁴⁹² 'Remarks on Issuing the Joint Soviet-United States Statement on the Summit Meeting in Geneva' 21 November 1985; *PPPR*.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

to nuclear testing, and the complete abolition of all nuclear weapons by the year 1999.⁴⁹⁴ Reagan resented how his 'Zero-Option' was made to appear as though it were a 'Soviet idea' and the fact that the media was all abuzz about Gorbachev's nuclear abolitionism further incensed the President, as he had been saying the same thing for years. As a consequence, the White House released a statement pointing out that Reagan had proposed this radical idea before Gorbachev. Speaking in the President's name, it began: 'In 1983 at the Japanese Diet, *I called for the total abolition of nuclear weapons.*' The second paragraph began: 'Now *the Soviet Union has responded* with a proposal which builds on some of the elements *we had previously set forth.*' (Emphasis added).⁴⁹⁵

It was, in Reagan's view 'one hell of a propaganda move' as he recorded in his diary,⁴⁹⁶ a conclusion also reached by many of his team since Gorbachev had violated the 'private channel' between himself and the President by making the proposals public. Evidence today reflects that Reagan and his team were correct in their analysis, as William D Jackson observes:

Highly doubtful that the Reagan administration would fundamentally alter its policies toward the Soviet Union, Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership were inclined to pursue a diplomatic strategy that discounted the prospects of reestablishing a detente relationship with the hardline Reagan administration. They sought to isolate the Reagan administration and thereby increase pressure on it to alter its policies by enticing Western Europe with bold new disarmament proposals...By demonstrating a willingness to make concessions in the name of peace, the Soviet Union would improve its own image and at the same time escalate international and domestic opposition to the Reagan administration's own military build-up.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ 'Gorbachev Offers to Scrap A-Arms in 15 years' 16 January 1986, *The New York Times*.

⁴⁹⁵ 'Statement on the Soviet Proposal on Nuclear and Space Arms Reductions', 15 January 1986, *PPPR*.

⁴⁹⁶ Entry for 15 January 1986, Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 383.

⁴⁹⁷ William D. Jackson, 'Soviet reassessment of Ronald Reagan, 1985-1988', *Political Science Quarterly*, (New York: Winter, 1998/1999), Vol.113, Iss.4, p. 617.

Nonetheless, while Reagan believed Gorbachev's motives to be questionable, he forbade his Administration to voice their misgivings publicly, as his diary records on 4 February 1986:

NSPG time in the situation room re: Gorbachev's proposal to eliminate nuclear arms. Some wanted to tag it as a publicity stunt. *I said no. Let's say we share their overall goals and now want to work out the details.* If it is a publicity stunt this will be revealed by them.⁴⁹⁸ (Emphasis added).

Reagan also privately asked: 'Why wait until 2000?' to abolish nuclear weapons.⁴⁹⁹ The Administration, however, was in near mutiny, with the National Security Agency, the State Department and the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff aghast at the concept of a world without nuclear weapons. However, Reagan had a firm ally in his Secretary of State, George Shultz, who enforced the President's decision to forward a counterproposal to Gorbachev that shared the same goals.

Leading up to the Reykjavik Summit, there was no one person in the Reagan Administration next to the President more responsible for America's nuclear arms reduction policy than George Shultz. Meeting the President in the Oval office on 24 January 1986, he informed him that 'your arms control community disagrees with your desire to get rid of nuclear weapons'. Consequently, Shultz suggested the creation of a 'special group' of experts that could circumvent the 'petrified, stultified, inter-agency process.'⁵⁰⁰ Reagan gave the go ahead, but he did not understand the opposition within his own Administration to the cause of nuclear abolitionism. 'If any nation is likely to conduct a first strike', he said, 'it is the Soviet Union. So

⁴⁹⁸ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p.388.

⁴⁹⁹ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 333.

⁵⁰⁰ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p.703.

why isn't this a problem we want to get rid of?'⁵⁰¹ The major problem was, of course, that the Soviets enjoyed a huge advantage in terms of conventional military power, and the concern was that if each side divested itself of nuclear weaponry, there would be no deterrent to stop Soviet tanks from rolling into Western Europe. When this issue was raised at Shultz's 'special group' meeting, Shultz replied that a 'staged approach' was required that incorporated 'the powerful vision the President has projected'⁵⁰² and would include agreements on conventional weapons reduction down the road. However, forces within the US government were determined to undermine that vision, and Shultz was forced to walk a tightrope between the President's 'idealist' position, and the more 'realist' stance taken by his subordinates.

President Reagan's desire to negotiate a nuclear arms reduction treaty with the USSR was aggressively opposed by members of his own Administration, and it was only the President's and George Shultz's leadership that kept the team in line. Immediately following the beginning of Shultz's 'special group' meetings, 'unnamed sources' began placing calls with the governments of Japan and France, seeking their help in undermining any attempt to negotiate an INF Treaty. Furthermore, the National Security Council draft letter from President Reagan to Gorbachev purposely omitted INF from even being mentioned, despite the fact that Reagan clearly wanted this issue to be 'center-stage' in any upcoming summit. Reagan ordered the NSC letter to be re-written to include INF, and stated that contacts with foreign governments was 'a despicable act', ordering an investigation of the Pentagon and the dismissal of the offender. Weinberger said that he would punish the culprit, but no action was taken.⁵⁰³ Nevertheless, Reagan sent a message to

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid. p.705.

⁵⁰³ At least according to Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p.708.

any would-be saboteur within his government: opposition to his agenda would result in termination of employment. Perhaps Weinberger got the message, because he then proposed a radical arms reduction scheme of his own.

At a special meeting held in the White House ‘Situation Room’ on 12 June 1986, Secretary of Defense Weinberger proposed to the President that the US work towards the total elimination of all ballistic missiles. Shultz, who was present at the meeting with a handful of others, was taken aback by the fact that Weinberger, of all people, was advocating such a proposal. After all, he was the person who had set up obstacles to all of the arms negotiation positions that had been floated prior. But the idea was not Weinberger’s; rather it had originated with Fred Ikle, a Swiss-born arms control expert, who as early as 1973 had voiced his concerns about the dangers of the fast moving missiles in a *Foreign Affairs* article.⁵⁰⁴ Ikle believed that if ballistic missiles were eliminated, then the most dangerous aspect of nuclear weaponry—the ability to strike quickly and without warning—would be removed. He ran the idea past Richard Perle and, finally, Weinberger, who, being convinced of the merits of the argument, brought it to the President.⁵⁰⁵ Reagan, who had been proposing total elimination of all nuclear weapons for quite some time, did not see anything radical in Weinberger’s plan, and his diary account of the meeting does not even mention Weinberger at all. Instead, Reagan recounts how *he* summed up the meeting:

I finally proposed that we offer a reduction of ICBMs and at the same time an agreement that both of us should continue research on a possible defense against them. If and when such tests should indicate such a defense weapon is possible

⁵⁰⁴ Fred Ikle, ‘Can Nuclear Deterrence Last out the Century?’ *Foreign Affairs*, January 1973, Vol. 51, Iss.2, pp.267-285.

⁵⁰⁵ For a detailed account of this, see Dan Obederdofer’s *The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era, the United States and the Soviet Union 1983-1990*, pp.169-174.

both of us observe ‘tests’ and we agree that deployment must follow *the elimination of all ICBMs* and then the defense be made available to all. *I think our team bought it.*⁵⁰⁶ (Emphasis added).

The importance of Weinberger’s proposal, therefore, was not its substance: it was the fact that both the Pentagon and the State Department had finally united behind Reagan’s vision of massive reduction of nuclear armaments. Reagan went with this unity to the Reykjavik Summit ready to make history with Gorbachev.

The Reykjavik Summit: The Most Sweeping Arms Reduction Proposals in History

On 11 October 1986, the two most powerful men in the world sat down face-to-face and began two days of extraordinary discussions; discussions that achieved the basic terms of the INF and START nuclear reduction treaties, and permitted the two Superpower leaders to look beyond the Cold War into a new era where nuclear weapons could be abolished.

The summit took place in Hofdi House, which overlooked the Icelandic ocean, and Reagan and Gorbachev began proceedings seated at a table looking out at the arctic landscape. Apart from interpreters and note-takers, the leaders were alone. The ‘Memcons’ record that the meeting, which began at 10:40am, started with Reagan expressing his pleasure at Gorbachev’s idea for the Summit; Reagan then stated his desire that agreement on reducing the nuclear stockpiles by 50% could be realized, as ‘the world is watching in the hope that this will be

⁵⁰⁶ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, pp.418-419.

achieved.⁵⁰⁷ Gorbachev then began to unveil his new arms reduction proposals, only to be interrupted again by Reagan who said that any treaty must include agreement on ‘effective verification’ and that this, too, ‘would be a great step and the world would applaud.’⁵⁰⁸ After several more exasperating interruptions by the President, Gorbachev decided that it was time to call in Shultz and Shevardnadze.

With the Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister joining them, Gorbachev unveiled the most far reaching arms reduction proposals in history, moving far closer to America’s positions than had ever been anticipated. Firstly, Gorbachev agreed to the 50% reduction of strategic arms first proposed at Geneva, stating that he had ‘taken the US view into account’ and made the ‘concession’ of including only long range missiles.⁵⁰⁹ Secondly, Gorbachev accepted Reagan’s ‘Zero-Option’ for INF weapons in Europe, and dropped the requirement of British and French disarmament. It was a ‘huge compromise’ to the American side, Gorbachev said. The question of medium-range missiles in Asia, Gorbachev continued, should be withdrawn by the American side ‘in [the] spirit of compromise,’ or at least referred to the Geneva arms negotiation teams.⁵¹⁰ Turning to the ABM Treaty, Gorbachev proposed that both sides commit to observe it ‘strictly and in full,’ with a firm agreement of non-withdrawal for a period ‘not less than ten

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Memorandum of Conversation: Reagan-Gorbachev Meeting In Reykjavik: 11 October 1986. 10:40AM-12:30pm’, Executive Sec. National Security System Files, Box 45, p.5 *RPL*.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p.3.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*,p.4.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.

years' during which all SDI testing would be confined to 'laboratories'.⁵¹¹ He added that a moratorium on nuclear testing would follow, and 'on-site' verification was acceptable.⁵¹²

As Gorbachev was unveiling this package, Reagan wondered if the Chernobyl disaster, which had happened in April that year, was behind the Soviets' willingness to offer such far-reaching reductions. After all, the radiation released there was less than the amount that would be emitted by a single nuclear bomb: 'Has Chernobyl made Gorbachev think about the effects of a missile with ten nuclear warheads?' Reagan wondered.⁵¹³ Despite being amazed by the Soviet proposals, Reagan quickly countered.

Reagan was no master of details, but he quickly grasped Gorbachev's sweeping arms reduction proposal and informed the Soviet leader that on INF and SDI, the Soviets' position was unacceptable. Despite Gorbachev's request that the question of INF weapons in Asia be put aside in a 'spirit of compromise', Reagan pointed out that because Soviet INF missiles were mobile, moving them to Asia would make no difference, as their long range capability meant that they could still target Europe.⁵¹⁴ On SDI, Reagan said that a new treaty, one 'which would supersede the ABM Treaty', should be drafted which would permit research and testing 'in the presence of representatives' of each country; and when a system is deployable, then it would be shared with

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.,p.6.

⁵¹³ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 676.

⁵¹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation: Reagan-Gorbachev Meeting In Reykjavik: 11 October 1986. 10:40AM-12:30pm'Executive Sec. National Security System Files, Box 45, p.5 RPL.

each side. ‘The reason for this’, Reagan explained, ‘is that we can’t guarantee in the future that someone—a madman like Hitler, for example—might not try to build nuclear weapons’.⁵¹⁵

Gorbachev was displeased by Reagan’s reply, and said that he ‘hoped that these were preliminary remarks on the President’s part’ and that Reagan and his team would ‘give them appropriate attention.’ In other words, he hoped that Shultz would talk some sense into Reagan. But, while Shultz at one time had lectured Reagan on his failings over the Iran-Contra scandal,⁵¹⁶ when it came to arms control, his approach was always deferential to the President and his position. Reagan was leading the way, and setting the tone. Shultz’s role was to help work out the details. And so he did: as Reagan and Gorbachev slept that night, negotiating teams from both sides began an all-night session that sought to bring the two side’s positions closer together. By morning they were ready for a showdown.

Reykjavik: Day Two

President Reagan and Gorbachev awoke on Sunday 12 October to find that a lot of work was cut out for them: the American and Soviet delegations had failed to reach agreement on INF and ABM during the previous night’s negotiations. Disappointed, the two Superpower leaders sat down with the realization that whatever could be accomplished that day would be up to them.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p.7.

⁵¹⁶ In a meeting held in the private residence of the White House on 20 of November, 1986, Shultz came armed with ‘detailed material on statements the President had made that were wrong’. Shultz further wrote in his memoirs, ‘For nearly an hour I went at it with the President. We argued back and forth, hot and heavy. I never thought I would talk to a President of the United States in such a direct and challenging way’. *Turmoil and Triumph*, p.832. For further information on the Iran-Contra scandal see Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991); Peter Kornbluch and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *The Iran-Contra Scandal: The Declassified History* (New York: New Press, 1993); and Lawrence E. Walsh, *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-up* (New York: W.W Norton, 1997).

Gorbachev began by noting that according to the *Bible*, the world had been created in seven days and Reagan and he were ‘only on their second day’ with a long way to go until they reached the seventh.⁵¹⁷ Reagan replied that the day being Sunday, the two should actually be resting. Gorbachev then gave the floor to Reagan, who gave a ‘run down’ of the American negotiating position for arms reduction.

Reagan began by stating that on START he was ‘proud’ of the agreed 50% reduction in strategic arsenals that had been tabled.⁵¹⁸ On INF, Reagan stated that any agreement had to be ‘global’ in nature, to avoid removing weapons from Europe and re-deploying them to Asia. ‘These were not new arguments’, Reagan remarked, ‘but they were real concerns’ to him and to America’s allies. An interim agreement, perhaps limiting each side to 100 INF weapons on the road to zero, could be accomplished, as a compromise.⁵¹⁹ On ‘defense and space’, Reagan said that he ‘recognized’ that Gorbachev at that time ‘was not prepared to agree with him’, and he informed Gorbachev that he too ‘was not prepared to move from the course that he believed correct’. However, negotiators should be given instructions to investigate how SDI research could proceed under the guidelines of the ‘ABM Treaty’.⁵²⁰ As he listened to Reagan, Gorbachev grew angrier by the second, and when it was his time to talk, Gorbachev ‘let fly’ at the President.

Gorbachev’s response to Reagan’s presentation demonstrated how annoyed he was with the President’s refusal to accept Soviet proposals. He had come to Reykjavik, he said, with proposals that were ‘highly constructive’, both in terms of ‘spirit’ and in terms of details. The

⁵¹⁷Memorandum of Conversation; Sunday, 12 October 1986; 10:00am-1:35pm, Hofdi House, Reykjavik’ Executive Sec. National Security System Files, Box 45, *RPL*.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*,p.3.

USSR, he said, ‘had made real concessions to the US’, seeking ‘conditions for reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons’. But, instead of giving an ‘impulse’ to move the discussions forward, ‘the US was trying to drag things backward’.⁵²¹ Gorbachev reiterated the reason behind the entire meeting, namely that:

The Geneva negotiations prior to the current meeting had reached an impasse. New approaches were needed, as were political will and an ability to think in broad terms, to escape this dead-end. The Soviets had crafted their proposals with this in mind. They had expected the same from the Americans.⁵²²

On INF, Gorbachev rejected an ‘interim agreement’, saying he ‘was not interested in palliatives or make-shift solutions’.⁵²³ When Reagan again explained his misgivings, Gorbachev snapped: ‘It is clear that nothing would come of this discussion!’⁵²⁴

Reagan, seeking to diffuse Gorbachev’s temper, invited him to make some suggestions of his own. Gorbachev replied that Reagan ‘was not at a press conference’ and could therefore stop speaking in ‘banalities’. Instead, he asked that they ‘speak frankly’.⁵²⁵ Reagan replied that the US and the USSR alone were the great nuclear powers, and if they both began ‘the process of reducing their own nuclear forces to zero’, they would then ‘stand shoulder-to-shoulder in telling other nations that they [too] must eliminate their own nuclear weapons.’ Gorbachev agreed, but stated that the opportunity would not last, and that ‘Reykjavik would be simply a memory’.

⁵²¹ Ibid.,p.4.

⁵²² Ibid.,p.5.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., p.6.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., pp.6-7.

Reagan replied by saying that they should therefore use ‘the time available to contribute something to the world—to free the world from the nuclear threat’.⁵²⁶

Placated by Reagan’s display of obvious sincerity to create a world free of nuclear weapons, Gorbachev moved back to INF and said that he was willing to adopt the American position of zero in Europe and a limitation of 100 weapons each in Asia. Reagan replied that he agreed with the proposal that Gorbachev had just described.⁵²⁷ While pleased that the INF issue was thus settled, Gorbachev then pointed out that the USSR had made many concessions throughout the Summit, while the US had made none. On the question of missile defense and the ABM Treaty, therefore, he expected movement.⁵²⁸

Gorbachev’s position on the ABM Treaty and SDI was clear: the Treaty not only had to be maintained, but strengthened, and missile defense technology research had to be confined to the laboratory. If this were to occur, then the elimination of nuclear weapons could proceed over a ten year period. This ‘strengthening’, he said, was to ensure that ‘one side could not act behind the back of the other’.⁵²⁹ Reagan replied that he had no intention of violating the ABM Treaty, but that research had to continue and that this was a position that he would ‘not retreat from’.⁵³⁰ When Secretary Shultz asked for further clarification as to what the Soviet leader meant by ‘strengthening’, Gorbachev elucidated that ‘there could be testing, even mock up’, but that this could not go beyond the framework of laboratory research’. Strangely, Gorbachev said that this

⁵²⁶ Ibid., p.7.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.,p.8.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.,p.9.

requirement would ‘ensure against the appearance of a nuclear madman of the type the President had often mentioned’.⁵³¹

With that, it was Reagan who lost his cool and asked ‘what the hell was it that we were defending’? Stating that he ‘failed to see the magic of the ABM regime, whose only assurance of safety was the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction’, Reagan said that the reduction of nuclear weapons should proceed with a stepped-up research and development program so that ‘the nuclear genie’ would be put ‘back in his bottle’.⁵³² Gorbachev replied that according to an American expression, ‘it takes two to tango’, meaning that the American side had to make concessions, and ‘was the President prepared to dance?’⁵³³ After more debate, each camp agreed to a break as the two teams attempted to bridge the differences on the ABM Treaty.

The Final Showdown

Returning at 3:25pm, President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev sat down for a final showdown, and during the following three and a half hours, had the most extraordinary exchange between two Superpower leaders in the entire history of the Cold War.

Both began by reading their country’s negotiating position, each side noting the difference over one word: laboratory. Reagan said that he had met Gorbachev’s request for a 10 year period, and did not see why it should go beyond that.⁵³⁴ Gorbachev replied that after 10

⁵³¹ Ibid.,p.10.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid.,p.11

⁵³⁴ ‘Memorandum of Conversation; 12 October 1986; 3:25-4:30 and 5:30-6:50pm; Hodfi House, Reykjavik’ Executive Sec. National Security System Files, Box 45, *RPL*.

years America might decide that SDI was not the solution, so he was not about to tie arms reductions to a system that was an unknown quantity. Reagan replied that if both sides had eliminated nuclear weapons, ‘then there was no longer any threat’ so ‘why would there be any concern if one side build a safeguard, a defensive system against non-existent weapons in the case there might be a need for them in the future?’⁵³⁵ Reagan said that in 10 years he would come to Iceland and ‘each of them would bring the last nuclear missile from each country’ and have ‘a tremendous party for the whole world’. Jokingly, Reagan said that he would be so old at that point that Gorbachev would not recognize him, with Reagan saying, ‘Hello, Mikhail’ and Gorbachev responding, ‘Ron, is that you?’⁵³⁶ Gorbachev replied that he did not know if he himself would live that long as he was at the most ‘dangerous’ time period of his life, while Reagan had passed the dangerous point and ‘would live to be 100’. Reagan replied that ‘he wouldn’t live to 100 if he had to worry every day about being hit by a Soviet missile’.⁵³⁷

Gorbachev then reiterated his SDI proposal, saying that it was designed so that there would not be a ‘winner and a loser’, and that the massive reductions proposed were contingent upon agreement in this matter, otherwise ‘there was no package’.⁵³⁸ Reagan again responded that he did not understand opposition to defensive systems if there were to be no nuclear weapons left.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.,p.5.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid; As it turned out, Reagan did not live to be 100, but rather died in 2004 at the age of 93. The oldest elected President in history thus became the longest living President. However, Reagan’s longevity record was broken in 2006 by Gerald R. Ford, who was older by only 45 days at the time of his death. At the time of this writing (2009), Mikhail Gorbachev is 78 years of age: the same age that Reagan turned a month after finishing his presidency.

⁵³⁸ Ibid. p. 6

Bizarrely enough, at this moment Secretary Shultz asked for a clarification on what category of weapons were being discussed under the proposal to eliminate them during the 10-year period. Though intense negotiations had been going on for two days, Shultz was still under the impression that the ‘strategic’ category of weapons discussed only included ballistic missiles, as the Weinberger proposal stated. Gorbachev then replied that all types of weapons were included in this. Dissatisfied with this answer, Shultz asked for a break,⁵³⁹ after which he returned with a proposal that clearly stated that the American side was only talking about ballistic missiles, and not missiles launched by submarines or dropped by planes. When Gorbachev asked where the ‘aircraft are’, and said that the term ‘strategic’ had long included the entire triad of land, sea and air missiles, Reagan replied that he ‘was ready to include all the nuclear weapons we can’. Gorbachev replied, ‘we should use the whole triad’.⁵⁴⁰

After another interjection by Shultz that the American side was only talking about ballistic missiles, Reagan asked whether they would be ‘reducing all nuclear weapons—cruise missiles, battlefield weapons, sub-launched and the like’. Because if they were, then it ‘would be fine with me if we eliminated all nuclear weapons’.

Gorbachev responded in the affirmative saying, ‘We can do that. We can eliminate them.’

Reagan replied immediately, ‘Let’s do it!’⁵⁴¹

Reagan’s dream of a world free of nuclear weapons was within reach. He proposed that the negotiating team should draw up a treaty that would see the total elimination of all nuclear

⁵³⁹ According to the Memcons, this break lasted from between 4:30-5:30pm. Ibid. .p.8.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.,p. 9

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.,p.11

weapons within a 10 year period. Reagan had therefore moved far ahead from his own negotiating team, who had only approved and discussed the eradication of ballistic missiles. However, the possibility of doing away with all nuclear weapons was before him, and he was not about to let the opportunity pass. Seizing the moment, Reagan was proposing something that many of his own experts were unwilling to accept, either then or now.⁵⁴²

Gorbachev then turned to the issue of the ABM Treaty, and Reagan began to implore Gorbachev not to destroy what they had accomplished over one word—‘laboratory’. ‘We have an agreement we can be very proud of,’ he said with emotion.⁵⁴³ When Gorbachev persisted that it ‘was a matter of principle’, Reagan said that he ‘could not give in’, as he had ‘promised the American people’ not to cash-in SDI, and that unlike Gorbachev he had to contend with ‘right wing’ critics back in the US.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² This exchange, between the author and Richard Perle, who was present at the summit, demonstrates that the divide remains:

Perle: “And at Reykjavik he [Reagan] proposed, in terms of serious proposals, not the back and forth talk, he proposed the elimination of offensive ballistic missiles. But he did not put on the table anything in writing that suggested eliminating all nuclear weapons.”

Ryan: “But there is that time when Gorbachev said, ‘Are we talking about everything?’ and Reagan says, ‘Let’s do it’.

Perle: “Yes, but I didn’t take that all that seriously because the work of the negotiators, who picked up after these conversations between the leaders, were focused on a much narrower agenda.” Interview 15 November 2007: Chevy Chase, Maryland. See Appendix C.

⁵⁴³ ‘Memorandum of Conversation; 12 October 1986; 3:25-4:30 and 5:30-6:50pm; Hodfi House, Reykjavik’ Executive Sec. National Security System Files, Box 45, *RPL*.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.13.

Gorbachev said that Reagan was ‘three steps away from becoming a great President’, but if he could not agree to the laboratory limitation, then they ‘could say goodbye, and forget everything they had discussed’ as it was ‘a last opportunity’.⁵⁴⁵

The Soviet foreign minister, Shevardnadze interjected at this point that ‘the two sides were so close to accomplishing a historic task, to decisions of such historic significance, that if future generations read the minutes of these meetings, and saw how close we had come but how we did not use these opportunities, they would never forgive us.’⁵⁴⁶

Reagan then begged Gorbachev twice to do ‘this one thing’ for him, as it was ‘just one word’ and ‘this should not be turned down over a word’.⁵⁴⁷ Gorbachev replied that were it something as simple as asking the USSR to import more grain from America, he might be willing to oblige him, but to proceed with SDI would be to ‘permit the US to destroy the Soviet Union’s offensive nuclear potential’. Therefore, such a favor ‘could not be met’, as it was not a matter of ‘words, but of principle’. Gorbachev made it clear that he was not going to budge and concluded that his ‘conscience was clear’.⁵⁴⁸

With this, Reagan knew that the meeting was over, and passed a note to Shultz asking, ‘Am I wrong?’ Shultz whispered back, ‘No, you are right’.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid. ,p.14.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.,p.15.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

⁵⁴⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*,p.773.

With that, Reagan got up and walked out on Gorbachev. ‘I don’t know what more I could have done’ Gorbachev said as the two reached their limousines, ‘You could have said yes!’ Reagan snapped.

‘Damn it!’ Reagan said as he slumped into the car, ‘we were that close to eliminating all nuclear weapons!’

As Reagan flew home on *Air Force One*, his team of speechwriters were at a loss as to how to explain the President’s stubborn refusal to give up SDI even for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. Shultz had done his best to brief the press earlier, but the disappointment that he expressed, summed up by Sam Donaldson of ABC—‘Shultz looks like his dog has just been run over by a truck’⁵⁵⁰—had only made the PR problem worse. The President sat down and penned out his own thoughts, and summed up the summit by saying: ‘I went to Reykjavik determined that everything was negotiable except two things—our freedom and our future.’ The speechwriters agreed that Reagan was the best writer in the White House. Reagan added that he was ‘still optimistic’ that an agreement could be found and said ‘the door is open, and the opportunity to begin eliminating the nuclear threat is still within reach.’⁵⁵¹ He was not wrong.

⁵⁵⁰ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 353.

⁵⁵¹ ‘Address to the Nation on the Meetings With Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev in Iceland’ 13 October, 1986; *PPPR*. See also Wayne Howell’s examination of Reagan’s post Reykjavik rhetoric in ‘Reagan and Reykjavik: Arms Control, SDI and the Argument from Human Rights’, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, (East Lansing: Fall, 2008), Vol. 11, Iss.3, p.389. Howell argues: ‘The Reykjavik Summit was more than the SDI summit. It was a significant rhetorical event that Reagan exploited to prod Gorbachev toward deeper liberalization and democratization of the Soviet Union.’

Gorbachev Backs Down over SDI: The INF Treaty

Following the disarray of the Reykjavik Summit, two things became crystal clear: firstly, the international community shared none of Reagan and Gorbachev's enthusiasm for abolishing all nuclear weapons⁵⁵² and, secondly, Reagan would never give up SDI under any circumstances.⁵⁵³

Gorbachev therefore had to make a decision: whether to remain obstinate over missile defense and tie all arms reductions to its limitation, or to proceed with nuclear arms reduction and leave the question of SDI aside. With nothing to show for the two summits that had occurred, and fearing the full deployment of INF weapons on the USSR's border, Gorbachev decided to accept President Reagan's 1981 'Zero-Option' without any qualifications.⁵⁵⁴

Gorbachev's acceptance of the American INF proposal was a major victory for President Reagan's Soviet policy. In a letter dated 15 September 1987, Gorbachev wrote the President and accepted the 'Zero-Option', stating:

I think you and I were right when last October we arrived at what was virtually a concurring view that our meeting in Reykjavik had been an important landmark

⁵⁵² Margaret Thatcher, in particular, was aghast at the idea that Reagan had agreed on her nation's behalf to give up all British nuclear weapons—that was taking the NATO alliance simply too far. Similarly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the President in an 27 October 1986 meeting that even the more modest proposal to eliminate all ballistic missiles in 10 years 'would pose high risks to the security of the nation'. According to those present, Reagan ignored this and started to talk about how much he admired the military. 'It was the most incredible thing in my life', Admiral Crowe later said as though Reagan was operating in a dream world; see Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, pp.207-208. Reagan's diary account, however, shows that the President was fully aware of what was said: 'An NSPG meeting on the Iceland arms proposals. The Joint Chiefs wanted reassurances that [we] were aware of the imbalance with the Soviets in conventional arms & how that would be aggravated by reduction in nuclear weapons. We were able to assure them we were very much aware & that this matter would have to be negotiated with the Soviets in any nuclear arms reduction negotiations'. Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 447.

⁵⁵³ Reagan's refusal to give up SDI scored him high points with the American public. A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll gave a 71 percent favorable rating with only 16 percent negative; White House News Summary, 16 October 1986; *RPL*.

⁵⁵⁴ Gorbachev's decision to let SDI go for the moment was helped by an unlikely source—Andrei Sakharov. Sakharov, the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize winner, had been exiled in 1980 for publicly condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Sakharov, restored to a research position in Moscow by Gorbachev, told the Soviet leader that SDI essentially was a 'dog that wouldn't hunt'—as the technology to achieve it simply did not exist.

along the path toward specific and urgently needed measures to *genuinely reduce nuclear arms*....

Today, our two countries stand on the *threshold of an important agreement which would bring about—for the first time in history—an actual reduction in nuclear arsenals*. Nuclear disarmament being the exceptionally complex matter that it is, the important thing is *to take a first step, to clear the psychological barrier which stands between the deeply rooted idea that security hinges on nuclear weapons*.⁵⁵⁵ (Emphasis added).

On 30 October Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze visited the White House and officially announced the INF agreement and the upcoming visit of Mikhail Gorbachev to Washington to sign it. A reporter shouted at Reagan and the foreign minister, ‘Look’s like you’ve won Mr. President. Didn’t you win?’ Reagan replied, ‘There are no winners and losers, yet’.⁵⁵⁶ But it was a major accomplishment for Reagan, which he took personal pride in, telling his Chief of Staff Howard Baker: ‘See, they underestimated me again. They thought that they could persuade me, they could beat me, and by staying the course, I brought Gorbachev and the Soviets to the table. I got the INF Treaty’.⁵⁵⁷ Reagan was very proud of this victory, as evidenced by his words at the signing ceremony at the Washington Summit.

On 8 December 1987, Gorbachev arrived in Washington and signed the INF Treaty, with Reagan making clear that it was a personal triumph for him. After signing the INF Treaty in the East Room of the White House, Gorbachev said that the treaty held ‘universal significance for mankind, both from the standpoint of world politics and from the standpoint of humanism’. He further added that the day would ‘become a date that will be inscribed in the history books, a

⁵⁵⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, pp.687-88.

⁵⁵⁶ ‘Informal Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze’, 30 October 1987; *PPPR*.

⁵⁵⁷ Bosch, *Reagan*, p. 320.

date that will mark the watershed separating the era of a mounting risk of nuclear war from the era of a demilitarization of human life.⁵⁵⁸ Reagan declared in his statement that the ‘ceremony and treaty’ were ‘both excellent examples of patience’, and pointed out that:

It was over 6 years ago, November 18, 1981 that *I first proposed what would come to be called the Zero-Option*. It was a simply proposal—one might say *disarmingly simple*....Unlike treaties in the past, it didn’t simply codify the status quo or a new arms buildup; it didn’t simply talk of controlling an arms race.

*For the first time in history, the language of ‘arms control’ was replaced by ‘arms reduction’—in this case, the complete elimination of an entire class of US and Soviet nuclear missiles.*⁵⁵⁹ (Emphasis added).

President Reagan’s persistence had paid off with the Soviets, and the vision that he had articulated prior to becoming President, had been realized. As Reagan said in the statement above, the treaty that he had helped to negotiate was not yet another arms *limitation* agreement: it was an arms *reduction* accord that actually *eliminated* a weapons system that had seriously destabilized the nuclear equilibrium in Europe. In addition to this, it included on-site verification—something that had never been agreed to before, and something that Reagan had always insisted was mandatory for any treaty. Reagan had been successful in achieving an INF Treaty, but finalizing a START accord proved beyond his reach.

⁵⁵⁸ ‘Remarks on Signing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty’, 8 December 1987; *PPPR*.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The START Treaties

Reagan had wished to stay on as President into a third term, but the 22nd amendment to the Constitution made that an impossibility. Not only did the President feel that he needed another four years to fully enact his ‘Reagan Revolution’ domestically, but he felt that the process he had begun with Gorbachev was unfinished and needed completion. In particular, Reagan sought to finalize a follow up treaty to the INF, the so called START Treaty.

At the Washington Summit of 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev attempted to bridge the gap over START, but each fell back into the same arguments. Gorbachev, again, wanted the US to begin making concessions in his direction. He had folded on INF, and as he explained to Reagan, that had not been an easy task. He said:

The Supreme Soviet is even larger than the [US] Senate...2,000 members...It [raised] many questions. There was the question of why the Soviets had been so generous towards the Americans. They were eliminating four times as many missiles [in the INF Treaty]...It was not easy to make the first step towards disarmament. People asked how it was possible to have disarmament with the US when the Soviet Union was ringed by US bases. People asked how Gorbachev could bow down to the US.⁵⁶⁰

This time Gorbachev wanted Reagan to bow to him, and again, it surrounded Gorbachev’s desire to ‘strengthen’ the ABM Treaty. Again, SDI was holding them back. Reagan replied: ‘It would be better not to link the two concepts. One issue [START] should not be made hostage to the other [ABM]’. Gorbachev replied that a ‘ten year non-withdrawal’ agreement on ABM should proceed, and that Reagan should stop trying to make things ‘foggy’. Reagan began to lose his cool, as the Memcons record:

⁵⁶⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, White House Staff and Office Files: Executive Secretariat, NSC System files: 8791377. RPL.

The President replied (with some feeling) that it was not he who was making things ‘foggy’. He wanted to make things clear. He did not want to talk about links to SDI, about 50 percent reductions, about how the hell the two sides were to eliminate half their nuclear weapons. He wanted to talk about how the two leaders could sign an agreement like the one they had signed the day before—an agreement that made everyone in the world so damned happy it could be felt in the room at dinner the night before. ‘Let’s get started.’⁵⁶¹

Gorbachev said that he was ‘ready’. Shultz interjected that they agreed with a 10 year adherence to the ABM Treaty, but that what was permitted during that period, in terms of research and testing, needed to be worked out. ‘Good’, Gorbachev said, ‘[This] was a good conversation.’⁵⁶² Gorbachev obviously enjoyed sparing with the ‘old lion’ as a Russian note-taker called Reagan.⁵⁶³ Nonetheless, START was not worked out in Washington.

In his State of the Union address of 1988 President Reagan said: ‘We’re within reach of an even more significant START agreement that will reduce U.S. and Soviet long-range missiles—our strategic arsenals by half’.⁵⁶⁴ But it proved to be unattainable for Reagan, as he simply did not have enough time. Reagan and Gorbachev spent much of the Moscow Summit (1988) attempting to bridge the gap between each nation’s positions on START, but arms control being the arcane subject that it is, and the proposed treaty being far more complicated than the INF Treaty, neither was able to accomplish this goal. It would be up to Reagan’s successor, President George H.W Bush, to complete the START talks and sign the START Treaties.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ A Soviet note-taker at the summit shared with ambassador Jack Matlock that Reagan reminded him of an ‘old lion: lazily watching an antelope on the horizon, taking no interest, dozing a bit. He doesn’t move when the antelope stops only ten feet away, that’s too far. At eight feet, the lion suddenly comes to life!—Reagan, the negotiator, suddenly fills the room.’ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p.333.

⁵⁶⁴ ‘Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union’, 25 January 1988, *PPPR*.

When President Bush signed the START I and II Treaties with the Russian leadership, he was finalizing agreements that had been settled in principle by Reagan and Gorbachev several years earlier. START I, signed in Moscow by Bush and Gorbachev on 31 July 1991, and START II, signed by Bush and Boris Yeltsin on 3 January 1993, represented the most extensive arms control treaties in history. START I was successfully implemented, resulting in the standing down and destruction of half of America's and the USSR's (later Russia's) nuclear weapons. START II, however, which furthered reductions, stalled throughout the 1990s and was retired by Russia in light of the 2001 American withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. President George W. Bush's desire to pursue missile defense deployment was as unpopular with President Putin as it had been with Gorbachev; demonstrating that for all the radical changes in world affairs since the 1980s, some things never changed. The Reagan legacy, both in terms of arms reduction and the Strategic Defense Initiative, therefore, continues to reverberate two decades after his last year in office.

Conclusion

Returning to the central question of this thesis, *Reagan's role in the formulation and execution of American Soviet policy*, this chapter demonstrates that Reagan, to a surprising degree, was very much involved in the implementation of his views on arms control. As the preceding chapter detailed, Reagan was opposed to a mere limitation of the arms race, wanting instead to reduce stockpiles, and his ultimate objective, which became clearer as the years of his presidency unfolded, was for a world without nuclear weapons. It was on this basis that Reagan oversaw the

his arms negotiating team, giving them clear guidelines, choosing sides on debates, and in the setting of the Superpower summits, arguing forcefully and making the final decisions.

Reagan made perfectly clear from the outset of his Administration that he would push the Soviets for actual nuclear arms reductions. His first major opportunity to do so was the so called 'Zero-Option', devised by defense expert Richard Perle, as the American means of going forward with INF deployment if the Soviets did not agree to the removal of their SS-20 missiles. Despite the strongest of arguments by his assertive Secretary of State, Al Haig, Reagan agreed with the 'Zero-Option' because it reflected his belief that each side should in fact reduce their weapons to the level of zero.

The INF issue, however, pushed US/Soviet relations to breaking point, and when the Americans deployed on schedule in the fall of 1983, the Soviets walked out on the Geneva arms talks, without setting a date for their resumption. For the hardliners within the Administration it was a moment of rare triumph in the Cold War: America had stood nose-to-nose with the Soviets, and they had not only stared down the threats of nuclear war, but they had also begun to achieve European nuclear parity with the USSR, thus strengthening the nuclear equilibrium. This, they said, helped to ensure peace. But President Reagan was not jubilant: his goal was still the elimination of this class of weapons, and talks between the Superpowers to reduce the nuclear stockpiles, had to continue, no matter the difficulties involved.

Thanks to the diplomatic efforts of President Reagan and Secretary Shultz, America achieved a breakthrough with the USSR that allowed for the resumption of the START Talks at the close of 1984, without the end of the SDI program or the halting of INF Deployments, which the Soviets had formerly stipulated was an 'entry fee' to the talks. With the ascendancy of

Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party and thus leader of the USSR, these talks received added impetus. And it was at the Geneva Summit of 1985 where Reagan and Gorbachev finally had the opportunity to discuss arms control in a substantive manner.

The talks held in Geneva saw President Reagan emphasizing the need to establish trust between each other before arms reductions could proceed. As he himself summed up, America did not mistrust the Soviets because they were armed, they were armed because they mistrusted each other. Reduce the mistrust, and hence reduce the need for weapons. The two, he said, flowed from each other. Perhaps naïve to most observers, it nevertheless rang true to Mikhail Gorbachev, who had a similar view that relations between the Superpowers could be vastly improved if they established a dialogue based on trust. The two leaders departed Geneva with the general agreement that both sides should reduce their nuclear stockpiles by 50%: a momentous initial achievement of principle, even if the details had to be worked out later.

In Reykjavik, in 1986, the two leaders got down to the details of arms control. In exchange for a limitation of Reagan's missile defense program for ten years, Gorbachev offered the most sweeping arms control proposals in history. Accepting America's position on INF weapons in Europe and Asia and re-committing to the objective of halving each nation's nuclear stockpiles, the two leaders both moved beyond the consensus of their governments and even contemplated a truly radical proposition: the total abolition of all nuclear weapons. The fact that Reagan agreed to this should come as no surprise—he had been speaking in earnest about his dream of a world free of nuclear weapons since the beginning of his presidency. But Reagan and Gorbachev's vision of a world free of nuclear weapons simply could not coalesce, as Reagan tied it to the deployment of SDI as an 'insurance policy', while for Gorbachev abolition would only

occur if SDI were done away with. As such, the Reykjavik Summit broke down, and with it perhaps the only opportunity in world history where abolition could have been realized. Nonetheless, Reykjavik was not the total failure it appeared to be at the time.

In negotiations, once a proposal has been tabled, the other side knows how far their counterpart is willing to go, and thus knowing their 'bottom line', they can 'pocket' these concessions in any future dialogue. This the American negotiating team did in regards to Gorbachev's acceptance of Reagan's 'Zero-Option', which was not tied to British and French nuclear stockpiles, as it originally had been, and limited INF weapons in Asia to 100 on each side. Gorbachev's willingness to withdraw the INF proposal from his 'package', a package that limited SDI to the laboratory for ten years, permitted the agreement to be codified in the INF Treaty, signed in Washington DC in December of 1987.

The INF Treaty was a major victory for Reagan because it mirrored his own philosophy about nuclear arms control which he had placed on the record prior to becoming President. Namely, that any arms control treaty had to *reduce*, not *limit* a nuclear stockpile, that *equal ceilings* had to be agreed to, and that the terms of the pact were subject to *on-site verification*. All this was achieved, with the added bonus that in the case of INF, the reduction was to the point of zero, and thus accomplished the beginning of what Reagan hoped would be a process that would lead one day to his dream of a world without nuclear weapons.

Though not codified during his presidency, the START Treaties, which cut the Superpowers' nuclear stockpiles in half, were agreements based on Reagan's ideas and the diplomatic efforts of his Administration. For starters, the very acronym START was created by Reagan when he was a candidate for President in 1980. Second, the ground-breaking figure of

reducing the nuclear arms of each nation by 50% was first proposed by the President. The ‘broad strokes’ were painted by Reagan, accepted by the Soviets, and the many esoteric details were filled in by teams of nuclear arms specialists over many years. It was the combined effort of both the American and Soviet governments, but in the final analysis, it was Reagan who set the overall theme and goals.⁵⁶⁵

Much credit, therefore, belongs to President Reagan’s leadership for turning a world ‘on the precipice of disaster’, into one where the likelihood of nuclear war has been greatly reduced.⁵⁶⁶ Much credit also belongs to Gorbachev, his partner in this endeavor, for without a Soviet counterpart willing to engage in a serious and constructive dialogue, nothing could have been accomplished in the field of arms reduction. Their actions, together, replaced a poisonous Superpower relationship on the brink of war, to one where trust, communication and indeed peace had been achieved.

The following, penultimate chapter, therefore, will examine Reagan’s dream of making peace with the USSR, and will determine whether he had, as he did with arms reduction, a set agenda in this regard, when he became President in 1981.

⁵⁶⁵ Reagan’s call for a world without nuclear weapons was re-iterated by George Shultz in a 4 January 2007 *Wall Street Journal* article entitled, ‘A World Free of Nuclear Weapons’. Surprisingly, the article was co-authored by Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn and William Perry. For an analysis of this ‘fourth wave’ of nuclear abolitionism, see Michael Krepon, ‘Ban the Bomb. Really’, *The American Interest*, (Washington: Jan/Feb 2008), Vol.3, Iss.3, p.88.

⁵⁶⁶ In the interests of balance, however, it should be noted that while the Reagan Administration moved forward with nuclear arms reduction with the Soviets, it is argued by some that the US was ‘lax’ when it came to the issue of nuclear proliferation. Walton Brown states that: ‘During the Reagan administration the pace of proliferation actually increased as the United States seemingly turned a ‘blind eye’ to proliferation Argentina, Brazil, India, Iraq and Pakistan obtained unprecedented amounts of nuclear aid through secret transfers from the more advanced nuclear states.’ See ‘Presidential Leadership and U.S Non-Proliferation Policy’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: Summer 1994), Vol.24, Iss. 3, p. 563.

Chapter 9

THE CAUSE OF WORLD PEACE

'Let me assure you, I have no higher priority than peace'.

*-Ronald Reagan*⁵⁶⁷

The American political tradition asserts that the United States is an 'exceptional' nation, one set apart from the 'Old World' with its pursuit of self interest (often through war), and acting instead as a 'beacon' of freedom. America was *the exception*.⁵⁶⁸ Part of this mythology is that the United States is never the aggressor in a war, and in fact, its supreme interest is the preservation of its moral purity.⁵⁶⁹ If the United States does enter a conflict, it does so reluctantly, and never for self interest: the safeguarding of some higher moral principle must always be at stake.

Of course this is a romanticized mythology that no serious student of history could ever accept. For, while the United States does justify itself in moral or ideological terms, like all other

⁵⁶⁷ Letter to Stephan E. Speer, 18 December 1984, as reproduced in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, p. 412.

⁵⁶⁸ French author Alexis de Tocqueville discussed American exceptionalism in his 1835 work, 'Democracy in America'; for a more current perspective as to how America remains different and therefore 'exceptional' see James Q. Wilson's article, 'American Exceptionalism', *The American Spectator*, (Bloomington: Sep 2006), Vol. 39, Iss. 7 p. 36.

⁵⁶⁹ For a sweeping overview of this tension in American foreign policy, between being virtuous and exercising power, see John Kane's, *Between Virtue and Power*, (Yale University Press, 2008).

nations *its primary interest is to further its interests.*⁵⁷⁰ Ronald Reagan was not your average student of history, however, and he ‘bought into’ the mythologized national identity and became its most ardent evangelist. Inconvenient truths never cluttered Reagan’s mind or made him lose the clarity of his vision; for him, the United States was ‘the spiritual leader of the free world’, the ‘most moral nation on earth’ and as such had a special responsibility to pursue the age old dream of ‘world peace’.⁵⁷¹

This chapter demonstrates that making peace with America’s primary foe during the 1980s—the Soviet Union—was in fact a stated goal of the Reagan Administration, and thus, official US foreign policy. From there, the history of this goal throughout the Cold War is examined to show that Reagan was not the first President who spoke of his desire to achieve a lasting peace with the Soviet Union. Finally, the record of Reagan’s adherence to this belief prior to assuming the presidency is detailed, and it will be proposed that Reagan’s sense of pre-destination to be a great peacemaker was only strengthened by the 1981 assassination attempt on his life, which occurred only 70 days into his presidency.

Making Peace: Reagan Foreign Policy

For the first three years of Reagan’s presidency, making peace was not as important as averting war. The Soviet Union, the American people were constantly reminded, was a serious threat and

⁵⁷⁰ As Nixon wrote of the détente between the US and the USSR, ‘The Soviet Union will always act in its own self interest; and so will the United States. Détente cannot change that’, *Memoirs*, p.941. While the US does do a great deal of humanitarian work throughout the world, and calls attention to human rights abuses, these should be considered ancillary to its general self interested approach to foreign affairs.

⁵⁷¹ Reagan wrote, ‘I always felt that from our deeds it must be clear to anyone that Americans were a moral people who, starting at the birth of our nation, had always used our power only as a force of good in the world’, *An American Life*, p. 588.

as such the United States had to stand tall through a program of ‘military modernization’ that could deter aggression. This posture was understandable: after all, Nixon, Ford and Carter had engaged the Soviet Union in a so called ‘détente’, negotiating arms control measures with Brezhnev, only to see him order in 1979 the invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas, of all days. A period of re-armament and harsher rhetoric was perhaps required, as talking about ‘peace’ with a country which at that time was engaged in war crimes, would not have gone down well with an American public whose mood had soured considerably towards the USSR.

But, by 1984 the Administration was ready to change its message considerably: after all, Reagan was up for re-election, and while he received high marks for his handling of most issues, the highest negatives were linked to his foreign policy, with a large proportion of the population still fearful that Reagan could lead them to war.⁵⁷² The belligerent words about the ‘Evil Empire’ were left behind, and the White House began a public relations campaign designed to change Reagan’s image from warmonger, to peacemaker. The change in Reagan’s script was not done gradually; rather, as stated earlier, on 16 January 1984 Reagan dramatically tossed out the old performance of dire warnings about the USSR, and instead spoke of a ‘constructive dialogue’. His political handlers might have rubbed their hands together in glee as Reagan ‘neutralized’ an issue that the Democrats were sure to use during the campaign,⁵⁷³ but the former Hollywood star was not acting: Reagan’s words were a real indicator of his sincere desire to turn the page, and

⁵⁷² George Gallup, the pollster, said in mid January 1984 that Reagan ‘appears to be increasingly vulnerable on foreign policy issues at a time when Americans’ concern over the threat of war has grown to its highest point since the Vietnam War’. 49% of the public were disapproving of his handling of foreign policy, with only 29% approving. As cited in Cannon, *President Reagan*, p. 510.

⁵⁷³ NSC adviser McFarlane had written a memo to the President in 1984: ‘We must stress in public your call for dialogue and your desire to reduce tensions and solve problems... You must be in a position by late summer or fall to make clear that this is their fault not yours... Your reelection is of strategic importance to the United States’. White House Staff and Office Files, Baker, James III, Political Affairs, Jan 1984—July 1984.

begin down the path of a peaceful end to the Cold War conflict.⁵⁷⁴ In fact, Reagan was so confident of his mission for peace that he began declaring, somewhat pre-maturely, that America was *already at peace*. In his 1984 acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, Reagan reviewed the progress made since 1980 and said:

We came together in a national crusade to make America great again, and to make a new beginning. Well, now it's all coming together. *With our beloved nation at peace*, we're in the midst of a springtime of hope for America. Greatness lies ahead of us.⁵⁷⁵ (Emphasis added).

Reagan further asked that the American people join him to ‘move us further forward on the road we presently travel... the road leading to prosperity and economic expansion in *a world at peace*’.⁵⁷⁶ (Emphasis added). Reagan, obviously, wished to be seen as a peacemaker not only for America, but for the entire world.

That Reagan’s 1984 speeches were not just a campaign gimmick is demonstrated by the fact that his efforts for peace intensified significantly after his second term was secured at the ballot box, and particularly so when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. As Reagan spelt out in an address to the nation on the eve of his 1985 Geneva Summit with the Soviet leader, he wanted to be a peacemaker:

My mission, stated simply, is a mission for peace. It is to engage the new Soviet leader in what I hope will be a dialogue for peace that endures beyond my

⁵⁷⁴ The press were dubious, as *Time Magazine* recorded in its 25 June 1984 edition: ‘Exit Ronald Reagan, rough rider...Enter Reagan the statesman, man of peace and reason, holding out an olive branch to the Kremlin: ‘I am willing to meet and talk anytime...The door is open, we’re standing in the doorway, seeing if anyone’s coming up the steps’...Reagan’s softer line was not aimed so much at Moscow as to the American electorate’.

⁵⁷⁵ ‘Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas’ 23 August 1984; *RPL*.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

presidency. It is to sit down across from Mr. Gorbachev and try to map out, together, a basis for *peaceful discourse* even though our disagreements on fundamentals will not change. It is my fervent hope that the two of us can begin a process which our successors and our peoples can continue—facing our differences frankly and openly and beginning to narrow and resolve them; communicating effectively so that our actions and intentions are not misunderstood; and eliminating the barriers between us and cooperating wherever possible for the greater good of all.⁵⁷⁷ (Emphasis Added).

Reagan was not the first President to have endeavored to seek peace with his Soviet counterpart, as the same address just quoted made clear. Giving an over-view of US--Soviet relations prior to his presidency, Reagan said:

The history of American-Soviet relations, however, does not augur well for euphoria. Eight of my predecessors—each in his own way in his own time—sought to achieve *a more stable and peaceful relationship with the Soviet Union. None fully succeeded*; so, I don't underestimate the difficulty of the tasks ahead. *But these sad chapters do not relieve me of the obligation to try to make this a safer, better world.* For our children, our grandchildren, for all mankind—I intend to make the effort.⁵⁷⁸ (Emphasis added).

These 'sad chapters' Reagan referred to should be looked at in some detail, because they demonstrate that not all were considered 'sad' at the time, and most of them began with the same intention that Reagan had when he left for the Geneva Summit—to bring peace.

⁵⁷⁷ 'Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva', 14 November 1985; Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

Summits for Peace? Superpower Summits from Truman to Carter

The first president who ingenuously ambled towards peace with a Soviet leader during the nuclear age was Harry S. Truman, and he brought with him the same conviction that Reagan would later hold; namely, that if the two leaders of the Superpowers could talk as friends, then there could be peace. Truman approached his first Summit with a Soviet leader with some trepidation; after all, he had to fill the ‘big shoes’ left by his legendary predecessor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. President Roosevelt had not only steered America through the shoals of the Great Depression, but he had also charted the course for the United States during the Second World War, overseeing the defeat of fascist Germany. Furthermore, Roosevelt had built solid and enduring relationships with his partners in the war, Winston Churchill of Great Britain and Joseph Stalin, of the Soviet Union. Truman had hoped to build on the work of Roosevelt, and manage the alliance as successfully in the immanent post-war period as his predecessor had during the war. As Truman’s biographer David McCullough explains, his hopes rested not on strategic geopolitical realities, but on something far more basic—friendship:

As American as anything about this thoroughly American new President was his fundamental faith that most problems came down to misunderstandings between people, and that even the most complicated problems really weren’t as complicated as they were made out to be, once everybody got to know one another. He knew also the faith Roosevelt had in personal diplomacy as a consequence of his two meetings with Stalin, at Teheran and Yalta.⁵⁷⁹

Truman came to the Potsdam Summit (16 July—2 August 1945) determined not to be intimidated, as he said in an interview at the time: ‘Haven’t you ever been overawed by a secretary, and finally, when you have reached the man you want to see, discovered he was very

⁵⁷⁹ David McCullough, *Truman*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 409.

human?’⁵⁸⁰ Taking this belief with him as he met Stalin, Truman attempted an air of familiarity with the Soviet despot, affectionately calling him ‘Uncle Joe’. Relations were cordial enough, and Truman seemed to get along with Stalin, falsely believing that he was a man he could do business with. As Truman said of his intentions with Stalin:

I wanted to convince him that we are ‘on the level’ and interested in peace and a decent world, and had no purposes hostile to them; that we wanted nothing for ourselves, but security for our country, and peace with friendship and neighborliness, and that it was our joint job to do that. I ‘spread it on thick’, and I think he believes me. I meant every word of it.⁵⁸¹

But Truman was soon to learn that despite his best intentions and the appearance of a warm grandfatherly figure before him, Stalin was a ‘cutthroat leader’ who shrewdly exploited everything to his advantage. The interests of his totalitarian regime were to be furthered, regardless if he was on friendly terms with his democratic counterpart. It did not take long for Truman to ‘wise up’ about Stalin, as he reneged on agreements to hold fair elections in the Soviet-occupied territories, and the Cold War began in earnest. Stalin and the Soviet Union were ‘enemies of freedom’, and only a policy of ‘containment’—assistance to those resisting communist subversion, coupled with economic aid—would stop Soviet expansionism.⁵⁸² The success of democratic liberalism required an American shrewdness that matched strength with strength. Still, the lesson that Truman learnt was unlearnt by his successor, Dwight D.

⁵⁸⁰ Woolf, ‘President Truman Talks About His Job,’ *The New York Times Magazine*, 15 July 1945.

⁵⁸¹ Quoted in Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman 1945-1948* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), p.84.

⁵⁸² The military assistance became known as the ‘Truman Doctrine’, while the economic re-structuring of post-war Europe was named the ‘Marshall Plan’, after Secretary of State George C. Marshall.

Eisenhower, for he also believed that friendship could prevail over the inherent ideological hostility of the two Superpowers. He, too, would have to learn.

Eisenhower should have known better. After all, he was the Commander of Allied forces during the Second World War against the scourge of Nazism, and the NATO Commander at the onset of the Cold War. The hostilities between the Superpowers had nothing to do with misunderstandings: they had everything to do with the understanding that capitalism and communism, democracy and totalitarianism, were diametrically opposed. The Soviets only respected strength, and American sentiment about world peace, for them, was to be taken advantage of, not engaged with.

Ten years after the end of the World War II US /Soviet alliance may have been too short a time-frame for an objective look at the nature of Soviet Union. Eisenhower still hoped that he could re-ignite the old partnership, misunderstanding that the Soviets had aligned themselves to fight the common enemy of Hitler, and once that enemy was gone, so too was their 'friendship'. America had become a strategic threat to Soviet expansionism, and with the advent of nuclear weapons, to its very existence. Still, Eisenhower believed that if he ignored the glaring differences between the two countries and focused instead on developing the right 'spirit', then perhaps he could find a way out of the morass of the Cold War. As he said in an address to the nation prior his 1955 Geneva Summit with Khrushchev:

Our many postwar conferences have been characterized too much by attention to details, by an effort apparently to work on specific problems, rather than to establish *a spirit and attitude* in which to approach them. Success, therefore, has been meager.⁵⁸³ (Emphasis added).

⁵⁸³ 'Radio and Television Address to the American People Prior to Departure for the Big Four Conference at Geneva' 15 July 1955; *Public Papers of President Eisenhower*.

In this way, Eisenhower was ‘different’ from Truman, and indeed ‘different’ from all diplomats before him, because apparently Eisenhower was the first to take a ‘human’ approach to his Soviet interlocutors, and that this had been the ‘ingredient’ that had been ‘missing’ all along. Elaborating on this, he said:

I mean an intention to conciliate, to understand, to be tolerant, to try and see the other fellow’s viewpoint as well as we see our own. I say to you, if we can *change the spirit in which these conferences are conducted we will have taken the greatest step towards peace, toward future prosperity and tranquility that has ever been taken in the history of mankind.*⁵⁸⁴ (Emphasis added).

The greatest step towards peace....in all of human history! This outlandish statement by Eisenhower was perhaps matched by his address upon his arrival at Geneva’s airport, when he pointed out that America’s wartime military colossus paled in comparison to American good will. He stated:

Some eleven years ago...I came to Europe with an army, a navy, an air force, with a single purpose: to destroy Nazism. I came with the formations of war and all of the circumstances of war surrounded that journey at that time.

This time I come armed with something *far more powerful: the goodwill of America—the great hopes of America—the aspirations of America for peace.*⁵⁸⁵ (Emphasis added).

The results of the Summit, however, did not live up to Eisenhower’s expectations, and he returned from Geneva somewhat chastened, and admitted:

We must never be deluded into believing that one week of friendly, even fruitful, negotiation can wholly eliminate a problem arising out of the wide gulf that

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ ‘Remarks Upon Arrival at the Airport in Geneva’, 16 July 1955; Ibid.

*separates, so far, East and West. A gulf as wide and deep as the difference between individual liberty and regimentation, as wide and deep as the gulf that lies between the concept of man made in the image of his God and the concept of man as a mere instrument of the State.*⁵⁸⁶ (Emphasis added).

Eisenhower had learnt his lesson, but still pledged himself to the cause of peace, as elusive as that may have been. Even when the 1960 Paris Summit with Khrushchev fell apart over the U-2 ‘spying’ incident, Eisenhower said to the nation: ‘Fellow Americans, long ago I pledged to you that I would journey anywhere in the world to promote the cause of peace. I remain pledged to pursue a peace of dignity, of friendship, of honor, of justice.’⁵⁸⁷ His immediate successor, however, never for a moment lost sight of the realities of the US/Soviet relationship.

John F. Kennedy declared in his 1961 inaugural address that America was living through ‘a hard and bitter peace’ and his opinion did not change leading up to his one summit with a Soviet leader, the Vienna conference with Nikita Khrushchev. Kennedy knew that Khrushchev was a bully, and indeed the Vienna conference (3-10 June 1961) was marked by the older Soviet leader trying to browbeat his younger American counterpart into a final settlement on Berlin. The summit was the least successful in the history of the Cold War, with Kennedy telling the Soviet leader at the close of their meetings, ‘Mr. Chairman, there will be war. It will be a cold winter.’⁵⁸⁸ Not a pleasant way to end a summit, and considering the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, his words were almost a self fulfilling prophecy. President Johnson at least attempted to keep the mood lighter.

⁵⁸⁶ ‘Radio and Television Address to the American People on the Geneva Conference’, 25 July 1955; Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ ‘Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Events in Paris’; 25 May 1960, Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 171.

President Lyndon Johnson, fighting a war with the Soviet armed North Vietnamese and at odds with the USSR's policy during the Arab-Israeli 'Six Day War' (1967), certainly did not believe that his summit meeting with the Soviet leader could bring peace: but it did not stop him from talking the language of peace. Meeting at Glassboro, New Jersey on 23 June 1967, Johnson and Soviet leader Alexey Kosygin found huge differences in their opinions, but were united on one front: each were grandfathers, and wished to leave a world of peace to their grandchildren. As Johnson recounts his first meeting with Kosygin in his autobiography *The Vantage Point*:

As we walked toward the house, the Chairman and I chatted amiably. He congratulated me on becoming a grandfather two days earlier. 'I have been one for eighteen years,' he said with a grin, 'and I have no regrets'.⁵⁸⁹

Inside, the two continued to talk in the same vein:

We spoke of our grandchildren and of our hopes that they would grow up in a world of peace. He described his experiences in Leningrad through the long German siege of that great city during World War II. The memory of war's horror was always with the Soviet people, he said, and they wanted nothing but peace.⁵⁹⁰

With nothing to show for the summit, Johnson said upon arrival back at the White House that 'meetings like these do not themselves make peace in the world', but still efforts like his were always valuable because it helps 'to sit down and look at a man right in the eye and try to reason

⁵⁸⁹ Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, p. 483.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

with him, particularly if he is trying to reason with you'.⁵⁹¹ Nixon, Johnson's successor, was not going to have any of this 'nonsense'.

President Nixon liked to consider himself as having a clear eyed view of the world. He was a realist, after all, and if peace were to be achieved, it would be through hard-nosed policies that recognized the strategic interests of each party involved. Rhetoric about peace simply 'wouldn't cut it'. In a somewhat ungracious review of the summits which preceded his 1972 Moscow Summit, Nixon jetting off for the meeting, wished to demonstrate that things were different with him. He said:

As you know, the visit that we will be making to the Soviet Union is the first state visit that a President of the United States has ever made to that country. It is a visit that will be different from those that have occurred on previous occasions between American Presidents and the leaders of the Soviet Union. *The others were important, but they did not deal primarily with substance. That is why we often hear them referred to as the 'spirit of Camp David,' or the 'spirit of Vienna', or the 'spirit of Geneva', or the 'spirit of Glassboro'.*

In this case we are not going there simply for a better spirit, although that is important, and we think that may be one of the results of the trip. But *we are going there for substance*, very important substantive talks.⁵⁹² (Emphasis added).

Richard Nixon had said in his 1969 inaugural address that 'the greatest title that history can bestow, is the title of peacemaker'.⁵⁹³ He also sought to create a 'structure of peace' that would lead to a 'generation of peace'. Realism was to underpin these efforts for peace, but with the Watergate scandal draining him of power, Nixon resorted to the rhetoric of peace based on

⁵⁹¹ 'The President's Remarks Upon Arrival at the White House Following the Glassboro Meetings With Chairman Kosygin', 25 June 1967; *The Public Papers of President Johnson*.

⁵⁹² 'Remarks on Departure From Andrews Air Force Base for Austria, the soviet Union, Iran, and Poland' 20 May 1972; *The Public Papers of President Nixon*.

⁵⁹³ 'Inaugural Address', 20 January 1969; *Ibid*.

friendship between Superpower leaders, just as his predecessors had done. In an intimate dinner with Leonid Brezhnev at his San Clemente home in 1973, Nixon raised his glass for a toast saying:

As you can see, Mr. Chairman, this is not a large house, but it is our home. On such an occasion our thoughts turn way from the affairs of state to our families and loved ones wherever they may be. *I want our children to grow up in a world of peace, just as I am sure you want your children and grandchildren to grow up in a world of peace.* What the meetings that you and I have had last year and this year have done is contribute to that goal I only hope that Russians and Americans in future generations may meet as we are meeting in our homes as *friends because of our personal affection for each other, and not just as officials meeting because of the necessity of settling differences that may exist between our two countries.* Therefore I propose this toast of course to your health, and that of our other guests, but even more to Mrs. Brezhnev, to your children and our children and *all the children of the world who, we trust, will have a happier and more peaceful future because of what we have done.*⁵⁹⁴ (Emphasis added).

With these words, Brezhnev's eyes 'filled with tears' and he rose and 'threw his arms' around Nixon giving him a 'bear hug'. However, it did not stop him from calling a surprise meeting at 10:30pm that very night and attempting to 'browbeat' Nixon into a settlement for the Middle East.⁵⁹⁵ The gulf between high sounding platitudes and the reality of the US--Soviet relationship was again made starkly apparent: self interest would always come before the hopes of peace. But again, that did not stop Nixon's two immediate successors from also trying their hand at the cause of peace.

Gerald R. Ford also sought to be a peacemaker. In his address upon assuming the presidency he said that Nixon had 'brought peace to millions', and he pledged 'an uninterrupted

⁵⁹⁴ Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, pp. 883-84.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 884-5

and sincere search' himself for world peace.⁵⁹⁶ Meeting with Leonid Brezhnev in Vladivostok in November of 1974 he worked on the Helsinki Act (finalized in 1975) and the SALT II Treaty. Returning from this trip Ford declared: 'I believe we accomplished what we set out to achieve and perhaps more. And in that process, I pray that we have done all we could to *advance the cause of peace* for all Americans and for all mankind'.⁵⁹⁷ Ford, defeated at the ballot box, was unable to further this peace cause, and it would be Jimmy Carter who would take on this task and preside over the end of détente.

Jimmy Carter was a man of great idealism and spoke of the cause of peace, but like Kennedy and Johnson before him, he always grounded his words in realism. By the time that Carter left America to meet Brezhnev for the 1979 Vienna Summit, he had had enough experience of Soviet intransigence to know that what lay ahead would not be easy. After all, various SALT II proposals—including a package that included actual nuclear arms reductions—were rejected out of hand by the Soviets. Carter therefore chose his words very carefully. In an address to the nation prior his departure for the Summit he said:

The only way to have peace in the end is to wage peace constantly from a position of constant and sustained national strength....I approach this summit in Vienna with hope, but without any false expectations. The goals which lie at the heart of my mission today—improving our own Nation's security and *enhancing the prospects for world peace and the avoidance of nuclear war*—transcend all other issues that I will ever face in my own life in public service.⁵⁹⁸ (Emphasis added).

⁵⁹⁶ 'Remarks on Taking the Oath of Office' 9 August 1974; *The Public Papers of President Ford*.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Remarks Upon Returning from Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Soviet Union', 24 November 1974; *Ibid*.

⁵⁹⁸ 'The President's Trip to Vienna, Austria Remarks on Departure from the White House' 14 June 1979; *The Public Papers of President Carter*.

Even at Carter's moment of triumph—the signing of the SALT II Treaty, the Sunday school teacher turned President refrained from speaking of 'swords being beaten into plowshares', and instead gave a somber assessment of their work. Carter pointed out that the 'most powerful currents of history' were usually 'the ones which swept nations to war'. Looking at this reality, Carter pointed out that a 'more watchful course, even a small careful shift' could have averted the catastrophe of conflict, and instead re-directed the course of events towards 'the ways of peace'. Carter then simply said, that 'this is the purpose of what we have done here today in Vienna in signing this treaty'.⁵⁹⁹ Yet Carter's cautious words are not what are remembered from that Summit: rather the awkward attempt at European custom when Carter took Brezhnev in his arms and kissed him on both cheeks. It was a moment that Carter would rather forget, for just six months later, the man to whom he gave the 'kiss of peace', ordered the invasion of Afghanistan and thus destroyed détente between the US and the Soviet Union.⁶⁰⁰

This was the history of US--Soviet relations and the seven Presidents before Reagan, all of whom attempted in their own way to achieve peace. Despite some successes, most notably the agreements signed by Presidents Nixon, Ford and Carter, peace remained as elusive as ever when Reagan ran for president in 1980. In fact, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it could be said that the Cold War had heated up considerably, and that it was more likely that the two Superpowers would be at war in the decade ahead, than making a lasting peace. Still, Reagan believed that he was the man who could pull off this colossal task; in fact he held that he was destined to do so.

⁵⁹⁹ 'Vienna Summit Meeting Remarks of President Brezhnev and President Carter on Signing the Treaty on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms', 18 June 18 1979; Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ For a history of the Nixon, Ford and Carter Summits with the Soviets by a note-taker present, see A. Denis Cliff, *With Presidents to the Summit*, (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, 1993).

Reagan's Destiny?

Reagan believed that he was destined to end the Cold War. Where this belief came from, remains a mystery. What is known is that Reagan was a man with a streak of romantic idealism and a belief in Providence and pre-destination. That idealism led him to believe that world peace could be achieved, and that religious belief guided him to act under the assumption that he was God's instrument to bring about this peace.

The idealism of pacifism was not unusual for a man who came of age in pre-World War II America. This period of time was marked by revulsion of war, an extreme isolationism and a belief that war itself could be 'outlawed'. Indeed, the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact *did* make war illegal. This document was a reflection of the philosophy that peace is the natural order for humanity, and that war is always an aberration, usually foisted on peace loving people by governments and arms manufacturers who place their self-interest and greed above the common good. Reagan shared the view that people were generally pacifists and that governments were to blame for all wars. But Reagan took his belief about the innate goodness of humans a step further: since governments were made up of people, even 'evil' regimes had men and women of goodwill at the top. If good people were carrying out acts of evil, it must be because they had been poisoned by ideology. This led to Reagan's scandalous remark that the Nazi SS soldiers buried at Bitburg were 'victims, just as surely as the victims in the concentration camp'.⁶⁰¹ Adolph Hitler to Reagan was 'a madman', mentally deranged and therefore himself an aberration. If the leader of the Soviet Union were sane, then Reagan believed he could reason with him. And if he could only get him alone in a room, the two could talk to one another as human beings, appeal to their natural desire for peace, and undo the 'misunderstandings' that

⁶⁰¹ Morris, *Dutch*, p. 523.

were at the heart of the Cold War conflict. Then, with the Soviet leader and he walking out of the meeting ‘arm in arm’ in agreement, no ‘bureaucrat’ below them could undo what had been accomplished.⁶⁰² Peace would be achieved. It was as simple as that! Add to this Reagan’s belief that he was destined to be President and therefore in a position to carry out this fantasy, then the two flow together.

Reagan felt destined to be the President of the United States of America. Again, where this belief came from, remains a mystery. Freud would perhaps call it a ‘Messiah complex’, a condition defined as believing that you alone were called to save the world.⁶⁰³ What is clear is that Reagan had presidential aspirations from the start of his political career. So confident was he in his destiny that he ran for President in 1968, just one year after becoming the Governor of California. Then came the ‘prophecy’ that only re-enforced his sense of destiny. As Reagan’s biographer Lou Cannon relates:

In 1970, singer Pat Boone brought evangelical ministers Harald Bredesen and George Otis to visit the Reagans at their residence in Sacramento. They prayed together, with the prayer led by Otis...During the prayer Otis was seized by what he took to be a visitation of the Holy Spirit. The tone and message of his prayer

⁶⁰² Reagan wrote of this theory in his memoirs, ‘Starting with Brezhnev, I’d dreamed of personally going one-on-one with a Soviet leader because I thought we might be able to accomplish things our countries’ diplomats couldn’t do because they didn’t have the authority. Putting that another way, I felt that if you got the top people negotiating and talking at a summit and then the two of you came out arm in arm saying, “We’ve agreed to this,” the bureaucrats wouldn’t be able to louse up the agreement.’ *An American Life*, p.634.

⁶⁰³ Considering the power of the presidency and the ego that one must have to achieve it, this condition is no doubt common among Presidents and presidential hopefuls. Freud said of President Woodrow Wilson at the Versailles peace talks: ‘Wilson’s unconscious identification of himself with the Savior had become so obvious that it compelled even those who had never studied the deeper psychic strata to recognize its existence.’ As quoted in Jacob Weisberg *The Bush Tragedy*, (New York: Random House, 2008),pp.215-216; See also ‘Bush’s Messiah Complex’ *Progressive* (February 2003) As accessed at: <http://www.progressive.org/feb03/comm0203.html>; Also, in the 2008 Presidential campaign, John McCain’s team released an ad entitled ‘The One’, which mocked Obama for his various Messianic claims, in particular, ‘We are the change that we’ve been waiting for’. In a self depreciating speech at the 63rd Alfred E. Smith Memorial Dinner, with McCain in attendance, Obama poked fun at himself about this saying, ‘Contrary to the rumors you have heard, I was not born in a manger. I was actually born on Krypton and sent here by my father, Jor-el, to save the planet earth.’, as quoted in ‘Rivals cease hostilities to dine out on charitable gibes’ *The Weekend Australian* 18-19 October 2008, p. 13.

changed, and *he prophesized that Reagan would become president*. A participant in the meeting who was clasping Reagan's hand felt 'a bolt of electricity' run through it. Otis's own hand was shaking uncontrollably at the time. When he subsequently learned that Reagan's hand had also been shaking, he regarded it as an authentication of the prophecy. *Reagan also accepted the prophecy as valid.*⁶⁰⁴ (Emphasis added).

Reagan was a popular Governor who had run for President before and was the presumed front runner for the 1976 election; so it did not take much of an imagination to predict that Reagan could become President. Supernatural experience or not, as Cannon notes, for the deeply religious Reagan, it was a 'sign'.⁶⁰⁵ That sign, no doubt, fed his sense of pre-destination.

Reagan inherited from his devoutly Christian mother Nelle Reagan a belief that each life on earth had purpose and meaning.⁶⁰⁶ for him, it was to be President of the United States and to end the Cold War. Nelle, a member of the Disciples of Christ Church, instilled in her son a belief that he could achieve anything he set his mind to and that when setbacks occurred, he should take heart, for later he would look back and realize that had that misfortune not occurred, then something better would not have followed. It was all 'part of God's plan'.⁶⁰⁷ According to

⁶⁰⁴ Quote from Lou Cannon's, *President Reagan* p. 288. Cannon's source for this event is from Garry Will's, *Reagan's America*. p. 197.

⁶⁰⁵ As Patti Davis, Reagan's daughter, revealed in her book on the faith of her father, Reagan was a man who both looked for signs, and had numerous experiences throughout his life that he would describe as supernatural encounters. See, *Angels Don't Die: My Father's Gift of Faith*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

⁶⁰⁶ For a detailed analysis of the effect of Nelle Reagan and the Disciples of Christ Church's influence on Reagan, see Stephen Vaughn's article, 'The moral inheritance of a President: Reagan and the Dixon Disciples of Christ', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: Winter 1995), Vol. 25, Iss. 1, p. 109.

⁶⁰⁷ Nancy Reagan related: 'Ronnie is a great deal like his mother....She was a very religious person whose faith saw her through bad times. She was also an incredible optimist—a trait her son shares...Nelle used to tell her boys that everything happens for a reason, that they might not understand the reason at the time, but eventually they would. Ronnie still believes that. Nelle told him this repeatedly, especially after Ronnie's divorce from Jane Wyman. The divorce happened suddenly, with absolutely no warning, and Ronnie was shattered and ashamed. But later, he would say to me, 'You see, my mother was right. If I hadn't been divorced, I never would have met you.''. As quoted in Nancy Reagan, *My Turn*, pp.107-108.

longtime aide Michael Deaver, Reagan felt that ‘God’s plan’ for him was to be President, end the Cold War, and abolish nuclear weapons. Deaver said:

This was a guy who believed in pre-destination, who believed that there was a purpose for everybody’s life and we had to fulfill it. And that was his purpose...He was running for President because he believed he was *destined* to do away with nuclear weapons. And I don’t know how long it will take before [that] becomes clear to people.⁶⁰⁸

Bud McFarlane, who served as one of Reagan’s national security advisers, also recalled Reagan’s willingness to engage the Soviets as stemming from a ‘a self confidence that he was an historic figure ...He had enormous self-confidence in the ability of a single heroic figure to change history.’⁶⁰⁹

For a man who believed firmly that he was destined to be an ‘historic figure’ and end the Cold War, being elected President would serve as a huge confirmation. After all, in America’s 204 year history up to that point, only thirty-eight out of hundreds of millions of people had risen to join that most select of clubs. But even then, one could doubt, and think that maybe it was a ‘fluke’—even Reagan admitted that it only became ‘real’ when he saw his own furniture in the White House.⁶¹⁰ It is only human to doubt why a person happens to be in the situation in which they find themselves, and consider what forces placed them in that position. Sometimes only one thing can make a person absolutely certain about who they are and what they must accomplish, and that is coming face to face with death.

⁶⁰⁸ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan*, pp.30-31.

⁶⁰⁹ As quoted in Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 22.

⁶¹⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 228.

A close brush with death and one's own mortality often dramatically changes one's perspective, especially for a religious person. A near death experience, even devoid of a mystical occurrence or religious meaning, can make a person realize how fragile life is, and that they must make 'the most' of the life they have before death comes for good. But for a religious person, and especially for one who *does* experience something 'mystical', a near death experience is not so much about *cheating* death, as having been *saved* through Divine Intervention. If from a medical standpoint the odds were stacked against a recovery, and yet a full recovery occurs, the person believes that something or *someone* was at work and saved them, for a reason. Indeed, former President Nixon's close brush with death following his resignation, it has been argued, helped him make the most of his 'second chance' at life, to begin yet another improbable comeback.⁶¹¹ If being 'spared' empowers, then it is especially true if one overcomes death through an assassination attempt.

The Assassination Attempt: Reagan's Narrative

This thesis has sought to understand what beliefs Reagan brought to the presidency, and how involved he was in seeing that these were implemented. When it comes to whether Reagan felt destined to be a great peacemaker before becoming President, his former aides are divided on the question. However, all are in agreement that following the assassination attempt on him only 70 days into his presidency, Reagan did in fact feel destined to end the Cold War. Such consensus is

⁶¹¹ When former President Nixon, suffering from a severe case of phlebitis, slipped into toxic shock in 1974 and came within 'an inch of his life', he experienced what he called was an offer from an outside source: whether to continue life, or pass on. Nixon chose to fight on and made a remarkable recovery, both of his health, and his standing as an 'elder statesman'. Some have theorized that Nixon was able to make this recovery because he felt that he had received this second 'pardon'. See Robert Sam Anson, *Exile: The Unquiet Oblivion of Richard M. Nixon* (Simon and Schuster, New York: 1984), p. 84.

not surprising: Reagan tells us himself in his memoirs that this was his interpretation of his experience. Analysis of this work, therefore, sheds light on Reagan's own belief about his role in bringing about the end of the Cold War.

In Reagan's 1990 autobiography, *An American Life*, the ex-president framed his assassination attempt in the context of the Cold War drama in which he found himself as he began his presidency. He did this with a definite purpose in mind: he wished the reader to understand that he had been spared through Divine Intervention to help bring about the end of the Cold War. Writing after his presidency, when the revolution in US/Soviet relations had occurred and the Cold War was almost universally agreed upon as being over, Reagan was seeking to impress a cause and effect relationship between his having been spared, and the end of the Cold War. Of course, Reagan is too humble to say this directly, but as a gifted story teller with a background in Hollywood, he knew how to set up a storyline for the audience to draw the same conclusions as he did.

Reagan begins his narrative on the day preceding the assassination attempt, and the first scene has him at 'The Presidents Church' across from the White House. Reagan writes, 'Sunday was a beautiful spring day and in the morning we went to St. John's Episcopal Church'. Reagan noted that the choir 'sang beautifully and looked and sounded so right that I felt everyone in the church that morning must have felt good about their country'.⁶¹² Reagan then records that he spent that Sunday afternoon in the White House residence thinking about 'those people I'd seen in church, the future of America and the 'MAD' policy.'⁶¹³

⁶¹² Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 256.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.* p. 257.

Reagan then elaborated about the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction, reminding his readers that the world in 1981 was forever on the precipice of nuclear destruction. Demonstrating that he carried ‘the greatest responsibility’ of ‘any human being’ on earth, Reagan wrote: ‘As President, I carried no wallet, no money, no driver’s license, no keys in my pockets—only secret codes that were capable of bringing about the annihilation of much of the world as we knew it’.⁶¹⁴ Reagan pointed out the limitations of a world being constantly on the brink—he would only have six minutes to respond to a submarine launched nuclear attack on the US. ‘Six minutes to decide how to respond to a blip on a radar scope and decide whether to unleash Armageddon!’ Reagan lamented adding, ‘How could anyone apply reason at a time like that?’ For Reagan, there had to be another way.

To rid the world of the terror of the bomb and to bring peace between the Superpowers—this, Reagan would have his readers believe, was on his mind on the eve of the attempt on his life. Stating that the MAD theory was ‘madness’, Reagan said, ‘There had to be some way to remove this threat of annihilation and give the world a greater chance of survival’.⁶¹⁵ As Chapter 5 of this thesis demonstrates, Reagan did not have much enthusiasm for a missile defense system in 1981, yet in this narrative, Reagan informs the reader that he was in fact thinking of such a system that day. He writes: ‘I wondered if it might be possible to develop a defense against missiles other than the fatalistic acceptance of annihilation that was implicit under the MAD policy’. In light of the evidence presented in Chapter 5, Reagan’s recollection is perhaps questionable. What is more credible is that Reagan was concerned about the issues of war and peace. He concludes his account of the day preceding the attempt on his life saying:

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., p. 258.

We couldn't continue this nervous standoff forever, I thought: we couldn't lower our guard, but we had to *begin the process of peace*. As the afternoon of March 29 passed, I spent a lot of time wondering what I could *do to get the process started*. (Emphasis added).

Reagan ends Chapter 41 with these words, while Chapter 42 begins with the assassination attempt at the Washington Hilton on 30 March 1981. Thus, Reagan had set up the scene: a Churchgoing President pondering nuclear war and his sense of responsibility to lead America out from under the cloud of nuclear annihilation and towards defense and peace almost gets killed.

On 30 March 1981, Reagan was shot and almost killed by a lone crazed gunman, John Hinckley Jr. The attack came as Reagan exited the Hilton, where he had just given a speech to union leaders. As the President waved to some onlookers, Hinckley crouched into a shooting position, and discharged six shots in two seconds. Four people were hit, including the President as he was pushed into the waiting limousine by Secret Service agent Jerry Parr. 'Jerry, get off, I think you've broken one of my ribs!' the President said, in excruciating pain.⁶¹⁶ When Reagan coughed up red, frothy blood, Parr believed that he might be right, as an initial search of the President's body detected no bullet wound. 'Rawhide not hurt', Parr lied over the radio, using the President's codename, while ordering the driver to take Reagan to the closest hospital.⁶¹⁷

Returning to Reagan's narrative of his assassination attempt, the President continues in his memoirs with the theme of Divine Intervention as the location moves to the hospital. 'Someone was looking out for us that day', Reagan writes, explaining that a medical conference

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. ,p.259.

⁶¹⁷ Parr lied in case anyone was listening in on his radio conversation: he wanted any members of a possible conspiracy to believe that Reagan's car was heading to the White House, not the hospital. See Herbert L. Abram's account, *The President Has Been Shot: Confusion, Disability and the 25th Amendment in the Aftermath of the Attempted Assassination of Ronald Reagan*, (New York: WW Norton and Co, 1991),p. 303.

had been held at George Washington University Hospital and therefore ‘the room was full of specialists in virtually every medical field’.⁶¹⁸ Lying naked on the gurney, as the doctors searched for the bullet hole and placed an oxygen mask over his face, Reagan recalled in his diary praying for his assailant:

I focused on that ceiling and prayed. But I realized I couldn’t ask for God’s help while at the same time I felt hatred for the mixed up young man who had shot me. Isn’t that the meaning of the lost sheep? We are all God’s children and therefore equally beloved by him. I began to pray for his soul and that he would find his way back to God.⁶¹⁹

In his memoirs, Reagan concluded: ‘God, for some reason, had seen fit to give his blessing and allow me to live a while longer.’⁶²⁰ This sense of being spared endowed Reagan with a sense of obligation. He ends his chapter with an excerpt from his diary in which he said: ‘Whatever happens now I owe my life to God and will try to serve him in every way I can.’⁶²¹ For Reagan, obviously, coming so close to death was a *religious* experience that endowed him with a *religious sense of mission*.

What is interesting is that Reagan’s experience and the conclusions which he drew from this were parallel with another famous assassination attempt which occurred just six weeks after his own: the attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II. By briefly looking at this case, we can gain an even stronger understanding of Reagan’s sense of destiny.

⁶¹⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 261.

⁶¹⁹ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 12.

⁶²⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 262.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.* p. 263.

Pope John Paul II, before embarking on an ecclesiastical career, like Reagan, was an actor. Like Reagan, his journey to the pinnacle of power was unlikely,⁶²² and like Reagan, he had a dramatic sense of his position on the world stage. On 13 May 1981, the Pope was shot in St. Peter's Square by Mehmet Ali Agca, the bullets just missing vital organs. Not surprisingly, the Pope, like Reagan, believed that Divine Intervention had saved his life. Reflecting on what occurred in 1993, the Pope said: 'Agca knew how to shoot, and he certainly shot to kill. Yet it was as if *someone was guiding and deflecting that bullet*'.⁶²³ (Emphasis added). Like Reagan, John Paul saw the attempt on his life in the context of the Cold War struggle of his times, but unlike Reagan, he believed that his assassin was working on direct orders from the Kremlin. Calling it 'one of the final convulsions of the arrogant ideologies unleashed during the twentieth century' he added, 'Both fascism and Nazism eliminated people. So did communism.'⁶²⁴ Like Reagan, John Paul clearly thought that he had been spared to play a role in the ending of the Cold War, saying, 'It would obviously be ridiculous to claim that the Pope brought down communism single-handedly'⁶²⁵; a statement, which in itself demonstrates that the Pope certainly believed that *he had played a very significant role indeed*. And finally, the Pope, like Reagan, forgave his assailant, both believing that their would-be assassins were merely bit players in the larger drama swirling around them: between the very forces of good and evil.⁶²⁶

⁶²² The papacy had been the sole reserve of Italians for nearly 500 years: the likelihood that a Polish Cardinal would be elected Pope seemed very remote.

⁶²³ Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* (Rome: Rizzoli, 2005), p. 159.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.166.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.165.

⁶²⁶ In John Paul's case, his forgiveness was given in person when he visited Agca in prison.

And so, at the dawn of his presidency, Ronald Reagan felt he had been destined to be a peacemaker. He had overcome incredible odds to become President and then survive an assassin's bullet, and being a religious person, he took his recovery as a sign of Divine Intervention that endowed purpose. That purpose would be the cause of ending Cold War hostilities and averting nuclear war. Like Pope John Paul, Reagan saw himself as the major player in this epic quest.

Conclusions

This chapter has detailed that beginning in the election year of 1984, America's policy towards the USSR was directed towards the goal of achieving peace. That this was not merely a campaign tactic, can be demonstrated that the peace rhetoric only intensified in Reagan's second term, in particular once Mikhail Gorbachev had become the Soviet leader.

This chapter established that Reagan was not the first President to have sought such an outcome: nearly all of his Cold War predecessors, beginning with Truman, had hoped to speak on a human level with the Soviet leader, reducing mistrust and misunderstanding, and re-establishing the wartime partnership. Despite their failure to end the Cold War, and even with his own intense anti-Communist ideology, Reagan believed that he could accomplish what the others had been unable to do.

Evidence has been presented here that would lend credence to the theory that Reagan felt destined to be President, and once in that position, to play the 'leading role' in ending Cold War tension. Reagan was a man who believed in pre-destination, and it had been 'prophesized' by Evangelical Pastors that his destiny was to be President. According to Michael Deaver, Reagan

ran for President to accomplish his goal of nuclear abolitionism. While Deaver's theory was not substantiated here by any other intimates of the President, Reagan's own writings demonstrate that following the attempt on his life, he did in fact feel destined to end the likelihood of nuclear war.

An analysis of Reagan's 1990 memoirs has demonstrated that the former President wished the reading audience to draw the same conclusions about his brush with death as he did: namely, that he had been spared by Divine Intervention to end the Cold War. Carefully constructing the events preceding and following the attempt on his life, Reagan painted the picture of a President determined to bring peace having been saved, against all odds, to do just that. Thus, Reagan began his presidency with a sense of mission.

The following chapter will examine what Reagan did with that sense of mission: how he pursued the cause of peace with the USSR in his belief that he could in fact end the Cold War.

Chapter 10

REAGAN THE PEACE-MAKER

“Here you and I are, two men in a room, probably the only two men in the world who could bring about World War III. But by the same token, we may be the only two men in the world who could perhaps bring about peace.”

-Ronald Reagan to Mikhail Gorbachev, Geneva Summit, 1985⁶²⁷

Ronald Reagan believed that he could act as a global peace-maker. As the preceding chapter demonstrates, nearly all of America’s Presidents of the Cold War era also felt that peace could be achieved and pursued it in their own way. But Reagan was different from his predecessors in that he actually felt *destined* to realize this historic outcome. As President, he would work towards his goal of a world free from the terror of nuclear warfare, and undertook to accomplish a lasting peace with the USSR.

Just seventy days into his presidency, however, Reagan’s agenda, both domestic and foreign, came close to an untimely end with the assassination attempt on his life. Had Jerry Parr, the head Secret Service officer in the limousine with Reagan, not ordered the driver to head immediately to the hospital rather than returning to the White House, Reagan undoubtedly would have died. The fact that he did survive was interpreted by Reagan as evidence of some sort of

⁶²⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.13.

‘Divine Intervention’, and the President felt that he should devote the remainder of his presidency to ‘doing God’s will’; which he interpreted as being to end the Cold War.

This chapter assesses Reagan’s ambitious attempt to make peace between the United States and the Soviet Union, and examines in particular the various overtures that the President made to the Soviet leadership—both in correspondence, through speeches and in person. The influence of Presidential handlers who wished to remold Reagan into the image of peacemaker is investigated, and this chapter examines Reagan’s commitment to the cause of peace and how he overcame much in-house opposition from those within his administration who believed that continual offensive was better than dialogue.

The argument over whether Reagan ‘won’ the Cold War is left entirely out of this thesis. Rather, the question is posed: did Reagan seek to be a peacemaker, and what role did he personally play in attempting to bring this about?

Following the Assassination Attempt: An Olive Branch to Brezhnev

As the previous chapter detailed, Reagan’s account of his close brush with death following the attempt on his life in 1981 is structured and written for the reader to conclude as Reagan did, that his life had been spared for a purpose: to end the Cold War. This chapter continues with what followed that dramatic opening to Reagan’s presidency, to ascertain whether his 1990 account of what he believed he was called to do, was actually something that Reagan felt at the time and followed through on.

Recuperating at the White House in April of 1981 following surgery to remove a bullet, Reagan's sense of obligation to bring peace became palpable, resulting in the President's first personal olive branch being extended to the Soviet leadership. His work load drastically cut-back on the orders of his wife Nancy, Reagan began the process of recovery either lying in a 'hospital-style bed' in the Lincoln bedroom or 'relaxing in robe and pajamas in the solarium', where he had in his own words 'lots of time to think about the problems our country faced and the things we could do to deal with them'.⁶²⁸ While Reagan pondered getting his 'economic recovery' program through Congress, he spent most of his time, he claims 'recalling those thoughts I'd had on the Sunday before the shooting about the MAD policy'. Reagan saw what he had to do: 'Perhaps having come so close to death made me feel I should do whatever I could in the years God had given me *to reduce the threat of nuclear war; perhaps there was a reason I had been spared*'.⁶²⁹ (Emphasis added). Reagan therefore decided that he would reach out to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev by writing him a personal, heartfelt letter.

Reagan's letter to Brezhnev, which he commenced work on one week after leaving hospital, was his attempt to begin the process for peace. With a yellow legal pad in hand, Reagan wrote sincerely about his desire to improve relations and bring about peace. He wrote:

Mr. President, in writing the attached letter I am reminded of our meeting in San Clemente a decade or so ago. I was Governor of California at the time and you were concluding a series of meetings with President Nixon. Those meetings had captured the imagination of all the world. *Never had peace and good will among men seemed closer at hand. When we met I asked if you were aware that the hopes and aspirations of millions and millions of people throughout the world were dependent on the decisions that would be reached in your meetings. You took my hand in both of yours and assured me that you were aware of that and*

⁶²⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 265.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 269.

that you were dedicated with all your heart and mind to fulfilling those hopes and dreams. The people of the world still share that hope.⁶³⁰ (Emphasis added).

This segment was the centerpiece of the letter, but for Secretary of State Haig, it was not acceptable. As the original draft at the Reagan archives shows, Haig crossed out this entire section and insisted that he, and not Reagan, should compose any correspondence to the USSR. Informing his aide Mike Deaver of this development, Reagan was told by his old friend to ‘screw’ Haig, after all, ‘he wasn’t elected President: you were’. Reagan agreed, thanked Deaver,⁶³¹ and told Haig that he would send his own correspondence and took the deleted section and made it the opening of the letter.⁶³² In addition to conveying his peaceful purposes, Reagan also sought to revisit the origins of the Cold War, to illustrate that, according to Reagan, America’s intentions had always been pure.

Reagan’s letter to Brezhnev included the President’s interpretation of the genesis of the Cold War and, of course, America was blameless. Reagan pointed out that when ‘World War II ended’ the US ‘alone had the ultimate weapon’ the nuclear bomb, and therefore could have ‘sought world domination then’. Instead, the US used its ‘power and wealth to rebuild the war-ravaged economies of the world’.⁶³³ This benign and perhaps simplistic view of American power seemed naïve to Haig, however he consented to Reagan’s letter being sent, but said that he would

⁶³⁰ Original draft Executive Secretariat NSC: Head of State File: Records, 1981-1989, *RPL*.

USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev (8190057), Box. 38. *RPL*.

⁶³¹ Strober and Strober, *Reagan*, p. 116.

⁶³² Haig’s attitude towards the President reflected a disdain for the intellectual powers of Reagan. He said: ‘His staying power is zilch. He isn’t a mean man. He’s just stupid’. As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 111. Eventually, Reagan had had enough of Haig and terminated his services on 25 June 1982.

⁶³³ Original draft Executive Secretariat NSC: Head of State File: Records, 1981-1989, *RPL*.

USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev (8190057), Box. 38. *RPL*.

send a separate letter, this one drafted by himself. The second letter, however, contradicted the first in that its tone was bombastic and threatening and Reagan's team had to re-write it extensively.

As National Security Adviser Richard Allen's Memo to the President on the Haig letter demonstrates, the Secretary of State seemed determined to undercut Reagan's peace initiative. Labeling Haig's draft, 'fundamentally negative' and pointing out that the 'first formal exchange of correspondence' between the two countries required 'more careful thought',⁶³⁴ Allen gave a litany of abuses that had to be corrected. For starters, instead of fostering Reagan's desire to reach out to the USSR, Allen said that the letter came across as a 'brush off' compared to Brezhnev's 'statesman-like air' in his first letter to Reagan, sent in early March. Secondly, Haig had totally ignored issues raised in Brezhnev's letter, such as the Middle East and Asia; these needed to be addressed. Also, Haig's accusation that Soviet arms proposals were 'designed for propaganda purposes' in Allen's view crossed a line that 'violate[d] accepted diplomatic usage'. Warning that Haig's language sounded 'deliberately insulting', Allen said: 'We have behind us five centuries of diplomatic experience, during which norms have been evolved to convey such messages more politely.'⁶³⁵ Reagan agreed with Allen's recommendation that the letter be 'redrafted', and the letter was significantly re-written, with an emphasis on a willingness to engage in 'dialogue'. However, Reagan did not find Brezhnev to be the 'partner in peace' that he had hoped for.

Brezhnev's reply to Reagan's letter was the first sign to the President that his dream to bring peace between the Superpowers was not going to be accomplished in the short-term. The

⁶³⁴ Ibid. Box 37.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

six-page letter was mainly devoted to refuting Reagan's claims of America's benevolent foreign policy following World War II. Firstly, Brezhnev said that it would be hard for him to find 'many people', 'those familiar with that time' either through 'experience' or through 'serious study', who would agree with Reagan's interpretation of history. 'The US did the maximum it could, using a wide array of military, political and economic means' to 'restructure the world the way it wanted to be', via a so called '*Pax Americana*', Brezhnev said. Though Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan had been conquered, the US created NATO, a 'closed military block' against the USSR, and its economic assistance was only given to those countries willing to 'submit their policy to foreign interests'.⁶³⁶ Reagan later recalled that the letter was 'icy' and said, 'So much for my first attempt at personal diplomacy'.⁶³⁷ But perhaps Reagan was overlooking the many positive aspects of Brezhnev's letter.

Brezhnev made clear to Reagan in his letter that he was willing to join with the President in the cause of peace. 'I gave careful thought to your personal letter', Brezhnev had begun, and said 'just as you do, I recall our brief conversation at the reception given by President R. Nixon at Casa Pacifica in June 1973'.⁶³⁸ Echoing Reagan's words to him then, Brezhnev said: 'Today, as we did at that time, all Soviet leadership and I commit our hearts and minds to the realization of hopes and aspirations of all the peoples of the world for peace, quiet life and confidence in their future'. Again quoting Reagan, Brezhnev said: 'You indicated that peace and goodwill

⁶³⁶ Brezhnev's letter of 25 May 1981, from Executive Secretariat NSC: Head of State File: Records, 1981-1989 USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev (8190057), Box 38. *RRPL*,

⁶³⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 273.

⁶³⁸ Brezhnev's letter of 25 May 1981, from Executive Secretariat NSC: Head of State File: Records, 1981-1989 USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev (8190057), *RRPL*, Box 38.

among men never had seemed closer at hand' and Brezhnev gave the reason for this: the successful policy of détente. Recounting that policy, he stated:

Our two countries took the path of reaching agreements which marked a radical turn for the better not only in Soviet American relations but in the international situation as a whole. Those were the years when the USSR and the USA actively and not without success set about to solve the task of limiting arms, first of all strategic arms, when they started seeking in common solutions to acute international problems when mutually beneficial bi-lateral ties and cooperation between our two countries in a variety of [areas] were developing fruitfully.⁶³⁹

Brezhnev then put forward his lengthy version of events as to why relations had soured since then, but he did not want Reagan to come away from his letter thinking that that it was a 'dressing down'. Rather, 'The main idea though that I would like to convey through my letter is that we do not seek confrontation with the USA or infringe upon American legitimate interests. What we seek is different: we seek peace, cooperation, a sense of mutual trust, benevolence, between the Soviet Union and the United States of America.' If Reagan wanted to, he and Brezhnev could work together to 'search for mutually acceptable solutions to practically all major questions between us—be it restraining of the arms race, elimination of most of the dangerous sources of tension in various areas of the world, or measures for confidence building.' Promising there was 'no ruse or any ulterior motives' Brezhnev concluded that his was, 'thus a policy for peace'.⁶⁴⁰

However, Reagan chose to focus on the 'dressing down' part of the letter, and due to Brezhnev's failure to address the key issues of Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and its SS-20

⁶³⁹ Brezhnev's letter of 25 May 1981, from Executive Secretariat NSC: Head of State File: Records, 1981-1989 USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev (8190057), Box 38. *RPL*.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 6.

missiles in Europe, the language about peace rang somewhat hollow. Reagan could no more make peace with Brezhnev than Carter could: and when on Christmas Day 1981 Brezhnev sent a cable to Reagan accusing him of ‘defaming our social and state system’, and adding that Reagan’s foreign policy was ‘thoroughly amoral’, Reagan had to conclude at the close of 1981:

As I thought back on that letter to Brezhnev after the shooting, I realized I hadn’t made much progress with the Russians in reducing Cold War tensions during my first year in office...the Soviets were acting more like international brigands than ever.⁶⁴¹

Andropov and Chernenko: Failed Attempts at Peace

On 10 November 1982, Leonid Brezhnev died. His tenure as leader of the USSR had seen détente and its discontents; from the heights of the summitry under Nixon with its arms limitation agreements, to the depths of the invasion of Afghanistan, and SS-20 deployments under Carter. Perhaps with Brezhnev gone, it was hoped, the relationship could be marked less by *depths* and more by *heights*. Possibly Reagan had a chance to bring peace. As he recounted in his memoirs:

I had made no progress with Brezhnev. Now there was a new leader in the Kremlin, Yuri Andropov, former head of the KGB. I didn’t expect him to be any less of a doctrinaire Communist than Brezhnev, *but at least there was a clean slate*.⁶⁴² (Emphasis added).

Onto this ‘clean slate’, Reagan chose to use the language of peace and extended anew an olive branch, albeit with caution. At a press conference held 11 November, Reagan said:

⁶⁴¹ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 306

⁶⁴² *Ibid.* p. 567.

I want to underscore *my intention to continue working to improve our relationship with the Soviet Union. Our two nations bear a tremendous responsibility for peace in a dangerous time—a responsibility that we don't take lightly...* I want to reconfirm that we will continue to pursue every avenue for progress in this effort. But we shouldn't delude ourselves. Peace is a product of strength, not of weakness—of facing reality and not believing in false hopes.⁶⁴³ (Emphasis added).

But 1983 was not to be a year of peace between the Superpowers: indeed, it was probably the most dangerous year since 1962, which saw the near disastrous Cuban Missile Crisis. Reagan's first written response from the new Soviet leader Andropov was in the President's view, icier than Brezhnev's, saying, 'His letters were stiff and as cold as a Siberian winter'.⁶⁴⁴ On 11 July 1983 Reagan pushed harder with his language of peace, suggesting in another letter that they correspond 'privately and candidly'. If Andropov wanted direct communication, he said that: 'you will find me ready. I await your reply.'⁶⁴⁵ Andropov, already gravely ill from kidney failure,⁶⁴⁶ did reply in a positive tone, saying 'thank you for your personal letter' and expressing 'satisfaction' at the 'assurances that the US government shares a devotion to the cause of peace and the elimination of the nuclear threat'.⁶⁴⁷ But Andropov was unwilling to make any substantial move towards peace.

In his letter, Andropov ignored Reagan's concerns about Soviet 'subversion' of Third World countries saying that those nations had the right to be 'masters of their own fate'. And on

⁶⁴³ 'The President's News Conference' 11 November 1981, *PPPR*.

⁶⁴⁴ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 575.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 576.

⁶⁴⁶ Andropov suffered kidney failure in February 1983, and for the remainder of his life underwent hemodialysis treatment several times a week; as reported in Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 20.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

the critical issue of INF weapons in Europe, Andropov took the dishonest position that the USSR was only responding to British and French nuclear arsenals, and asked, somewhat audaciously, 'Is this not an honest and moderate position?'⁶⁴⁸ Reagan was not pleased, but decided to keep the tone conciliatory in a 4 August 1983 letter that took a more realist approach to the issues raised. But events soon overtook them both, and the relationship was poisoned, terminally.

'And make no mistake about it, this attack was not just against ourselves or the Republic of Korea' Reagan said with anger, 'This was the Soviet Union against the world and the moral precepts which guide human relations among people everywhere'; thus said Reagan in an address to the nation on 5 September 1983 concerning the Korean Airline 'massacre'. It was the final straw for Andropov: he had put up with Reagan's 'Evil Empire' speech in March, his announcement of SDI, and now this. Reagan, he felt, had gone too far. Lashing out against the President, he said that Reagan 'risked war' and ruled out any agreements while Reagan remained in office: 'Even if someone had illusions as to the possible evolution for the better in the policy of the present American Administration,' Andropov said, 'the latest developments have dispelled them.' Relations went from bad to worse: the Soviets walked out of the Geneva arms talks in November, and with the 'Able Archer' NATO military exercises, the Kremlin placed their forces on nuclear alert. 1983, therefore, ended with the prospect of nuclear war. Reagan's peace initiatives were a dismal failure; a failure that Reagan was determined to turn around in 1984.

President Reagan publicly demonstrated his commitment to peace at the dawn of his re-election year in a major speech on US--Soviet relations which centered on the need for a 'constructive dialogue'. On 16 January 1984 Reagan gave his address which he hoped would close the chapter on 'the year of the bomb', and begin a new chapter that would move

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.,p.577.

Superpower relations away from confrontation, and instead in the direction of peace. As stated previously, Reagan said:

We must and will engage the Soviets in a dialogue as serious and constructive as possible—dialogues that will serve to promote peace in the troubled regions of the world, reduce the level of arms, and build a constructive working relationship.⁶⁴⁹

‘Our challenge,’ Reagan added, ‘is peaceful’. However, Andropov was not taking up Reagan’s challenge. As stated earlier, on 28 January 1984 Reagan received his final letter from the ailing Soviet leader, in which he said:

If one must state today that the affairs between our two countries are taking on, to put it frankly, an extremely unfavorable shape, then the reason for it is not our policy—we did not and do not want it to be so...We are prepared to accept very deep reductions both of the strategic and European weapons....*However, the United States has destroyed the very basis on which it was possible to seek an agreement.* Let us be frank, Mr. President, there is no way of making things look as if nothing happened. There has been a disruption of the dialogue on the most important questions. *A heavy blow has been dealt to the very process of nuclear arms limitation.*⁶⁵⁰ (Emphasis added).

After this unpleasant letter, Reagan must have felt little sorrow upon hearing on 9 February 1984 that Andropov was dead—when asked if he wanted to attend the funeral, Reagan said: ‘I don’t want to honor that prick’.⁶⁵¹ Nonetheless, in a radio address to the nation two days later, Reagan publicly extended another olive branch to the new leader Konstantin Chernenko in his quest to fulfill his dream for peace. He said:

⁶⁴⁹ ‘Address on US-Soviet Relations’ 16 January 1984; *PPPR*.

⁶⁵⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 592.

⁶⁵¹ As quoted in Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 87.

At this time of transition in the Soviet Union, our two nations should look to the future. We should find ways to work together to meet the challenge of preserving peace. Living in this nuclear age makes it imperative that we talk to each other, discuss our differences, and seek solutions to the many problems that divide us.⁶⁵²

‘America is ready’ Reagan said, and asked that the Soviets ‘take advantage of the opportunities at hand.’ Demonstrating his heartfelt desire for peace, Reagan ended his address saying, ‘If the Soviet Government wants peace, then there will be peace’.⁶⁵³

Reagan felt that with Brezhnev and Andropov gone, he might actually have the chance to meet with a Soviet leader who could join him in his quest to end the Cold War. As Reagan’s diary records for 22 February 1984, the President was hopeful and wanted a summit:

I have a gut feeling I’d like to talk to him about our problems man to man and see if I could convince him there would be a material benefit to the Soviets if they’d join the family of nations etc. We don’t want to appear anxious which would tempt them to play games and possibly snub us. I have our team considering an invitation to him to be my guest at the opening of the Olympics, July in LA. Then he and I could have a session together in which we could start the ball rolling for an outright summit on arms reductions, human rights etc. We’ll see.⁶⁵⁴

It did not take long for Reagan’s hopes to be dashed again. Two days after this diary entry, he received his first letter from the new Soviet leader. In it Chernenko described US--Soviet relations as being ‘abnormal, and let’s face it, dangerous’. Furthermore, he accused America of seeking to ‘gain military advantages’ and slammed criticism of Soviet human rights abuses

⁶⁵² ‘Radio Address to the Nation on United States/Soviet Relations’ 11 February 1984; *PPPR*.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, pp.220-221.

stating that the Soviets ‘believe it is wrong and even dangerous to subordinate our relations to ideological differences’.⁶⁵⁵ Reagan, however, was not going to give up.

Reagan’s 7 March 1984 letter to Chernenko demonstrated yet again his determination to bridge the divide between the US and the USSR, and again, the President believed that the personal touch would be key. Attempting to ‘use the old actor’s technique of empathy, to imagine the world as seen through another’s eyes and try to help my audience see it through my eyes’,⁶⁵⁶ Reagan wrote about Soviet wartime miseries. In particular, Reagan drew attention to the massive casualties sustained by the Soviet people in its struggle to destroy the Nazi war machine during World War II. Also, recalling Chernenko’s words to Vice President Bush at Andropov’s funeral that ‘we should take steps to insure that history recalls us as leaders known to be good, wise and kind’, Reagan said, ‘Nothing is more important to me, and we should take steps to bring this about’. A handwritten postscript to the letter further stated Reagan’s ‘profound commitment’ to achieving a ‘lasting reduction of tensions between us’.⁶⁵⁷ But again, the Soviets were not moved.

Chernenko’s response to Reagan’s letter and his subsequent pledge to boycott the Olympics being held in Los Angeles, plunged US--Soviet relations into deep freeze. Turning Reagan’s ‘actor’s technique’ against the old thespian, Chernenko’s letter said: ‘It appears to be an American idiom to put somebody in someone else’s shoes’, asking Reagan to realize that from their perspective, ‘the Soviet Union is encircled by a chain of American military bases’. Chernenko ruled out being Reagan’s guest at the opening of the Olympics, and on 8 May 1984,

⁶⁵⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.593.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.595.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 597.

the Kremlin announced that the Soviet team would not be participating at all—they were boycotting the Olympics.⁶⁵⁸ Chernenko went as far to say that the Reagan Administration: ‘has chosen terrorism as a method of conducting affairs with other states and peoples’.⁶⁵⁹ At a press conference on 22 May reporter Helen Thomas put Reagan on the defensive. As this exchange shows, Reagan was made to look like the man responsible for the toxic Superpower relationship:

Thomas: Mr. President, Senator Byrd says that our relations with the Soviet Union have reached the lowest point in 20 years. Did you misjudge the Russians? Are your hard-line policies responsible for the boycott of the Olympics, the break-off of arms negotiations, stepped-up offensive in Afghanistan, more missiles off our coast?

Reagan: No, Helen, I don’t think I’m responsible for any of those things...

Thomas: Would you admit there’s a heightened sense of belligerency? And six eminent world leaders today said that we’re headed for global suicide. What are you going to do about it with this arms race?

Reagan: I don’t think we are, and I don’t think we’re any closer or as close as we might have been in the past to a possible conflict or confrontation that could lead to a nuclear conflagration. I think the very fact that we’re stronger—yes, the Soviet Union is unhappy. They’re unhappy because, for the first time in a couple of decades, we are preserving our security ability. We’re building up our military, and we’re not unilaterally disarming while they continue their massive arms buildup. And I’m sure this makes them a little unhappy about that, that things aren’t as easy as they once were. But when they’re ready to come back to the

⁶⁵⁸ The Soviets officially blamed distrust of the US government and the peril caused its athletes. President Reagan had sought to avoid this from occurring, and wrote the Soviet leader pledging to ‘warmly welcome’ their competitors and provide a ‘hospitable climate’. Furthermore, Reagan said, ‘I know that you share my enthusiasm for this great sporting event, and I am looking forward to seeing all the outstanding athletes of the world marching behind their flags in Los Angeles on July 28. I consider sport to be one of the finest opportunities for people of all nations to come to know and understand each other.’ See Executive Secretariat NSC: Head of State File: Records, 1981-1989 USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev: RRPL, Box. 39 RPL.

⁶⁵⁹ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 228.

table, it probably—or might not be till after the election, I don't know. But I think that the world maybe is a little safer than it has been in the past.⁶⁶⁰

Reagan felt that placing the blame on him, was wrong. As he wrote in a letter to an old friend:

The Soviets shoot down a plane, they walk out of disarmament talks, boycott the Olympics and the press asks, 'Why don't you do something'? Actually we have done everything we could quietly to let them know the door is open. We do have one reservation. We won't make some offer that would look as if we were rewarding them for walking out. Just between us I think they are going to be this way until after the election.⁶⁶¹

The President was right: the Soviets were hoping that by taking a hard-line stance, they would spoil his chances of being re-elected.⁶⁶² However, by the fall, even the Soviets saw the writing on the wall, that barring the unforeseen, Reagan would be re-elected President by a landslide. Thus, despite Reagan's off the cuff joke about bombing Russia that was caught on an open microphone⁶⁶³—the Soviets sent out signals that their foreign minister Gromyko would be willing to meet with Reagan during his annual visit to the UN in September. When Secretary Shultz raised the idea with Reagan, he immediately agreed to the meeting.

Gromyko's meeting at the White House was the earliest indicator that the Soviets were now ready to engage with Reagan's peace initiative. It was the first such visit in four years, and the media covered the event as though the General Secretary himself had arrived. While both

⁶⁶⁰ The President's News Conference' 22 May 1984; *PPPR*.

⁶⁶¹ Letter to Paul Trousdale, 17 May 1984, as reproduced in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, p. 412

⁶⁶² Strobe Talbot reported for *Time Magazine* with the headline: 'Behind the Bear's Angry Growl—What the Soviet's really want is to get rid of Ronald Reagan.' 21 May 1984.

⁶⁶³ Testing the microphone before his weekly Saturday radio address, Reagan joked: 'My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you I just signed legislation which outlaws Russia forever. The bombing will begin in five minutes'. *New York Times* 14 August 1984. Reagan was horrified that journalists would report this, and indeed, the Soviets did go on a higher alert as a result of this gaffe.

sides expressed a desire to end the arms race, the most memorable exchange occurred between Gromyko and the First Lady, when the usually dour minister asked Nancy:

‘Does your husband believe in peace?’

‘Of course’ Nancy replied.

Gromyko then said, ‘Then whisper the word peace in his ear every night’.

‘I will’ Nancy said, ‘And I’ll whisper it in your ear too’ she said, leaning in and whispering ‘peace’. Gromyko, for the first time in memory, cracked into a smile.⁶⁶⁴

Both sides also agreed that the arms race was seriously out of control, and that sitting on ‘mountains of weapons’ was counterproductive to the interests of each nation and the cause of world peace. Reagan recorded in his diary: ‘I kept emphasizing that we were the two nations that could [either] destroy or save the world’.⁶⁶⁵ The President was delighted with the outcome of the talks: the Soviets had finally come to terms with the fact that he would be President until 1989, and they were in agreement that hostilities needed to be replaced with co-operation. When Reagan won 49 out of the 50 states in the November election, the Soviets sent a telegram of congratulations to which Reagan replied:

I share your hope that the coming years will be marked by improved relations between our countries. Despite our different political beliefs and perspectives on international problems, I am confident we can make progress on strengthening peace and resolving our differences through discussions and negotiations. We hope you will join us in the critical work needed to reduce international tensions and to create a safer world.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁴ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 605.

⁶⁶⁵ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p.270.

⁶⁶⁶ ‘Message from Reagan to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union on his re-election’ 14 November 1984, *PPPR*.

1985: the Rise of Gorbachev

Reagan's second term began with a propitious announcement: the United States and the Soviet Union would resume arms negotiation talks without any preconditions set. For the first time since the fall of 1983, the Superpowers were talking to each other again. Reagan's dream for peace was slowly but surely moving in the right direction. That process would be dramatically intensified when Reagan at last achieved what he had long hoped for: a man willing to engage in a constructive dialogue of peace leading the USSR. The ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev to the position of General Secretary meant that for the first time since the Nixon/Brezhnev partnership, US--Soviet relations would be marked by collaboration on a wide range of bi-lateral issues. And this time there would be no souring of relations: Gorbachev was as committed to ending Cold War tensions as Reagan was.

On the morning of 11 March 1985 President Reagan and his wife Nancy were awoken at 4am by a telephone call. The message? Chernenko was dead. 'How am I supposed to get any place with the Russians,' he asked Nancy, 'If they keep dying on me?'⁶⁶⁷ Again there was a new leader to deal with, and again, Reagan felt optimistic that it could mean a greater chance for peace. The White House released a statement by the President, sending Reagan's condolences, but also extending anew the olive branch for peace. It read: 'At this solemn time, I wish to reiterate the strong desire of the American people for world peace. Although the problems which divide our countries are many and complex, we can and must resolve our differences through

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. p.611.

dialogue and negotiation.’⁶⁶⁸ Already it was clear that Mikhail Gorbachev would be Chernenko’s replacement, and Reagan wasted no time—the moment had arrived for a Superpower summit.

In the Reagan/Gorbachev partnership, it was Reagan who made the first move. Perhaps encouraged by Margaret Thatcher’s assessment that Gorbachev was ‘a man you could do business with’,⁶⁶⁹ Reagan wrote a letter to him on 13 March 1985, which was handed to the new leader at Chernenko’s funeral by Vice President Bush. It read:

You can be assured of my personal commitment to working with you and the rest of the Soviet leadership in serious negotiations. *In that spirit, I would like you to visit me in Washington at your earliest convenient opportunity.* I recognize that arriving at an early answer may not be possible. But I want you to know that I look forward to a meeting that could yield results of benefit to both our countries and to the international community as a whole.⁶⁷⁰ (Emphasis added).

Gorbachev replied that he had a ‘positive attitude’ towards a Summit, and called for US--Soviet relations to take the path of ‘peaceful competition’. Seeking a ‘peaceful, calm development’, the new leader stressed his desire for ‘an atmosphere of greater trust between our countries’.⁶⁷¹ They were off to a good start, and after a series of letters over several months, they had finally agreed to a summit to be held in Geneva. But not everyone in Reagan’s Administration shared the President’s enthusiasm for such an event.

Ronald Reagan, the ardent anti-communist, the man who had decried the USSR as an ‘Evil Empire’ was all set for a meeting with the new Soviet leader and led by Secretary of

⁶⁶⁸ ‘Message to Vasiliy V. Kuznetsov on the Death of General Secretary Konstantin U. Chernenko of the Soviet Union’, 11 March 1984; *PPPR*.

⁶⁶⁹ As quoted in *Time Magazine*, 7 January 1985.

⁶⁷⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 612.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 614.

Defense Casper Weinberger, the conservatives who supported him began a revolt. Weinberger, whose own ardent anti-communism now seemed out of place in Reagan's second term, had been excluded from the Geneva Summit and he was none too pleased. As Reagan left for Geneva on *Air Force One*, an unnamed source in the Pentagon leaked a letter that Weinberger had written to the President in an attempt, in the opinion of Bud McFarlane, to 'sabotage the Summit'.⁶⁷² The letter to the President urged him not to accept any restrictions on his SDI program, to refuse to agree to continue the flawed SALT II Treaty, and to avoid any communiqué that glossed over the fact that the Soviets were serial violators of past treaties.⁶⁷³ Shultz, McFarlane and others in the Reagan Administration were livid, and wanted Weinberger fired. Reagan refused, and recorded in his diary:

The press is excited about the leak of a letter to me from Cap on why I shouldn't be trapped into endorsing continued observance of SALT II. It is a great distortion and is not as the press would have it: an in-house battle. I agree with Cap and wanted his factual accounting in writing.⁶⁷⁴

Reagan the peacemaker may have seen that having a hard-line Secretary of Defense helped him diplomatically, as it demonstrated to the Soviets that there were forces within the Administration who were only too eager to return to Cold War tensions if the renewed dialogue was unsuccessful.⁶⁷⁵ Reagan's re-assurances to Weinberger and other conservatives, that he would

⁶⁷²Shultz, p. 598.

⁶⁷³ For full text of letter see 'Weinberger Letter To Reagan On Arms Control' 16 November 1985 *The New York Times*, p. 7.

⁶⁷⁴ Diary entry for 17 November 1985, Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 369.

⁶⁷⁵ George Shultz was asked in an interview with the author: 'Within the administration, with people like Cap Weinberger, who was always the hardliner- do you think that playing "good cop/bad cop" might have helped with negotiations as the Soviets realized that there were people who were opposed to better relations?' Shultz, who never got on with Weinberger and whose fights with him were legendary replied, 'Not particularly'. Interview at Stanford, 5 October 2007. See Appendix B.

not ‘sell the shop’, was part of his negotiations strategy: he had to convince his own political base that he had not changed if he were to avoid a right wing revolt and thereby achieve any meaningful peace with the Soviets.

The Geneva Summit: Undoing the Mistrust

On the eve of the Geneva Summit, Reagan addressed the nation saying, ‘My mission, stated simply, is a mission for peace’.⁶⁷⁶ Finally Reagan would fulfill his dream to sit down one- on-one with a Soviet leader, and try out his theory that the Cold War was above all else a misunderstanding: that if he could just convey America’s peaceful purposes and gain the trust and friendship of the Soviet leader, then peace could be achieved. Reagan had thought long and hard about this for many years and he prayed privately: ‘Lord, I hope I’m ready and not over trained’.⁶⁷⁷ Publicly, he asked that God would grant ‘guidance for all of us at Geneva, so that the cause of true peace among men will be advanced and all of humanity thereby served’.⁶⁷⁸

Reagan had ‘crammed’ hard for the Summit, being schooled by the experts on Russian history and its new leader, Gorbachev. Reagan thoroughly enjoyed his readings on Russian culture prepared by Jack Matlock, and he shared the memos with the Vice President and his wife Nancy. Recognizing the historic importance of what he was about to undertake, Reagan recorded in a memo to himself his thoughts on the Soviet leader. He wrote:

⁶⁷⁶ ‘Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva’, 14 November 1985; *PPPR*.

⁶⁷⁷ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 369.

⁶⁷⁸ ‘Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva’, 14 November 1985; *PPPR*.

I believe Gorbachev is a highly intelligent leader totally dedicated to traditional Soviet goals. He will be a formidable negotiator...He is dependent on the Soviet communist hierarchy and will be out to prove to them his strength and dedication...He will wish to reduce the burden of defense spending that is stagnating the Soviet economy...[This] could contribute to his opposition to SDI since he doesn't want to face the cost of competing with us.⁶⁷⁹

The Summit was a moment that Reagan had long anticipated, and the importance of that day is demonstrated by the fact that Reagan's prologue to his autobiography begins with that first day in Geneva. Revealing his peace theory based on an interpersonal relationship, Reagan wrote:

I believed that if we were ever going to break down the barriers of mistrust that divided our countries, we had to begin by establishing a personal relationship between the leaders of the two most powerful nations on earth. During the previous five years, I had come to realize there were people in the Kremlin who had a genuine fear of the United States. I wanted to convince Gorbachev that we wanted peace and they had nothing to fear from us.⁶⁸⁰

Reagan, therefore, had gone to 'Geneva with a plan', to 'see Gorbachev alone'. Upon arriving in Geneva, Reagan had set aside a pool room with a roaring fire for their one-on-one meeting. Reagan knew what he wanted to say, and it was there that he wanted to say it. Reagan would get to begin that personal relationship, but it did not unfold exactly as he later described it.

From the first moment of Reagan and Gorbachev's 'Super-Summit',⁶⁸¹ each saw in the other leader an opportunity for a constructive dialogue leading towards peace. As Reagan recalled: 'That morning, as we shook hands and I looked into his smile, I sensed I had been right

⁶⁷⁹ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 282.

⁶⁸⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.12.

⁶⁸¹ It was dubbed the 'Super-Summit' by the United Press International, reflecting the huge expectations surrounding this meeting.

and felt a surge of optimism that my plan might work'.⁶⁸² Gorbachev, had a 'warmth in his face' Reagan observed, 'not the coldness bordering on hatred I'd seen in most senior Soviet officials I'd met until then.'⁶⁸³ Reagan was delighted by this pleasant surprise.⁶⁸⁴ Gorbachev, similarly, stated that he too felt something positive about Reagan from the first moment of their meeting, telling Reagan's biographer Edmund Morris that he saw, 'Sunshine and clear sky' in the President, and felt immediately that he was dealing with someone of '*lincnost*' (authenticity) and *kalibr* (caliber).⁶⁸⁵ It was the first time in six years, since Carter's meeting with Brezhnev in Vienna in June of 1979, that the leaders of the Superpowers had met. There was an air of excitement not only in the press pool, but also around the world. And no-one was more excited by the opportunity than Reagan; an excitement that made him get a little carried away.

When Reagan first met Gorbachev, he was so eager to begin work on his 'personal diplomacy', that he did not wait for his one-on-one fireside chat as planned, but proceeded immediately to speak from the heart the words he had chosen to convey America's peaceful nature. As the Memcons record, as soon as Gorbachev was ushered into the residence, Reagan sat next to him on the couch and began to use the material he had prepared beforehand: words that in his later recollection, he would claim were spoken at the fireside-chat held later in the day. But the Memcons do not lie, and Reagan's words were spoken as aides chatted in the background, and with Reagan's egotistical Chief of Staff Don Regan leaning in between them. It

⁶⁸² Reagan, *An American Life*, p.12.

⁶⁸³ Ibid. p. 635

⁶⁸⁴ Reagan had not expected Gorbachev to be a warm human being. A few weeks before the Summit 27 year old *Wall Street Journal* editor Gregory Fossedal said to Reagan: 'I've had made a special model of Mikhail Gorbachev for you to study before the Summit'—and handed a model of *Star Wars* villain Darth Vader to the President. Reagan responded by saying: 'You know, they really are an Evil Empire. I've never had any regrets or retractions about that'. As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 284.

⁶⁸⁵ Morris, *Dutch*, p.556-57.

was hardly as intimate as Reagan's setting, 'beside the blazing hearth, just the two of us'.⁶⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Reagan's account of the personal talk held between the two is correct, if his recollection of the setting is not. The Memcons record that in that initial meeting, Reagan:

...indicated that both he and the General Secretary had come from similar beginnings which were quite different from their current positions. He, Reagan, was born and began his life in a small farming community,⁶⁸⁷ and now the two of them were here with the fate of the world in their hands, so to speak. The US and the Soviet Union were the two greatest countries on Earth, the superpowers. *They were the only ones who could start World War III, but also the only two countries that could bring peace to the world.*⁶⁸⁸ (Emphasis added).

In that effort to make peace, Reagan wished to get to what he considered the heart of the Cold War: the mutual mistrust between the two nations. 'Mr. General Secretary,' he said, 'we don't mistrust each other because we're armed; we are armed because we mistrust each other'.⁶⁸⁹ Reagan stated that arms reductions would be discussed in great detail but 'he wondered if the primary aim between them should not be to eliminate the suspicions which each side had of the other. The resolution of other questions would follow naturally after this.' Explaining his reasoning, Reagan said: 'To talk about arms while such suspicions exist is an empty exercise as both sides are defensive'. Instead, Reagan hoped 'that in the meetings the two sides could get at the sources of the suspicions which exist.'⁶⁹⁰ Gorbachev replied positively, stating that the US and the USSR had co-operated in the past, and that there was no reason why this could not be

⁶⁸⁶ Reagan, *An American Life*, p.13

⁶⁸⁷ Reagan was from Dixon Illinois, a small town, but certainly not a small farming community

⁶⁸⁸ Memcon: Nov. 19, 1985, 10:20-11:20am, Box 45 RPL.

⁶⁸⁹ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 13.

⁶⁹⁰ Memcon: Nov. 19, 1985, 10:20-11:20am, Box 45 p. 1, RPL.

true of the future, stating ‘in the USSR there was no enmity toward the United States or its people.’⁶⁹¹

Picking up the American idealist belief that human beings are inherently peace-loving, and that it is only governments who start wars, Reagan said, ‘There was no question but that the Soviet and American peoples, if they learned more about each other, would find that they had many things in common, and that friendship between them would grow. Unfortunately, it was not people but governments that created arms’.⁶⁹² Gorbachev did not take up this Wilsonian concept, so foreign to Marxist theories of class warfare, but he did say that both old and young hoped with him that the Summit would address ‘the central issue of the present time, that is, the question of war and peace’.⁶⁹³ Gorbachev added, ‘Perhaps the President was aware that a slogan had been used during the time of this meeting in Geneva which said that Reagan and Gorbachev should bear in mind that the world did not belong only to the two of them.’⁶⁹⁴ Reagan replied he was not aware of this saying. And thus ended their initial *tête-à-tête*.

Reagan’s personal outreach to Gorbachev in the quest for a better relationship, continued throughout the remainder of the Summit and a friendly rapport was established between the two leaders. As planned, Reagan asked Gorbachev to walk with him down to the pool room for a private conversation. Reagan’s invitation came at the end of the second plenary session, and Gorbachev ‘leaped out of his chair’ according to Reagan at the suggestion. It is a good thing that Reagan did make this gesture: because up until that point, Gorbachev said that Reagan was a

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.,pp. 2-3.

⁶⁹² Ibid., p.3.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.,p. 5.

‘political dinosaur’.⁶⁹⁵ Walking down to the boathouse at the *Villa Fleur d’Eau*, the Soviet leader asked questions about Reagan’s Hollywood career, their conversation aided of course by the use of interpreters. The banter between the two men was relaxed, with Gorbachev asking, ‘What’s it like, to see yourself so young on the screen?’ Using a well used one liner, Reagan replied, ‘Like meeting a son you never knew you had.’⁶⁹⁶

Once inside, Gorbachev noted that the setting, with the fire, actually did create a warmer atmosphere for discussions.⁶⁹⁷ Though the two discussed a nuclear arms reduction treaty and argued intensely over SDI, they did not allow their tone to become mean spirited. They disagreed strongly over the idea of missile defense technology, but underneath their strong words, there remained a basic understanding of each other. At one point during the conversation, Gorbachev said that he could ‘understand the President on a human level’ and how ‘the idea of strategic defense had captivated the President’s imagination’.⁶⁹⁸ The two agreed to disagree, but the friendly rapport continued between the two leaders. This was demonstrated by Reagan’s invitation on the walk back to the main house that Gorbachev must visit him in Washington for a follow up summit. The General Secretary agreed immediately, and similarly invited Reagan to visit him in Moscow the following year. The personal relationship between the two had already borne fruit: they had agreed to two further summits, thus creating a schedule for continued dialogue.

⁶⁹⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, p. 406

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.567.

⁶⁹⁷ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, p.407.

⁶⁹⁸ Memcon: 19 November 1985, 3:40-4:45pm, p. 5 *RPL*.

On the second day of the Summit, Reagan had another one-on-one discussion with Gorbachev, and the topic of conversation was human rights. Reagan had long linked human rights to the cause of peace, believing that a nation that breaks its covenant with its own people, was likely to break it with other nations. However, as Reagan's diary account shows, the President attempted to use his old negotiation skills to make Gorbachev believe that Reagan was trying to help him:

We went to the Soviet mission and he took me into a small room with interpreters. This was my chance to have at human rights. I explained that I wasn't telling him how to run his country—I was asking for his help; that I had a better chance of getting support at home for things we'd agreed to if he would ease some of the restrictions on emigration, etc. I told him I'd never mention what he was doing out loud but he'd find that I could better meet some of his requests for trade etc. He argued back sort of indicating that he thought they treated their people better than we did ours. He quoted statements made by some of the feminist extremists to prove we were unkind to women. I fought back—only time will tell if I made any headway.⁶⁹⁹

The personal relationship established by Reagan and Gorbachev, with the firm commitment to the continuance of dialogue, was the great success of the Geneva Summit. The hours spent together, including the two state dinners, helped each side see the human dimension of the other. The summit, by all accounts, was a great success. It ended with a joint statement that that summed up the central question of peace:

The sides, having discussed key security issues, and conscious of the special responsibility of the USSR and the U.S. for maintaining peace, have agreed that *a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought*. Recognizing that any conflict between the USSR and the U.S. could have catastrophic consequences, they emphasized the importance of *preventing any war between them, whether nuclear or conventional*. (Emphasis added)⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁹ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 370.

⁷⁰⁰ 'Joint Soviet-United States Statement on the Summit Meeting in Geneva' 21 November 1986; *PPPR*.

‘Nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought’ was a Reaganism, a phrase that he had been using for many years. For the press, it was the standout statement for the entire summit.⁷⁰¹

Returning to the United States, the President, as Nixon and Carter had done before him, immediately addressed a Joint Session of Congress, where he received a thunderous welcome, with Reagan writing in his diary: ‘I haven’t gotten such a reception since I was shot. The galleries were full and the members wouldn’t stop clapping and cheering’.⁷⁰² The mood among the Congressman and Senators was truly representative of how the American people rated Reagan’s performance at Geneva, with 83% of respondents to a CBS poll approving of Reagan’s handling of the Summit.⁷⁰³ In the President’s report to the Congress, he dubbed Geneva the ‘fireside summit’ and spoke of the cause of peace:

We know that peace is not just the absence of war. *We don’t want a phony peace or a frail peace.* We didn’t go in pursuit of some kind of illusory détente. We can’t be satisfied with cosmetic improvements that won’t stand the test of time. *We want real peace.*⁷⁰⁴ (Emphasis added).

⁷⁰¹ For a scholarly understanding of the significance of the arms control measures discussed at Geneva, as viewed at the time, see Phillip Stewart, ‘Gorbachev and the Obstacles toward Détente’, *Political Science Quarterly*, (New York: Spring 1986), Vol. 101, Iss. 1., pp.1-22.

⁷⁰² Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p.371.

⁷⁰³ White House News Summary, 22 November 1985; *RPL*.

⁷⁰⁴ ‘Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Following the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva’ 21 November 1985; *PPPR*.

Privately, Reagan was satisfied with the Geneva Summit, while still holding some reservations about Gorbachev. Writing to his friend George Murphy, who had compared Reagan's role in Geneva to starring in a blockbuster movie, the President wrote:

Thanks for your letter and that most generous review of my *performance* in Geneva. I must say I enjoyed playing the part and the show did have something of a happy ending. Maybe I should say—'tune in next year for the second installment'.

Seriously, it was worthwhile but it would be foolish to believe the leopard will change its spots. He is a firm believer in their system (so is she) and he believes the propaganda they peddle about us. At the same time he is practical and knows his economy is a basket case. I think our job is to show him he and they will be better off if we make some practical agreements without attempting to convert him to our way of thinking.⁷⁰⁵

Gorbachev certainly was not going to be 'converted' to American capitalism, but he concurred with Reagan that the Summit had been a success. Writing to the President he said that Geneva had helped them to 'overcome a serious psychological barrier which for a long time has hindered a dialogue worthy of the leaders of the USSR and the USA'. Furthermore, Gorbachev said that he felt that the Superpowers could 'set aside our differences and get down to the heart of the matter', improved relations. 'I agree with you, Mr. President,' Gorbachev wrote, 'In the final analysis, no one besides us can do this'.⁷⁰⁶ But improved relations continued to stall after Geneva, despite the best of intentions between Reagan and Gorbachev.

⁷⁰⁵ Letter to George Murphy, 19 December 1985, as reproduced in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, pp.415-416.

⁷⁰⁶ Letter dated 24 December 1985, as reproduced in Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 646.

The Rocky Road from Geneva to Reykjavik

‘More than four months have passed since the Geneva meeting,’ Gorbachev wrote Reagan, asking, ‘what is the reason for things not going the way they, it would seem, should have gone? Where is the real turn for the better?’⁷⁰⁷ Gorbachev’s frustration was evident, and he felt that the US government had dismissed his arms reduction proposals—including the goal of total nuclear elimination by 2000—as ‘propaganda, as a desire to score high points in public opinion.’⁷⁰⁸

Two weeks after this letter, relations continued to sour when the US bombed Libya, a state sponsored by the Soviet Union. A Soviet official described Qaddafi as ‘heroic’ and Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze cancelled a planned meeting with Shultz to discuss the promised summit. Then came Chernobyl.

On 25 April 1986, the Soviet nuclear power plant at Chernobyl went into meltdown, and the reality of the destructive threat of nuclear weapons became ever more apparent, giving fresh impetus to the US--Soviet quest for peace. President Reagan was aboard *Air Force One* on his way to Indonesia and Japan for a thirteen-day trip when it was reported to him that abnormally high radioactive readings over Europe pointed to something catastrophic occurring in the USSR. Unable to cover up the incident because of these readings, the Soviet news agency *Tass* reported the accident.⁷⁰⁹ Reagan offered to send experts to assist with the cleanup, and used the incident to push for greater effort in the stalled Geneva talks. He wrote Gorbachev:

Mr. General Secretary, our recent history provides ample evidence that if you wait for an ideal moment to try and resolve our differences; we are unlikely to resolve

⁷⁰⁷ Letter dated 2 April 1986, as reproduced in Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 662.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ Shultz, *Triumph and Turmoil*, p. 714.

anything. We should take advantage of it since it is a time of historic and possibly unique potential. Let us not lose it for lack of effort.⁷¹⁰

On 26 June 1986, the Geneva arms talks ended without any consensus on moving towards the goals set by Reagan and Gorbachev. The momentum begun at the Geneva Summit seemed to have hit a ‘brick wall’. With no success among the arms negotiators, the likelihood of a summit in 1986 seemed remote. Then came what appeared to be the death blow: the Nicholas Daniloff affair.

On 4 September 1986 *US News and World Report* journalist Nicholas Daniloff was seized by the KGB in Moscow and accused of spying. Reagan was furious: Daniloff was no spy, and it was obvious that the capture was in response to the American arrest of Soviet UN mission member Gennadi Zakharov a few weeks earlier. Reagan had had about enough of Soviet duplicity, but what offended him the most was the fact that despite his personal assurances to Gorbachev that Daniloff was not an agent of espionage, the Soviets refused to release him.⁷¹¹ How could Gorbachev be Reagan’s partner in peace, if he did not even believe him? As Reagan’s diary records: ‘Word came the Soviets were going to officially charge Daniloff with espionage. Gorbachev’s response to my letter was arrogant and rejected my statement that Daniloff was no spy. I’m mad as hell.’⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 665.

⁷¹¹ The Soviets may have had reason to believe that Daniloff was a spy, because while not technically an agent of the CIA, he did act in a covert manner: violating Soviet law by delivering letters from Soviet citizens to the American embassy, where at least one letter went to the CIA and sending ‘top secret’ Soviet documents to the *US News & World* headquarters. Also, according to Shultz, Daniloff was ‘compromised’ by the CIA when his name was mentioned by them to a Soviet dissenter—a conversation recorded by the KGB. As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 334.

⁷¹² Diary entry for 7 September 1986, Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 435.

Meanwhile, Shultz was behind the scenes, working out a deal to release the Soviet spy Zakharov in exchange for Daniloff, and seeking to find a way to make it not appear to be what it was: a hostage swap. Shultz was anxious to resolve the matter, because he believed that Daniloff's actions in the USSR—which included forwarding mail from Soviet citizens to the US embassy—could technically be defined as espionage according to Soviet law. (In correspondence with the author, Daniloff said that Soviet law was so broad that a 'ham sandwich could have been prosecuted!')⁷¹³ As all this was going on, Gorbachev was ready to move the peace process forward, and sent his foreign minister to the White House with a proposal for a snap summit.

On 19 September 1986, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze met with President Reagan and delivered a letter from Gorbachev proposing a summit to break the impasse in relations between the Superpowers. But before Reagan would receive the letter, he crossly gave the Soviet foreign minister a lecture over the 'Daniloff affair'. Reagan recounted in his diary:

I let the Foreign Minister know I was angry and that I resented their charges that Daniloff was a spy after I had personally given my word that he wasn't. I gave him a little run down on the differences between our two systems and told him they couldn't understand the importance we place on the individual because they don't have any such feeling. I enjoyed being angry.⁷¹⁴

When Reagan finally did accept the letter and read it, he saw that Gorbachev addressed the Daniloff issue, which he claimed had been exploited to launch a 'massive hostile campaign'

⁷¹³ Email correspondence with author, 28 November 2007.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid, p. 439.

against the USSR. Still, trying to spin the incident in a positive light, Gorbachev said that it was an example of how:

sensitive relations between the USSR and the United States are and how important it is for the top leaders of the two countries to keep them constantly within view and exert a stabilizing influence whenever the amplitude of their fluctuations become threatening.⁷¹⁵

What had begun at Geneva needed ‘a major impulse’ otherwise the stalled relationship would continue to ‘mark time’. Gorbachev therefore called for meeting between the two leaders to be held either in London or Reykjavik, with the purpose of being able to ‘find solutions’ to the problems between the two countries, and thus prepare for a ‘really productive and fruitful’ summit to be held later in Washington D.C. Reagan announced, on 30 September, that a summit was to be held in less than two weeks in Reykjavik, following Shultz’s earlier announcement that day that the Daniloff affair had been resolved.

On 9 October, in his remarks while departing the White House for the Summit, Reagan outlined the goals of his meeting with Gorbachev, which he articulated within the general theme of making peace. After claiming that credit for the success of the Geneva summit ‘belongs to the American people’ for their ‘unified support’, Reagan spoke of how summitry can help bring peace:

I’ve long believed that if we’re to be successful in pursuing peace, we must face the tough issues directly and honestly and with hope. We cannot pretend the differences aren’t there, seek to dash off a few quick agreements, and then give speeches about the spirit of Reykjavik. In fact, we have serious problems with the Soviet positions on a great many issues, and success is not guaranteed. But if Mr. Gorbachev comes to Iceland in a truly cooperative spirit, I think we can make some progress. And that’s my goal, and that’s my purpose in going to

⁷¹⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 669.

Iceland. *The goals of the United States, peace and freedom throughout the world, are great goals; but like all things worth achieving, they are not easy to attain. Reykjavik can be a step, a useful step; and if we persevere, the goal of a better, safer world will someday be ours.*⁷¹⁶

Reykjavik: A Breakthrough for Peace

As the previous chapters demonstrate, Reykjavik, far from being a ‘preparatory meeting’ for a summit, turned out to be the most remarkable summit of the Reagan Administration, if not of the entire Cold War period. It was a conference marked by incredible drama, with Reagan and Gorbachev proposing what most still consider unthinkable: a world without nuclear weapons. The sticking point of course was the limitation of the Strategic Defense Initiative to the laboratory for a ten year period, a demand that Reagan simply could not accept. Reykjavik, therefore, represented a lost opportunity. But while total nuclear abolition was not accomplished, something more intangible was: both Superpower leaders got to see beyond the confines of the Cold War conflict into a new era free of the terror of nuclear warfare, and in seeing beyond those boundaries, both saw in each other a true partner for peace.

Gorbachev knew that Reagan wanted to be seen as a ‘peacemaker’. During the Reykjavik Summit, when Gorbachev realized that his proposals were slipping away due to Reagan’s intransigence over SDI, the Soviet leader, as though hanging a carrot before the President said, ‘You are this far away from being known as a great peacemaker!’ Gorbachev was correct in his estimation of Reagan: he did wish to be known as a peacemaker, but he was wrong about how Reagan sought to achieve this.

⁷¹⁶ ‘Remarks on Departure for Reykjavik, Iceland’, 9 October 1987; *PPPR*..

In Reagan's vision for a world at peace, each side would begin the process of nuclear abolition while at the same time deploying missile defense technology as a sort of 'insurance' against cheating and the emergence of new leaders in the mold of 'Hitler'. Once SDI was fully operational, each side would destroy the last nuclear weapon, and share defensive technology with the world. Gorbachev's vision for peace—abolition without SDI—did not make sense to Reagan, and therefore, he simply could not accept it. SDI was central to his vision of a world free from the bomb: take SDI away, and peace would remain as precarious as ever. Of course, even Reagan's vision also had major holes in it: SDI would only protect against intercontinental ballistic missiles; it was never a defense against weapons launched by submarine or dropped from airplanes. When put to Secretary Shultz in an interview by the author the contradictions and problems inherent with each side's position, Shultz replied:

If you start down the road of abolishing nuclear weapons, if you start to do that, you realize how many important difficult steps need to be taken as you try to get to that objective. So it would have been a start; an important start towards nuclear abolition.⁷¹⁷

Historians will always ponder whether more flexibility on either side could have led to the beginning of that process, but even so, much was accomplished at that summit. Firstly, each side had shown all their cards, and in doing so, revealed the limits of their negotiating position. Even though the summit ended in apparent failure, both the Inter-Mediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987 and the START Treaties of 1991 and 1993 were agreed to in principle in that meeting; agreements that were not contingent on America giving up SDI, as the Soviets finally understood that Reagan or Bush would never do so, no matter how sweet their offer was. These

⁷¹⁷ Interview with Author, 5 October 2007, Stanford University.

agreements were made possible not because SDI was no longer an issue—the Soviets still condemned it as dangerous—but because they no longer viewed the United States as the threat that it once was.

By demonstrating his willingness to go all the way on nuclear abolition, Reagan had convinced the Soviet leadership that America, far from plotting a first strike against the USSR, was actually desirous of an end to the threat of nuclear warfare. Reykjavik therefore was an important ‘psychological breakthrough’: the same breakthrough that Reagan had spoken of saying, ‘We don’t mistrust each other because we are armed; we’re armed because we mistrust each other’. It seems that the walls of mistrust were broken down during those two days of intense negotiation and replaced with a trust that both men were on the same page when it came to the issues of war and peace. Whereas before Gorbachev had mocked Reagan as a ‘dinosaur’, he came away from Reykjavik with a great amount of respect for the American President. Reagan too, saw Gorbachev in a new light—before the Summit Reagan had watched Gorbachev on TV speaking of his hopes for peace and said out loud: ‘When you stop trying to take over the world, then maybe we can do some business.’⁷¹⁸ Afterwards he realized that Gorbachev, like himself, had no such desire. Something fundamental in the relationship between the two men—and therefore between their nations—had changed. Years later, Gorbachev said that the turning point towards the end of the Cold War had been Reykjavik and gave his reasoning as follows:

For the first time the two leaders really had a deep conversation about everything. We really exchanged views, and not just about peripheral things, [but also] about the central things, and that was what was important about Reykjavik...Reykjavik is really the top of the hill. And from that top, we saw a great deal.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 340.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.359.

Three weeks after the ‘failed’ summit, it had truly ‘sunk in’ to Reagan just how significant Reykjavik had been, and in a radio address to the nation he declared: ‘I believe that prospects for strengthening peace between our country and the Soviet Union have become better than at any time in the last 40 years.’⁷²⁰ Peace, Reagan was intimating, was at hand. From there, the summits of Washington and Moscow were demonstrations that Reagan believed that peace had been finally achieved.

Washington, Moscow and New York: Cold War Over?

The general theme that Reagan sought to project in his final three meetings with Gorbachev was that his goal of peace had been achieved. This was to be his legacy, his bequest to mankind, the fulfillment of his belief that he was pre-destined and saved to end the Cold War.

The Washington Summit held in December of 1987, was Reagan’s chance to showcase to the world that his policies had worked, and that peace had been achieved. For Reagan it was a dream come true: for the first time since Leonid Brezhnev’s visit in 1973, a Soviet leader was again on American soil, and this time, Reagan was positive that a lasting peace, not a *détente*, had been accomplished. On the eve of the Summit, Reagan declared in his thanksgiving address that: ‘America is at peace’.⁷²¹ It was a statement that infuriated his conservative base, who believed that Reagan had been taken in by Gorbachev’s charisma, and that the USSR remained as immense a menace as ever. At a press conference held on 3 December 1987, Reagan brushed

⁷²⁰ ‘Radio Address to the Nation on Soviet—United States Relations’ 1 November 1986; *PPPR*.

⁷²¹ ‘Radio Address to the Nation on Soviet—United States Relations’ 28 November 1987; *PPPR*

aside this criticism with the Russian proverb, ‘*Dovorey no provery*: trust but verify’. The proof would be seen in actions, but the point of the statement was that Reagan did in fact trust Gorbachev, itself a startling admission considering Reagan’s former denunciation of the Soviet leadership. But the critics were not as trusting.

Reagan’s outreach to Gorbachev in the quest for peace came at the cost of losing his conservative political base, who believed that Reagan, desperate to cement a legacy, had lost the plot. Over the years, as Reagan moved closer to Gorbachev, the conservatives blamed those around the President for the apparent change in policy—it must be Nancy Reagan, or George Shultz, or Mike Deaver—they thought. But when the Washington Summit rolled around, they pointed the finger of blame squarely at the President—painting him as an idiot actor. The *New Republic* wrote:

At the beginning of his administration, Reagan knew exactly one thing about the Soviet Union: it was the ‘Evil Empire’, the bad guys. And you fight bad guys at every step. What rendered Reagan suddenly conciliatory in mid-administration wasn’t any dramatic change in Soviet behavior...What changed Reagan’s tune, rather, was the cue he’s always responded to: applause. Mikhail Gorbachev had been winning global acclaim by talking peace. Reagan wanted some of the action. It’s that simple.⁷²²

Conservative Caucus member Howard Phillips said that Reagan was: ‘Nothing more than a useful idiot for Soviet propaganda’⁷²³. And George Will wrote that Reagan’s INF treaty was an example of ‘intellectual disarmament’, saying that the day the INF Treaty was signed—December 8—‘will be remembered as the day the Cold War was lost’.⁷²⁴ These statements, with

⁷²² *New Republic*, 21 December 1987.

⁷²³ *The New York Times*, 11 December 1987.

⁷²⁴ *The Washington Post*, 11 December 1987.

the passage of time demonstrating that Reagan was not merely playing to the crowd and that he was correct in his estimation of Gorbachev, now look somewhat ridiculous for being so off the mark. Furthermore, while conservative pundits might have been scathing of the INF Treaty, the vast majority of conservative citizens trusted Reagan's judgment.⁷²⁵ Nonetheless, the controversy does demonstrate that Reagan was 'marching to the beat of his own drum', and had moved beyond conventional conservative wisdom in his belief that Gorbachev could be trusted. On 8 December 1987, that trust was there for all to see, as Reagan welcomed Gorbachev to the White House.

Despite lingering differences over SDI and a testy exchange on the issue of human rights, the Washington Summit was an occasion for Reagan to persist in his quest to fulfill his perceived destiny: to end the Cold War. Gorbachev was received by the American people as something of a mix between a religious figure and a rock star. Riding with Vice President Bush down Connecticut Avenue, the Soviet leader looked out at the throngs of people lining the streets hoping to get a glimpse of him. When Bush said how unfortunate it was that he could not meet with the people, Gorbachev ordered 'Stop the car!'⁷²⁶ Plunging into the crowd like an American politician, Gorbachev shook hands and signed autographs—'Gorby mania' was gripping those

⁷²⁵ See Lee Sigelman, 'Disarming the Opposition: The President, the Public, and the INF Treaty', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, (Spring 1990), Vol.4, Iss. 1, pp.37-47. Sigelman argues that Reagan's outreach to the Soviets was acceptable because of his past as an ardent anti-communist, just as Nixon's outreach to China was acceptable in 1972 for the same reason.

⁷²⁶ Time has not diminished Gorbachev's assertive ways. At a speech held in Brisbane, 22 July 2006, at which the author was present, Gorbachev brushed aside the event coordinator and ordered the 'lights' in the auditorium be turned on so that he could take questions from the audience. Despite the protests from the organizers of 'Earth Dialogues' that this would throw out the entire schedule of other speakers, Gorbachev did what he wanted to do.

gathered.⁷²⁷ ‘I’m still shaking’ one young woman said after meeting Gorbachev, ‘It was like the coming of the second Messiah!’⁷²⁸ Reagan had messianic ideas of his own.

Reagan had ordered made especially for his meeting with Gorbachev a gift that he hoped would express his belief that the two were leaders were fulfilling a pre-ordained destiny: a pair of cufflinks with the image of *swords* being *beaten into plowshares*. It is an image that originated in the prophetic literature of the *Bible*, and the books of Isaiah and Micah both prophesy: ‘*They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*’⁷²⁹ The ‘Messianic’ era of peace foretold, to Reagan, was being fulfilled, and he and the General Secretary were the agents of its fulfillment. Reagan was a man with a private obsession with Biblical prophecy, in particular the apocalyptic forecast of ‘Armageddon’, which Reagan believed he had helped to avert or at least postpone. For as Reagan had said in his first inaugural address: ‘I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. I do believe in a fate that will fall on us if we do nothing’.⁷³⁰

Reagan had been so excited by the gift of cufflinks, that whenever he was briefed on the upcoming Summit, he raised the issue of the cufflinks and their meaning.⁷³¹ On the first day of

⁷²⁷ When President Reagan and his wife Nancy did a similar impromptu visit with ordinary people in the streets of Moscow in 1988, they got a similar ecstatic response from the crowd—however, the Soviet security detail began pushing, punching and kicking the crowd back. Reagan wrote in his diary of the experience: ‘Our people had an idea about us going out on the street to be seen by the people...It was amazing how quickly the street was jammed curb to curb with people—warm, friendly people who couldn’t have been more affectionate. In addition to our S.S the KGB was on hand & I’ve never seen such brutal manhandling as they did on their own people who were in no way getting out of hand.’ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 613.

⁷²⁸ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 442.

⁷²⁹ Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3 *New International Version Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002), p.1037, 1399.

⁷³⁰ ‘Inaugural Address’ 20 January 1981; *PPPR*..

⁷³¹ Colin Powell, with Joseph E. Perisco, *My American Journey*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), pp.347-348.

the Summit, Reagan handed the General Secretary the gift and with a twinkle in his eye, waited to see Gorbachev's reaction. Gorbachev, however, failed to see their significance: as a man raised in atheistic communism, he was probably unaware of the Biblical image, and as one who eschewed the symbols of the bourgeois, he did not wear cufflinks. Taking the gift and putting it in his pocket with a curt 'Thank you',⁷³² Reagan's feelings were hurt.

Bruised feelings aside, the summit was a huge success, in particular the signing of the INF Treaty and Gorbachev's personal agreement with Reagan to end Soviet shipment of arms to Nicaragua, and agreeing to move towards a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.⁷³³ The joint communiqué echoed that of Geneva and declared:

The President and the General Secretary...continued to be guided by their solemn conviction that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. They are determined to prevent any war between the United States and the Soviet Union, whether nuclear or conventional. They will not seek to achieve military superiority.

And like Geneva, the 'human element' again had had a profound impact on the participants, particularly Gorbachev. Ambassador Matlock observed: 'You know what mattered for Gorbachev? It wasn't seeing our prosperity—he expected that—it was being applauded by Americans. It was not the Manichean world he had grown up studying. He saw that the Americans didn't hate him'⁷³⁴. Gorbachev said as much to the Politburo: 'In Washington, probably for the first time, we clearly recognized how much the human factor means in

⁷³² Ibid. p.349.

⁷³³ Reagan had called Afghanistan 'genocide' and demanded that Gorbachev end it. Since the invasion in 1979, over 1 million Afghans had been killed; as cited in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 448.

⁷³⁴ As quoted in Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 445.

international politics.’ Americans, he said, were ‘guided by the most human motives and feelings’.⁷³⁵ Reagan felt just as positive, writing in his diary, ‘Well, at last it’s over. They’ve departed, and I think the whole thing was the best summit we’ve ever had with the Soviet Union.’⁷³⁶ Moscow would be part two.⁷³⁷

The Moscow Summit of 1988, to many, was the symbolic end of the Cold War conflict, as Reagan and Gorbachev stood together in Red Square, and Reagan declared that he no longer considered the USSR an ‘Evil Empire’. Rumblings of this declaration were heard six days before Reagan left for the summit, when he was asked if he considered Mikhail Gorbachev a ‘real friend’. Reagan replied, ‘Well, I can’t help but say yes to that because the differences between him and other previous leaders that I have met is that we can debate, and we disagree...but there is never a sense of personal animus when the arguments are over’.⁷³⁸

Reagan’s dream of having a Soviet leader that he could talk to ‘man to man’, and ‘undo the mistrust’ had been accomplished at Geneva and Reykjavik. Washington had been the

⁷³⁵ As quoted in Anatoly Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 142.

⁷³⁶ Diary entry for 10 December 1987, Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 557.

⁷³⁷ Something that Reagan had wanted to do with Gorbachev—a tour of the country—had not been accomplished during the visit. Reagan often spoke of his dream of flying Gorbachev over the country, showing him the high standards of living enjoyed by the average citizen: He imagined flying over suburbs, pointing out all the swimming pools, cars and other things that your ordinary ‘factory worker’ enjoyed. Gorbachev claimed to have looked forward to this, writing in his memoirs of the summit: ‘President Reagan had repeatedly said that he wanted me to see different parts of the United States—but apparently his wish was somehow forgotten when it came down to mapping out the program. Security forces (especially on our side) wanted to avoid complications and strongly recommended confining ourselves to Washington on this first trip’. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, p. 446. Colin Powell, counters this stating that Gorbachev himself vetoed any extensive US visit: ‘Gorbachev was having none of it. He came to do business. He didn’t come to be a tourist.’ See Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, p. 261. Whatever the case, in 1990 Gorbachev did get his trip out West—visiting George Shultz at Stanford University. In 1992 Gorbachev returned to California, and visited a retired Reagan at his ranch—amazed both by the fact that Reagan had his own gas pump, but also by how extremely modest Reagan’s small house was, compared to the stately tsarist villas that Gorbachev had enjoyed as head of state.

⁷³⁸ ‘Interview with Foreign Television Journalists’ 19 May 1988, *PPPR*.

crowning moment when the INF Treaty had been signed, and Reagan demonstrated that he felt that both he and Gorbachev were fulfilling a pre-ordained course for peace. In Moscow, Reagan ended all speculation when he was asked in Red Square whether he considered himself to be in an 'Evil Empire'. Reagan replied, 'No', and said that he had been talking about 'another time in another era'.⁷³⁹ The Cold War Warrior had come full circle,⁷⁴⁰ and peace it seemed had been accomplished. As Gorbachev later said of this declaration:

This statement, I think, really focused, concentrated, all the changes that happened to Ronald Reagan, himself. It means that even a person who had a kind of bias and who was at an age when it's not easy to change, he showed that he was able and ready to change his position, to change his evaluation. So he is really a very big person. A very great political leader.⁷⁴¹

Had Reagan changed? Reagan said no, and stated: 'If anything, the world was changing...and changing for the better.'⁷⁴²

On the final day of the summit Reagan had been unwilling to accept Gorbachev's term 'peaceful co-existence' for the final communiqué, (as it seemed too much like détente era language), but it no longer seemed important: Reagan had said that the USSR was no longer an 'Evil Empire'. Everything had changed. 'We had a great time', Gorbachev said in their final

⁷³⁹ White House News Summary, 31 May 1988; *RPL*.

⁷⁴⁰ Much to the chagrin of the conservatives back in America. See especially William F. Buckley's article, 'So Long, Evil Empire', *National Review*, 8 July 1988.

⁷⁴¹ Interview with Mikhail Gorbachev for PBS Documentary *Reagan: The American Experience*, Transcript available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reagan/filmmore/transcript/index.html>

⁷⁴² Reagan, *An American Life*, (Simon & Schuster Audio; Abridged edition, 1990).

meeting, putting his arm around Reagan's shoulder like an old friend, and leading him to his limousine.⁷⁴³ A Cold War had been replaced by a warming peace.

Conclusion

Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev met one last time while both were in office together, at Governor's Island in New York City on 7 December 1988. Gorbachev had come to the United States to address the United Nations General Assembly, and had agreed to meet with Reagan as a courtesy. It was to be a nostalgic meeting, as Reagan had less than a month and a half before his Vice President, George Bush, was to be sworn in as his successor. At the lunch, Reagan gave Gorbachev a framed photograph of the two of them walking together at Geneva, and inscribed that: 'We have walked a long way together to clear a path for peace: Geneva, 1985—New York, 1988'. Another other famous photograph was taken that day: of Reagan, Gorbachev and Bush looking out at the skyline of New York City, as Reagan pointed out the Statue of Liberty. Its symbolism, from today's perspective, is that the Cold War era had passed, and that Reagan and Gorbachev had been instrumental in this regard. The third man in the photo, George H.W Bush, would preside with Gorbachev over the peaceful break-up of the Warsaw Pact, the re-unification of Germany and the end of the communist USSR. These momentous changes, to Reagan, were the loose ends: the real change had begun during his presidency. Indeed, as Ronald Reagan flew in a helicopter over the White House on his last day as President, he declared out loud to no-one in particular, 'The Cold War is over'. Reagan had achieved his goal, and peace was his.

⁷⁴³ Reeves, *President Reagan*, p. 475.

Yet returning to that photograph in New York City, the three men stand with the World Trade Centre in the background: its twin towers pointing to another future where war and conflict would again plague international relations.⁷⁴⁴ Peace, it seems, is always a lull before another war. Yet the threat of an all out thermonuclear war, in which the Superpowers would, in the words of Jimmy Carter, unleash a ‘World War II every second’⁷⁴⁵ is now a thing of the past. War still exists, but the likelihood of humanity destroying itself completely, seems like a very remote possibility indeed—thanks to the efforts of Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev.

This chapter has examined whether Reagan aspired to be a peacemaker and the evidence would suggest strongly that following the assassination attempt on his life in March 1981, he did in fact feel obligated to take on such a role, particularly when it came to ending the Cold War conflict and its related threat of nuclear warfare. He began in earnest with a personal letter to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, and did the same to his two successors, Andropov and Chernenko. It should be noted that these olive branches were extended prior to the ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev to the position of General Secretary and before his 1984 election campaign when his political handlers wished to re-mold Reagan’s image to one more palpable to the American people. As such, the thesis that ‘Reagan the peacemaker’ came about as a reaction to Gorbachev or as a re-election gimmick is incorrect. Reagan was committed to the cause of peace, and pursued it from the earliest days of his presidency. Of course, for the first three years of his administration he did so privately while publicly using harsh rhetoric, like his speech which promised to leave Marxist-Leninism on the ‘ash-heap of history’. And while it is true that

⁷⁴⁴ Terrorism was an issue confronted by the Reagan Administration, from the Beirut bombing to the hijacking of numerous commercial airplanes. For a history of this 1980s ‘war on terror’ see David C. Martin and John Walcott, *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America’s War Against Terrorism* (New York: Touchstone, 1989).

⁷⁴⁵ President Carter’s Farewell Address to the Nation, 14 January 1981. *The Public Papers of President Carter*.

Reagan changed his public posturing in the election year of 1984, and while it is also true that Gorbachev became his partner in the peacemaking process, these two realities should not obscure the fact that Reagan did in fact believe in peace and sought it before 1984 and before Gorbachev.

This chapter demonstrates, nonetheless, that the Reagan/Gorbachev partnership was, in the President's estimation, the means for achieving his cherished hopes for peace. Considering Gorbachev a 'friend', Reagan declared in Red Square Moscow that he no longer considered himself to be in an 'Evil Empire'. Reagan had come to such an opinion through the Geneva and Reykjavik Summits, where the President had worked to 'undo the mistrust' between the two nations, by speaking frankly about America's position on a wide range of issues and clearly spelling out that the United States posed no threat to the USSR's survival. By proposing total nuclear abolition, it seems, Gorbachev was convinced that Reagan was genuine, as the two contemplated a future without the terror of the bomb. The removal of this psychological barrier permitted the agreement on the INF Treaty, and for the first time in the history of the Cold War, the Superpowers began to dismantle and destroy some of their nuclear arsenal. Political scientists and historians can debate and argue how and why the Cold War ended, but what is important for this thesis is to conclude that for Reagan, the Cold War was over by the time he left office, and he believed that he, along with Gorbachev, had played the leading roles in this most extraordinary of dramas.

Therefore it can be concluded that Reagan did in fact relish the idea of being seen as a peacemaker on a global scale, and that he took on this role with more passion than any other performance in his life. It was, to use the words of Lou Cannon, *the role of a lifetime*.

On the morning of 20 January, 1989, President Ronald Wilson Reagan went down to the Oval Office for one last time. Though there was no official business to conduct, Reagan wished to say farewell to the office that he had coveted for so long, and had enjoyed holding so much. The office had been stripped bare of all of Reagan's personal items, and the President looked around the room wistfully, alone in his thoughts. When official photographers came in to capture Reagan's final moments, National Security Advisor Colin Powell also joined them, giving the President his final daily briefing by saying simply: 'Mr. President, the world is quiet today.'⁷⁴⁶ And so it was. As Reagan flew out to California that day, as 'the twentieth century's fourth president of achievement and its first conservative one',⁷⁴⁷ he did so content with the knowledge that on his watch as President, a world on the brink of nuclear war had been replaced with one in which the Cold War was all but over. Peace, it seemed, had been achieved. 'Not bad', Reagan said to himself, 'not bad at all.'⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁶ As cited in Morris, *Dutch*, p. 652.

⁷⁴⁷ Michael Nelson, in Paul Kengor and Peter Schweizer (eds), *The Reagan Presidency: Assessing the Man and his Legacy*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p.12.

⁷⁴⁸ Quote from Reagan's farewell address to the nation, delivered 11 January 1989; *PPPR*.

THESIS CONCLUSION

Key Ideas

This dissertation has examined the role that America's 40th President, Ronald Wilson Reagan (1981-1989), played in the formulation and execution of American Soviet policy. Specifically, the author proposed five key ideas that, in his estimation, summed up Reagan's policy and can broadly be described as the 'Reagan Doctrine'. These were:

- 1) 'Peace through Strength'—that military might is required to deter aggression;
- 2) That the Cold War was a moral conflict, and had to be fought with ideas expressed through Presidential oratory;
- 3) That the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction was not a sound basis for national security, and that actual missile defense technology was required to secure the population;
- 4) That the superpowers should reduce, not limit their nuclear arsenals, and that the ultimate goal for both sides should be total nuclear abolition. And;
- 5) That the Cold War nuclear standoff was keeping the world on the precipice of disaster, and had to be replaced not with a détente, but with a lasting peace between the Superpowers.

This dissertation assessed these key ideas in their origin and their history in the Cold War preceding Reagan's presidency, and sought to determine whether Reagan held these views prior to becoming the President.

Primary source materials, in particular Reagan's hand-written radio addresses from the 1970s, were scoured and they demonstrate that Reagan was a man conceptualizing ideas, and drawing from a wide range of materials in order to buttress his arguments. The influences on him, mainly from conservative publications, indicate that Reagan sought out those who held the same ideological views as he and shared his concern about America's military position, vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. What was gleaned from these materials was that Reagan was no mere mouth-piece for Republican speechwriters. Rather, Reagan was writing his own material, thinking through the major issues of the day, and articulating his views in a manner that could be comprehended by the average citizen. Since many of the issues discussed were those that he himself had to confront as President, it can be argued that Reagan was in fact laying a 'blue print' for his own administration, as he seemed to fully believe that ultimately he would become the next President of the United States.

The five key ideas were then each examined in their implementation, again the key question being asked: What was Reagan's role? Far from finding a President disengaged from his government's policy towards the Soviet Union, this research has determined that Reagan was actually 'in the driver's seat'. While by no means an expert in the arcane details of arms control, for example, Reagan knew what he wished to accomplish and laid out his bold agenda and expected his staff to implement his directives. He was, if you will, painting the broad strokes, and left the details to others. The major policy decisions of the Reagan Administration were examined, and in addition to the use of memoirs, primary source materials from the Reagan archives such as National Security paperwork, speech drafts and other materials were utilized, seeking to determine how the decisions were made, and how involved Reagan was. In particular, Reagan's recently released diary and the Memorandums of Conversation from the four

Superpower summits, demonstrate, more so than any other evidence, the role that President Reagan played. If Nixon's tapes were the 'smoking gun' proving his involvement in the Watergate cover-up, then these materials represent Reagan's 'smoking gun', confirming that Reagan was, to a degree not generally known, very much involved in his government's Soviet policy. Thus, the evidence has demonstrated that the Reagan Doctrine, encompassing the five elements proposed, is rightfully named after the President, because the ideas and the implementation bore Reagan's imprint of authorship and engagement.

Review of Chapters and Research Questions

Chapter one of this thesis, examined the concept of deterrence, and sought to reveal whether Reagan was a firm adherent to the view that 'peace' comes through 'strength', and if he advocated an arms buildup before becoming President. After firstly establishing that this was official US foreign policy during the 1980s, the chapter detailed the history of deterrence in the Cold War leading up to the Reagan presidency. From there it examined the speeches and radio addresses that Reagan authored in the 1970s that touched on this subject.

Fearful that the Soviet Union had achieved military superiority over the United States, Reagan suggested that what was occurring in the West was reminiscent of its failure to deter Nazi aggression in the 1930s, and unless action was taken, a similar catastrophic outcome would ensue. Reagan therefore called for America to begin a massive re-armament program, both in conventional and nuclear weapons. Reagan's criticisms over the Carter Administration's cancellations of the B-1 bomber and the Hydrogen Bomb also show a certain level of sophistication when it came to the details of the weapons programs under discussion. This

chapter evidenced that Reagan was a firm believer in ‘Peace through Strength’ and the idea of deterrence that underpinned it. He was an outspoken supporter of new weapons programs which he believed were required to regain American military superiority. Later charges that Reagan was some sort of pawn to the ‘military-industrial’ complex were shown to be inaccurate—Reagan had his own very strong opinions on the matter and, while certainly not alone in those beliefs at the time, Reagan was the most vocal proponent of a ‘military modernization’ program.

Chapter 2 looked at the question of Reagan’s role in the rebuilding of America’s military strength in the 1980s. It firstly confirmed that in choosing Caspar Weinberger as Secretary of Defense, Reagan had selected a man who saw eye-to-eye with him on the need to restore America’s position of military parity with the USSR, no matter the cost. This appointment, more so than any other decision of Reagan’s, assured that his beliefs about ‘Peace through Strength’ would become operational, because Weinberger took on his role at the Pentagon with a determination that he himself admitted allowed for thought about little else. Just as Reagan had promised during the campaign, when it came to new military programs, what Carter had cancelled, Reagan reinstated. Others helped in this process. The MX missile program was put back on track, thanks to a bi-partisan commission that resolved the matter of basing. The Navy came close to achieving the 600 ship goal that Reagan had set for it, thanks to Admiral Lehman’s ‘Reagan Maritime Strategy’ which won Congressional funding. The Air Force adopted the ‘shock and awe’ strategy in large part because of the introduction of the Stealth bomber. Also, due to Reagan’s leadership as Commander-in-Chief, as demonstrated in the Grenada invasion, morale was restored to the armed services, and the Soviets and others were given pause for thought. According to Richard Perle, Caspar Weinberger’s right hand man at the Pentagon, ‘the ideology, the ideas, and the framework’, came from Reagan, and Weinberger ‘implemented’

them. While the exorbitant cost of the military modernization program can be questioned and Reagan could be criticized for failing to rein in spending, there can be no doubt that when it came to the execution of 'Peace through Strength' Reagan was at the top, giving the green light to proceed.

Chapter 3 questioned the origins of Reagan's ideological views on communism, and demonstrates that he had been engaged in a moral struggle against this belief system and its adherents since the late 1940s. The 'Evil Empire' address, and others like it during the Reagan presidency, reflected a journey that began when Reagan battled what he viewed to be a communist attempt to take over the motion picture industry. In many respects, this period in Reagan's life marked him both personally, and as a politician. Reagan's political activity on behalf of the Screen Actors' Guild, which he served in the capacity of President for six years, was cited by his wife Jane Wyman as the reason for their divorce. Reagan also believed that his activism undoubtedly affected his standing as an actor, resulting in him being passed over for prominent roles. But out of these apparent setbacks, came new opportunities: Reagan became a sought after speaker around the country, and as GE spokesman, he honed his skills in communication, and went from the gilded cage of Hollywood to factories and towns all around the country, where he got a feel for the hopes and concerns of 'Main street USA'. This apprenticeship served him well, for after his 'Time for Choosing Speech' in 1964, Reagan ran for the Governorship of California, and his ability to articulate to and connect with the average citizen, led to his electoral success.

The evidence presented in Chapter 3 also demonstrates that while Reagan was an ideologue, he was also a pragmatist and an opportunist. When Barry Goldwater wanted Reagan to cancel his prime-time address because of his concerns over what Reagan would say about

Social Security, Reagan refused, and went ahead and gave his speech—including the offending section on Social Security. When Reagan became Governor of California, he willingly allowed himself to be used by President Nixon as an envoy of his outreach to the two communist giants, the USSR and China. Then, in 1976 when he had failed to win a single presidential primary against Gerald Ford, Reagan polished off his ardent anti-communist speeches, and went on the attack against the détente of ‘Dr. Kissinger and Mr. Ford’. It was a strategy that almost worked, with Reagan coming close to defeating Ford for the nomination. When Carter became President, Reagan continued to argue against the de-moralizing of the Cold War conflict, and spoke passionately on human rights abuses behind the Iron Curtain and his distaste for all things détente. As the perused records show, this mix between ideological rhetoric, pragmatism and opportunism was clearly evident in Reagan’s political career prior his becoming President. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the pattern repeated itself when Reagan assumed the presidency.

Chapter 4 examined Reagan’s rhetoric as President, and argued that while the moral tone of his speeches did not waver, the emphasis indeed did, and could be carved up into three distinct periods: that of *confrontation*, *engagement*, and *challenge*. Reagan purposely sought, from his first press conference as President onwards, to confront the USSR on its ideology and practices and in doing so, in his words, to let the leaders in the Kremlin know that there was ‘new management’ in Washington. The key addresses of this period, lasting from 1981 to the end of 1983 were not authored by Reagan; nonetheless, the testimony of the speechwriters demonstrates that they had based their writing on Reagan’s own ideas, and that he had been key in keeping the more memorable (and controversial) sections included, over the objections of the so-called ‘pragmatists’ in the White House. The last major denunciatory address, on the Soviet shoot down

of the Korean airliner, however, was written by Reagan, and judging from the reaction of the Soviets, it was this speech that 'brought matters to a head'.

While Reagan's political handlers, his wife Nancy, and others argued that it was time to change tracks and emphasize dialogue (particularly since 1984 was an election year), the evidence shows that Reagan himself had come to this conclusion, based on his desire to improve relations. 'The Reagan reversal', as one author called it, was not actually a turnaround: Reagan had always been privately speaking to the Soviets and engaging in a dialogue. However, with terms like 'ash heap of history' being excised from addresses, Reagan was no longer sending out mixed messages. This period of engagement lasted through 1984, and beyond the election into the first two years of Gorbachev's leadership of the USSR. Then, in 1987, beginning with the 'Tear down this wall' speech, Reagan moved from engagement to extending a challenge to Gorbachev. If the new Soviet leader was serious about change, Reagan argued, then he needed to improve human rights behind the Iron curtain, and allow unrestricted immigration and religious and political rights.

Reagan's 1988 visit to Moscow was, in effect, a series of lectures on basic human freedoms, a culmination of Reagan's journey of forty years. The man who in the 1940s had been a 'one man battalion' against communism in Hollywood, who had risen to the office of President on the back of his rhetoric, and who had warned against 'the aggressive impulses of an Evil Empire' in his first term, now stood on Soviet soil, and urged its peoples to insist on their freedoms. It was an extraordinary journey, and within Reagan's journey, could be written the history of the Cold War in America: the 'red menace' of the 1940s and 1950s; the conservative worldview of the early 1960s that saw communism as a monolith; détente and its discontents in the 1970s; and finally, Reagan's leadership of the US in the 1980s that saw Superpower relations

hit rock bottom, and then, surprisingly a rapprochement of peace and a true challenge for reform. It was Reagan's journey, and the words, even when written by others, were his.

Chapter 5 examined the origins of American Missile Defense technology, including the systems attempted by the Johnson and Nixon Administrations, and assessed Reagan's own attachment to the idea of a national defense program. The history detailed that missile defense did not begin with Reagan's 1983 announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative, but that the US government had proposed two systems—Sentinel and Safeguard—in the 1960s and 1970s. However, as the evidence indicated, these two programs were very different from the one later proposed by Reagan, for they were, in reality, nothing more than bargaining chips created for negotiations with the Soviets. Indeed, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, negotiated between Nixon and Brezhnev in 1972, banned a national defense system and tied American security to the theory of MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction). By leaving their own nation vulnerable to nuclear annihilation, they believed, the Superpowers had created the greatest incentive for avoiding war. The research probed for evidence that Reagan longed for a national defense program before his presidency, and while the record shows that Reagan had thought about the idea and was surrounded by missile defense proponents (in particular Martin Anderson), he remained uncommitted to the concept before his election as President.

Chapter 6 moved from an investigation of missile defense prior to Reagan's presidency to looking at how the Strategic Defense Initiative came to be in 1983. While there is some confusion as to who first resurrected the idea—was it Reagan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or was it the other way around?—what is clear is that Reagan took the idea and ran with it. Acting in a manner without parallel in his entire presidency, Reagan purposely kept his Secretaries of State and Defense in the dark and circumvented the entire government, to ensure that his

announcement would not be obstructed. Proposing a program that he believed could render nuclear weapons ‘impotent, and obsolete’, Reagan sought to achieve a technological breakthrough that would save America from the fatalistic acceptance of MAD. The records of Reagan’s conversations with Gorbachev on SDI at Geneva also give great insight into how attached Reagan was to his initiative. And when it came to Reykjavik, where the President rejected a world free of nuclear weapons because of Gorbachev’s insistence on a 10 year restriction on missile defense, there could be no more doubt about Reagan’s ownership of SDI. The two, it seemed, had fused together: SDI and Ronald Reagan were a single entity. No incentive, or argument, could move Reagan to abandon his treasured program.

Chapter 7 examined the research question concerning the issue of nuclear arms limitation, reduction and elimination with the aim of determining Reagan’s views on the matter prior his becoming President. After giving a history of nuclear arms negotiations up to and including the SALT II period, the research found that Reagan already possessed a rather nuanced view on arms control before his presidency. Firstly, it detailed that Reagan did not support more arms limitations treaties, but instead favored agreements that actually *reduced* the levels of nuclear arms. Indeed, the acronym START—Strategic Arms Reduction Talks—was coined by Reagan during this period. Furthermore, the evidence shows that Reagan was of the view that any agreement had to achieve equal ceilings of weapons numbers, and that it had to be verifiable by onsite inspections. Also, while there is no direct evidence that Reagan was an advocate of nuclear abolition before his presidency, his speech at the 1976 Republican Convention and his early involvement in anti-nuclear protests in Hollywood, strongly suggest that Reagan always detested nuclear weapons and wished to see their elimination.

Chapter 8 focused on what Reagan's presidency achieved concerning arms control measures, and found that the President's role was of critical importance. Firstly, the 1981 'Zero-Option', proposed by Richard Perle, received the support of the President over the objections of Secretary of State Al Haig, because it reflected the President's philosophy on arms reduction, and because he knew from his experiences as a union negotiator that it was a good diplomatic strategy. And while the evidence shows that Reagan relied on the expert advice of the arms specialists when navigating his government's response to various Soviet arms proposals, the minutes of the Superpower Summits show that Reagan was well aware of the major pillars of the American positions, and was able to articulate these to Gorbachev with relative ease. On the issue of abolishing all nuclear arms, the analysis demonstrates that no-one else in the White House shared any enthusiasm for such a radical idea, and therefore authorship for that position belongs solely to the President. Nonetheless, George Shultz's involvement was absolutely vital in keeping the 'ship of state' a cohesive unit in seeking a staged implementation of the President's vision. At Reykjavik, Reagan's willingness to negotiate a treaty eliminating all nuclear weapons in 10 years, despite the fact that his own negotiators would only contemplate the less ambitious idea of eliminating all ballistic missiles, shows that the President was no one's puppet. Furthermore, the INF Treaty of 1987 and the START Treaties (1991 and 1993), it was shown, owed their existence to the work of the Reagan Administration—and of President Reagan in particular.

Chapter 9 examined the idea of peace in the Cold War era, and asked if Reagan felt destined to be a peacemaker from the outset of his presidency. Firstly, in reviewing all the Superpower summits held prior to Reagan, it was revealed that numerous American Presidents had sought to make a lasting peace with the USSR, and had attempted, as Reagan later would, to

establish a personal relationship with the Soviet leader in the hope that this would aid such an enterprise. The failures of these leaders, it seems, did not deter Reagan, as evidence would suggest that Reagan felt both destined to be President *and* peacemaker. A close reading of Reagan's 1990 account of the attempt on his life, revealed a President anxious to share with his reading audience his belief that he had been spared to fulfill a quest for peace. This text, more so than any other evidence or testimony, pointed to a President determined from the beginning of his presidency to be a peacemaker on a global scale and end the Cold War standoff with the related risks of a nuclear Armageddon.

In addressing the research question, 'What actions did Reagan take to make peace with the USSR?' Chapter 10 detailed the various olive branches that Reagan extended to the Soviet leadership, and demonstrates that Reagan had an agenda for peace from the first months of his presidency. Reagan's letter to Brezhnev following the attempt on his life in 1981, constitutes documentary evidence that Reagan wished to establish a dialogue with the Soviets that would reduce tensions and create a lasting peace. The theory that the peace between the Superpowers was Gorbachev's gift and one that Reagan merely had to accept is erroneous: Reagan extended olive branches to Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko long before Gorbachev came onto the scene. Also, it is noteworthy that when Gorbachev did come to power in 1985, it was Reagan who made the first move, immediately writing the Soviet leader and proposing a Superpower Summit. Nonetheless, the Reagan/Gorbachev partnership was just that—a partnership, whereby the two established a personal relationship that reduced mistrust and created a framework for continued dialogue. The warmth of the 'fire-side Summit' at Geneva helped melt the ice of the Cold War, but it was in Reykjavik where the wall of terror finally came tumbling down. When each side saw in the other not a potential aggressor but rather a fellow believer in a world free of

nuclear weapons, Superpower relations were freed from the straightjacket of mortal fear, and a full normalization of relations could follow. Gorbachev's view of America changed when he visited Washington in 1987, and when Reagan reciprocated by visiting Moscow in 1988, he declared that he was no longer in an 'Evil Empire'. Who won the Cold War or the exact means by which it came about has not been a central concern of this research. Rather, the fundamental question posed, was: Did Reagan believe himself to be a peacemaker, and did he think that peace had been achieved? The answer to both those questions, given the evidence obtained through extensive and intensive research, is in the affirmative—that by the time Reagan left office, he believed that he, along with Gorbachev, had ended the Cold War.

Areas for Further Research

Two areas for research seem to arise out of this thesis that requires further inquiry. Firstly, if Reagan was far more engaged in America's Soviet policy than had been previously thought, how engaged was he in other areas of policy during his presidency? Is it true that Reagan had 'lost interest' in everything but Superpower relations by his second term? Having examined Reagan's paperwork at the Reagan archives, there is a noticeable decline in the amount of comments or corrections that he would write on the margins of pages as the years of his presidency progressed, which would suggest a reduction of interest. But again, Reagan's diary tells another story—Reagan records the tedious, day to day work of the presidency—mainly liaising with Congress to get a bill passed, or fighting to keep something in the budget. It often makes for very dull reading indeed, and perhaps one could understand if Reagan did mentally 'check out' when these issues were discussed—but there they are, in his diary, telling us that he was still there, was

still well aware of what was going on, and as boring as it might have been at times, he was still involved in the process. These diary entries necessitate a revision of Reagan's presidency in full.

The second area of further investigation that arises out of this research is a closer examination of the Reagan/Gorbachev relationship. As James E. Goodby observed: 'Two revolutionaries, each in his own way, became history's catalysts for change.'⁷⁴⁹ But this raises the question: Who deserves most of the credit for this historic change in Superpower relations? As Gorbachev said in Reykjavik, 'it takes two to tango', and obviously both played major roles. But who played the *leading* role? In a letter to his actor friend Charlton Heston, Reagan assured him that he should not be concerned with his dancing with the 'Russian bear', because it was he who was 'leading the dance'. Was Reagan 'leading the dance', or was it Gorbachev? On whose terms did the Cold War end? What were the motivating factors for their personal outreach: economic, military, or something else? And to what extent did their relationship—the chemistry and friendship between the two Superpower leaders—play in reducing hostilities and mistrust? How much did the 'human factor' come into the equation? The definitive history of the Cold War's ending, therefore, has yet to be written.

Scholarship on the Reagan presidency is entering a new era aided by the change of government in Washington, D.C. The end of the administration of George W. Bush will not only cause historical review of that complicated and contentious presidency to begin in earnest, but also opens up the way for new scholarship on Reagan, his administration, and the ending of the Cold War. Already this researcher has found that the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for classified documents, lodged from the Reagan library, which were denied under the

⁷⁴⁹ James E. Goodby, 'Looking Back: The 1986 Reykjavik Summit', *Arms Control Today*, (Washington: September 2006), Vol. 36, Iss. 7, p.49.

Bush II Administration, have now received the ‘green light’ for release by the Obama White House.⁷⁵⁰ While making available thousands of pages of requested documents comes too late for inclusion in this study, no doubt they will be used by this author and other scholars in the future.

Concluding Thoughts

Ronald Reagan may have risen to the office of President of the United States, but according to himself, his happiest days were those of his youth, when he had worked as a life-guard at Lowell Park, in Dixon, Illinois. Reagan had spent each summer looking over a treacherous watering-hole, and had during the course of those summers, saved 77 people from drowning.

At the end of Edmund Morris’ controversial biography of Reagan, the author, in an act of fiction, inserts himself into the text as one of the 77 individuals whose life Reagan had saved. Morris credits Reagan with his life over the ‘last seven decades’, and ends by adding: ‘Some day, I hoped, America might acknowledge her similar debt to the old Lifeguard who rescued her in a time of poisonous despair, and in Joseph Grucci’s words, carried her *breastward out of peril*.’⁷⁵¹

In 2004, America did acknowledge its debt of gratitude to Reagan, following his death at age 93. As cable news networks covered every moment of Reagan’s transfer from California to Washington for memorial services, and then back again for burial, the accolades kept pouring in. Reagan was lauded as the all-American hero, as a leader who had come at a decisive moment in

⁷⁵⁰ For an understanding of how the Reagan and Bush II Administrations used the 1977 Supreme Court decision relating to presidential papers, *Nixon v. Administrator General Services*, to restrict access to Presidential papers, see Bruce P. Montgomery, ‘Source Material: Nixon’s Ghost haunts the Presidential Records Act: The Reagan and George W. Bush Administrations’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, (Washington: December 2002), Vol. 32, Iss. 4, p. 787.

⁷⁵¹ Edmund Morris, *Dutch*, p. 672.

American history and saved it from recession, nuclear war, and paralyzing self doubt. Reagan's funeral, with its week long pomp and ceremony, had the feel of a canonization:⁷⁵² Reagan had become a mythic figure, and the 1980s, in comparison to the Bush years, were held up as a Golden Age.

Historians and political scientists must be wary of myths: both those that make Reagan a new 'King Arthur' and his era another 'Camelot', and those inspired by political opponents that downplay Reagan as a leader, and overlook the real accomplishments of his years of public service. True objectivity and a fair assessment of the pros and cons of the Reagan era is needed; a task made harder by the fact that Reagan remains such a polarizing figure. That polarization is, no doubt, a result of Reagan being the iconic face of the Republican Party, and depending on political persuasions, a negative or positive portrayal of the 40th President is sure to receive a strong reaction either way. As Gil Troy wryly noted in his book, *Morning in America*: 'Studying Ronald Reagan is not for the faint-hearted or the untenured.'⁷⁵³ While this author comes from outside American political culture and therefore arguably has a greater degree of objectivity than one raised and existing in it, no doubt the revisionist nature of this study on Reagan is bound to cause some debate. And that debate should be welcomed.

History and political science are an endless debate, the arguments swinging back and forth like a pendulum in opposite directions according to the work of different researchers. This study has entered into that debate, and presented evidence that supports the argument that

⁷⁵² The term canonization is appropriate not only because of the pomp and ceremony surrounding Reagan's funeral, but also because as David John Marley notes, 'Reagan's image and ideas permeate the politics of the Christian Right to the point that he has become their patron saint'. As quoted in, 'Ronald Reagan and the Splintering of the Christian Right', *Journal of Church and State*, (Waco: Autumn 2006), Vol. 48, Iss.4, p.851.

⁷⁵³ Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.349.

President Reagan was far more involved in the formulation and execution of American Soviet policy than had hitherto been recognized. The conclusions were reached after an analysis of the evidence available; but no doubt, as more documents become accessible to scholars, different authors will propose different arguments. Reagan is viewed differently today than he was 20 years ago,⁷⁵⁴ and will be viewed differently again in another two decades. Nonetheless, future historians and political scientists will want to take into account the evidence presented herein, and incorporate it into their analysis and arguments. This thesis, which has cut into the multi-disciplinary fields of international relations and presidential and diplomatic history, hopefully will spur on greater research into the very important question of the Cold War's end, and of the presidency of Ronald Reagan. The subject material is of such importance, that it deserves no less.

⁷⁵⁴ As historian George H. Nash wrote: 'Scholarly appraisals of a president's legacy go through three stages: bunk, debunk, and rebunk. At the beginning of 1989 there was reason to believe that the coming historical evaluation of Reagan's presidency would skip the first phase and permanently wallow in the second. For despite his broad popularity with the general electorate, there was one influential corner of America where he remained anathema: academe. For all of Reagan's wit, charm, and persuasiveness, his had been a highly polarizing presidency on the plane of principle, and few academics inhabited his side of the great divide.' Nash goes on to argue that of course with the passage of time, and in particular the release of Reagan primary source documents, a re-evaluation has occurred. See 'He Belongs to History', *The American Spectator*, (Bloomington: July/Aug. 2008), Vol. 41, Iss.6, p.40.

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APPENDIX A

Timeline of US/Soviet Relations during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989)

1981

January:

20: Reagan inaugurated 40th President of the United States of America.

29: Reagan's first Press Conference, in which the President said of the Soviet Union that 'they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat...'etc.

March:

30: Assassination attempt on President Reagan.

April:

24: Personal letter by the President sent to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Grain embargo against the USSR lifted.

May:

17: Commencement address, at Notre Dame University in which Reagan says that the West 'won't contain communism, it will transcend communism' and adds, 'it will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written'.

27: West Point address, Reagan lays out vision for military modernization program.

November:

18: Reagan announces the INF 'Zero-Option' in an address before the National Press Club.

December:

13: Martial law declared in Poland

23: Address to the Nation on situation in Poland.

25: Cable from Brezhnev which accuses Reagan of 'defaming our social and state system', and adds: 'Attempts to dictate your will to other states are in gross contradiction to the elementary norms of international law. I would like to say further: they are thoroughly amoral'.

1982

January:

5: Reagan and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt meet in the White House, and release a joint statement warning the USSR that: 'any military intervention in Poland would have the gravest consequences for international relations and would fundamentally change the entire international situation'.

May:

9: Reagan gives Commencement address at his alma mater Eureka College, unveils START proposals.

June:

8: Reagan addresses Members of British Parliament, and predicts that 'the march of freedom and democracy' will 'leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history, as it

has left other tyrannies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people’.

25: Al Haig is forced to resign as Secretary of State, and Reagan announces George Shultz as his successor.

November:

11: Leonid Brezhnev dies, Reagan states publicly his desire to ‘work toward an improved relationship with the Soviet Union’.

22: In an address to the nation, Reagan unveils the ‘closely based spacing’ deployment option for the MX Missile and states: ‘I intend to search for peace along two parallel paths: deterrence and arms reductions. I believe these are the only paths that offer any real hope for an enduring peace’.

1983

March:

8: Reagan addresses Evangelical Pastors in Orlando, Florida and calls the USSR an ‘Evil Empire’.

23: Reagan announces the Strategic Defense Initiative in an address to the Nation.

May:

31: Reagan concludes his chairmanship of the Williamsburg Economic Summit, and a joint statement supporting INF deployment is released.

July:

11: Reagan writes to Soviet leader Andropov and states that if the two are to maintain international stability, it ‘will require a more active level of exchange than we have heretofore been able to establish’.

August:

5: Andropov writes Reagan, stating that Soviet SS-20 missiles are a ‘counterbalance’ to British and French nuclear arsenals and asks: ‘Is this not an honest and moderate position?’

24: Reagan replies to Andropov’s letter, stating that any Soviet linkage of INF weapons to British and French nuclear forces is ‘not a relevant point’ as they ‘are not at all in the

same category as the land based SS-20 missiles'. Furthermore, Reagan proposes three elements necessary to consolidate international security: 1) acceptance of the principle that international disputes must be settled peacefully, without the threat or use of force; 2) nuclear arms reduction; and 3) the establishment of a relationship of trust that could permit the realization of the first two objectives.

September:

1: Korean Airliner, Flight 007, is shot down by the USSR, killing 269 civilians.

3: Reagan rules out a cancellation of the Geneva Arms Talks in response to the attack.

5: Address to the Nation on the Korean Airliner Crisis. Reagan says: 'And make no mistake about it, this attack was not just against ourselves or the Republic of Korea. This was the Soviet Union against the world, and the moral precepts that guide human relations among people everywhere.'

28: Andropov condemns Reagan as 'risking war' through his rhetoric and states: 'Even if someone had illusions as to the possible evolution for the better in the policy of the present American Administration, the latest developments have dispelled them'.

November:

2-11: NATO war games named 'Able Archer' begin, realistically practicing a response to a Soviet attack on Western Europe.

23: NATO INF deployment begins: Soviet's walk out on Geneva Arms Talks in protest.

1984

January:

16: Reagan gives address on US/Soviet relations, with a emphasis on bettering relations: 'We must and will engage the Soviets in a dialogue as serious and constructive as possible'.

25: State of the Union Address, Reagan calls for nuclear disarmament.

28: Letter from Andropov arrives, harshly critical of Reagan's policies, saying that the US had 'destroyed the basis' on which an INF agreement could have been made and stating, 'a heavy blow has been dealt to the very process of nuclear arms limitation'.

February:

9: Andropov dies, and is replaced by Konstantin Chernenko.

11: In a radio address on US/Soviet relations, Reagan extends an olive branch to the Kremlin saying: 'America is ready. We would welcome negotiations...If the Soviet Government wants peace, then there will be peace.'

12: Letter from Chernenko arrives, condemning Reagan's rhetoric and stating that relations between the two nations was 'abnormal, and let's face it, dangerous'.

March:

7: Reagan writes Chernenko, stating that the US 'has no desire to threaten the security of the Soviet Union'. In a postscript, Reagan wrote of his 'profound commitment' to achieving 'lasting reduction of tensions between us'.

May:

8: Soviets announce boycott of 1984 Summer Olympic games held in Los Angeles.

August:

23: Reagan accepts party's nomination for re-election to the Presidency.

September:

28: Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visits the White House and meets with Reagan.

November:

6: Reagan is re-elected President, winning 49 out of 50 states.

1985

January:

8: Soviets agree to a resumption of Geneva arms control talks, without preconditions.

20: Reagan is inaugurated as President

21: Reagan gives second inaugural address.

22: Reagan meets with American Arms Control Delegation, publicly announces: 'I have no more important goal than reducing and, ultimately, eliminating nuclear weapons.'

March:

11: Chernenko dies; Gorbachev succeeds. Reagan releases a statement offering condolences and stating: 'I wish to reiterate the strong desire of the American people for world peace.'

13: Reagan writes Gorbachev, and proposes a Summit.

July:

1: The Soviets agree to a Summit, to be held in Geneva in November.

5: Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko takes up the ceremonial post of President of the USSR, with Eduard A. Shevardnadze appointed his successor in the Foreign Ministry.

November:

19: Reagan and Gorbachev meet for the first time as the US/USSR Geneva Superpower Summit begins.

21: Geneva Summit ends with the declaration: 'Nuclear war cannot be won, and must never be fought'.

1986

January:

1: Reagan and Gorbachev give a New Year's Address to each other's nation. Reagan's address focuses on human rights.

11: Gorbachev writes Reagan to inform him that human rights questions in the USSR were an internal matter, and not America's business.

15: Gorbachev publicly releases a letter to Reagan that calls for total nuclear abolition by the year 2000, a moratorium on nuclear testing, a ban on SDI, and the acceptance of the Zero-Option in Europe.

April:

25: Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster.

June:

26: Geneva arms talks end without any substantial movement towards an agreement.

July:

18: Reagan writes Gorbachev, proposing total elimination of all ballistic missiles.

September:

4: *US News and the World Report* journalist Nicholas Daniloff is seized by the KGB in Moscow and accused of espionage.

19: Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze visits White House with a letter proposing a snap Summit to be held in Reykjavik, Iceland.

30: Upcoming Summit publicly announced, after resolution of Daniloff Affair.

October:

11: Reykjavik Superpower Summit begins

12: Reykjavik Summit ends, with Reagan and Gorbachev coming close to an agreement on the abolition of all nuclear weapons, but failing to agree on the issue of defense systems.

13: In an address to the nation, Reagan explains why he walked away from Gorbachev's arms proposals over SDI: 'I went to Reykjavik determined that everything was negotiable except two things: our freedom and our future.'

1987**June:**

12: Reagan gives address at Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, and challenges the Soviet Leader saying: 'Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!'

September:

15: Gorbachev writes Reagan, accepting the INF Treaty and stating that together Reagan and he were 'leaving behind what was, frankly, a complicated stretch in world politics'.

October:

30: Shevardnadze visits White House and announces the Washington Summit and the signing of the INF Treaty.

November:

5: Caspar Weinberger resigns as Secretary of Defense; is replaced by Frank Carlucci.

December:

8: Washington Summit begins: INF Treaty is signed by Reagan and Gorbachev.

10: Washington Summit Concludes.

1988

May:

29: Moscow Summit Begins.

June:

1: Moscow Summit Concludes, and Reagan speaks of the ‘hope for a new era in human history, an era of peace between our nations and our peoples’.

December:

7: Gorbachev Addresses the UN in New York, announcing drastic reduction of conventional forces; meets with President Reagan and President Elect Bush at Governors Island, New York.

1989

January:

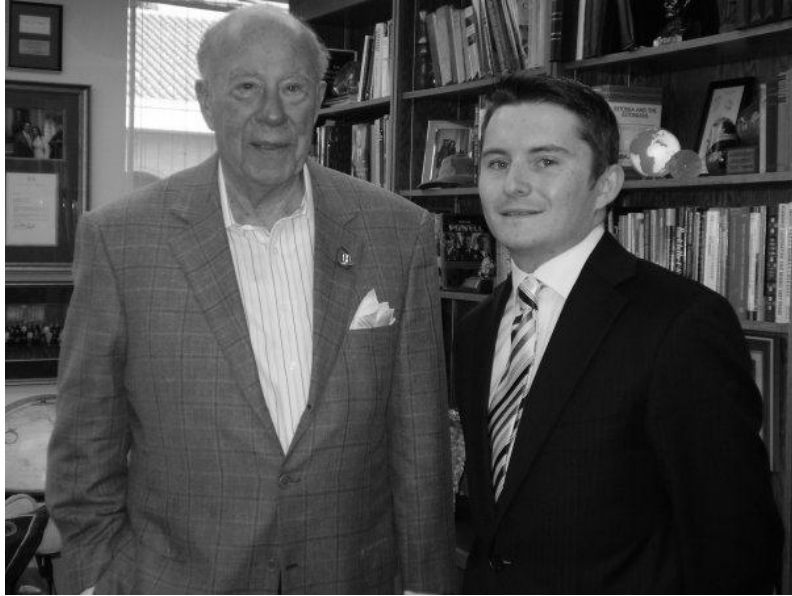
11: Reagan gives farewell address from the Oval Office, and states: ‘My view is that President Gorbachev is different from previous Soviet leaders’, adding, ‘We must keep up our guard, but we must also continue to work together to lessen and eliminate tension and mistrust.’

20: Reagan’s Presidency ends, with George H.W Bush being sworn in his successor.

APPENDIX B**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE SHULTZ**

Transcript for the interview between the Honorable, Former Secretary of State Treasury and Labor, George P. Shultz and Doctoral Candidate Ciarán John Ryan, held at the 'Herbert Hoover Memorial Building' on the campus of Stanford University, California.

October 5, 2007: 10am-10:45am



CR: First of all, ‘peace through strength’, the idea of deterrence, of having enough military strength to deter the Soviets: was this the guiding principle behind the military modernization program of the 1980s?

GS: Well there were three key words in the Reagan Administration. One was realism, the other was strength, and the third was diplomacy. And some of his supporters forgot the last word.

CR: Diplomacy.

GS: Diplomacy. Ronald Reagan never forgot that.

CR: I know that you say in your memoirs that there some in the administration who didn’t wish to negotiate at all. They were fiercely opposed to talks. How did you overcome that?

GS: Well the reason was that they thought that the Soviets would always get the better end of the

bargain; that there would be too much political pressure on the negotiators to reach a settlement of some kind. That was their experience of history, but we had a different approach than the détente era. President Reagan had been the president of a union, and he liked to talk about negotiations, and I had some experience in negotiations. But I can remember testifying to members of Congress and they said that ‘You’ve been secretary of state for x period of time, and don’t you feel badly that there is no agreement with the Soviets?’ and I said, ‘No I don’t, because a poor agreement is much worse than no agreement’. As a negotiator, you have to realize that if the other side sees that you want to have an agreement then you are giving away all your hole cards.

CR: You were willing to wait it out.

GS: Yes, we were willing to wait it out. And we did.

CR: And Reagan obviously believed that he needed sufficient military strength to deter aggression, but did he want superiority over the Soviets? Or did he want parity?

GS: Well, he wanted to deter...he wanted to have strength such that no one would be tempted to attack us.

CR: But did he want to be number one at all? Did he express a desire to be superior?

GS: I don’t know about ‘number one’...We were very careful and cautious with the use of military force. The only time that we used it was in Grenada. It was a very quick operation.

CR: And Reagan was given two options: one to launch a rescue mission the other to actually overthrow the government. Why do you think he chose the second option?

GS: Well they were so intermixed that there was hardly any point....We tried to get the hostages, the students out by a plane or a ship at least, but we didn’t have that option so we proceeded with the invasion.

CR: What effect do you think that had on the Soviets? Some say that it was the first time that the Brezhnev doctrine was overturned, that a communist government was overthrown.

GS: Well I think it had a different impact on different people around the world. I think the “Vietnam Syndrome” was over. [inaudible]

CR: Now moving onto the nuclear issue, 1983 you called the ‘year of the missile’, it was the NATO deployment in November of that year of INF weapons, and if you recall there was widespread fear about nuclear war; that this would provoke the Soviets to attack, and some thought that it would be a repeat of the ‘Cuban Missile Crisis’ where one superpower places nuclear weapons on the doorstep of the other superpower. You write in your memoirs that it was a ‘gut wrenching moment’ but that Ronald Reagan had had a ‘cool hand a cool head’. Afterwards though, you can see that Reagan realized that he needed to inform the Soviets that they had ‘nothing to fear from America’ and began to speak more intensely of his desire to abolish nuclear weapons. So obviously the year 1983 had some impact on him. Do you ever remember seeing him stressed about the decision to deploy?

GS: No. He was very clear. And if we hadn’t had deployed, we might have had a different outcome to the Cold War. This was the test of will. We felt that obviously many were worried about the war talk, but it was largely Soviet propaganda, causing so much unease in Europe. But once they were deployed, then things changed very rapidly. We then had a coordinated effort to get back to negotiations. Reagan gave a speech about Soviet relations, and in Stockholm I gave a more precise speech on the same theme.

CR: Is this prior to deployment?

GS: No, it was after deployment. And after that I had my meeting with Gromyko where we agreed to resume negotiations... It [deployment] was a turning point that demonstrated the cohesion and strength of the NATO alliance which they had tried to break without success.

CR: And how important was President Reagan's personal leadership with the other NATO leaders?

GS: It was critical.

CR: Because I know that some of the leaders came to Reagan hoping to delay deployment because they thought that they could lose their governments.

GS: They were pretty stressed out over the whole issue. But the deployment in Britain- they had their protests-but there wasn't the slightest hesitation by Margaret Thatcher about deployment, and it was the same in Italy. First there were the cruise missiles, and the combination of ballistic missiles, Pershing....[inaudible].

CR: And looking at the ideology of the Cold War, Reagan spoke of America as the nation that was 'chosen by God', a providential 'shining city on a hill' where freedom of religion, speech, democracy, business and so on was allowed to flourish. And the Soviet Union on the other hand, was its opposite, saying 'there is no God, there is no freedom of religion, speech, protest, no freedom of business'-they told the people where to work-so it makes sense that Reagan saw them- if America was God's 'chosen vessel' then the Soviets were the 'evil empire'. But do you think that Reagan in his Cold War policy was guided more by realism or ideology?

GS: Well the first part of what you said wasn't ideology; it was realism. That was his appraisal- that was the weakness of the Soviet Union. There were many people who were talking about their strength all the time, and this is one of the main arguments. In our view the Soviet Union would change because of its weakness, and the people who could only see the strength said that it would never change. And then there was the speech 'tear down this wall'. That was a metaphor. Many people thought that the wall was there forever, like the Great Wall of China. And by saying 'tear down this wall', it was his way of saying, 'This isn't permanent'.

CR: He was challenging them.

GS: Yes.

CR: And from reading through his speeches, from 81-83 he was condemning the Soviets and seeking to say the 'truth' about their system and predict its demise, and from 84-86 he changed and started speaking more about dialogue....

GS: No, he didn't change. I'm saying that he didn't.

CR: But did you think he changed his emphasis at all?

GS: There were negotiations from the beginning. The first deal that we made, we negotiated the release of the Pentecostals.

CR: There were always elements, but do you think that after 1983 he decided to tone down some of the inflammatory rhetoric?

GS: He never changed. In fact when we went to Moscow for the Summit in 1988 we had all the dissidents in for lunch at the embassy. And we insisted on the release of, I forget their name, but no, he never changed.

CR: Do you think that at that stage he was more interested in challenging Gorbachev, saying that 'If you are serious about change then this is what you need to do'?

GS: No. He [Reagan] was serious about human rights, he was serious about what he felt about [inaudible]. He gave a fascinating speech to the students at Moscow State University. And I had the advantage of going to the speech and I was seated where I could watch the students...

CR: reactions

GS: ...and it was all simultaneous translations and they all heard it in real time. They had all been herded in there. In five or ten minutes you could just see the impact of those words...

CR: Did you have a hand in writing that speech?

GS: Well partly, but there were other people who wrote his speeches.

CR: Because it seemed to be like your 'classroom in the Kremlin' when you spoke to Gorbachev about the micro-chip and the wave of the future that was about to come.

GS: It was there.

CR: And those speeches seemed to be the culmination of his lifetime of speeches on the USSR; was that the plan? You have the speeches at Danilov monastery on religious freedom, the speech to the dissidents at the embassy and the address to the students; was it the plan to cover all those freedoms at the summit?

GS: We had our ideas of what we wanted to accomplish...[inaudible] I think one of the funniest things was that I had told the president and Nancy, whom I knew pretty well, that when you go to Moscow you've got to see Red Square. And the so called 'hardliners' said absolutely not, because they didn't want the picture of Reagan in front of Lenin's tomb. And so I wrote out a little cue card for him, and I said that sometime when you are sitting with Gorbachev, why don't you say, 'I understand that Red Square is very beautiful and I'd like to see it.' And when he said that Gorbachev got up and said, 'Let's go'. So it was completely unplanned. And that's where some of the best images of the summit were shot, the two leaders in Red Square; Reagan was holding up a baby.

CR: And that's when a reporter asked him 'Do you still consider yourself to be in an evil empire?' and he said 'No', and Gorbachev saw this as a major breakthrough because Reagan had changed his view of the Soviets.

GS: Because the Soviet's had changed. And after Reykjavik he could see that. But many people couldn't see that and that's why we had so much opposition.

CR: And after Reagan's administration, the Bush administration came with their six month 'pause' where they wished to review US/Soviet relations; do you think that was due to a failure to grasp the tremendous changes that had occurred?

GS: Brent Scowcroft joined with Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon and wrote an article for 'Time Magazine' opposing ratification of the INF Treaty. Because for them the Soviets were the same as they were- they hadn't changed.

CR: They still had the old Cold War mindset, while Reagan and Gorbachev were able to see beyond it, even if members of their own governments or previous administrations could not.

GS: Yes. The government has people with all kinds of views.

CR: And within the administration, with people like Cap Weinberger, who was always the hardliner- do you think that playing 'good cop/bad cop' might have helped with negotiations as the Soviets realized that there were people who were opposed to better relations?

GS: Not particularly. I think what... 'The Strategic Defense Initiative' was very important. Not that we ever bargained about the research program, as such, but it had a big impact. It was very useful.

CR: And so with SDI, whatever the origins of it, Ronald Reagan took the idea and ran with it. He obviously saw it as a means of defending America against attack, but to the Soviets it would seem as though America was trying to achieve a first strike advantage. Did Reagan ever speak of SDI enhancing deterrence in that way?

GS: He thought that 'Mutual Assured Destruction' was an immoral, terrible thing to rely on and it would be much better if we could defend ourselves. And he said on many occasions to Gorbachev that he would be prepared to share defensive missile technology.

CR: But could he understand where the Soviets were coming from, that if SDI were up and running then America would have a first strike advantage and that this would be destabilizing?

GS: People worried about that. But there were many people who thought that it wasn't possible to have a defensive shield, that if the Soviets fired 5000 missiles at it...

CR: The Soviets could overwhelm it.

GS: Yes

CR: But some say that the Soviet's greatest fear was more that SDI research would lead to a technological breakthrough...

GS: I think they also had it in their minds that America was beginning a new endeavor and they didn't know where it would lead. They knew of our expertise...

CR: NASA and so on...

GS: and they also had their own scientists who understood this.

CR: And with nuclear arms limitation, Reagan wanted actual reduction and eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons. When Reagan first raised this issue with you did you think that it was a utopian dream or did you believe that he would be serious about it?

GS: He was a serious man, and he didn't say things that he didn't believe. And nuclear weapons to him were an immoral weapon- they were so destructive that he wanted them eliminated. And Gorbachev, at the Reykjavik Summit agreed with him.

CR: And at that summit both sides agreed to total nuclear abolition; do you think this would have been possible to achieve even if Reagan and Gorbachev had come out saying that they had agreed to this?

GS: I think it would have been a step. People were shocked that it had even been talked about.

CR: Margaret Thatcher...

GS: But when Reagan first announced his objectives in arms control, that is, eliminating INF weapons and cutting strategic weapons in half, the arms control community said the man isn't interested in arms control, because these positions are so ridiculous and impossible. And yet they were both achieved.

CR: And Secretary Haig said of the 'zero option', lets have a higher ceiling and Reagan said 'You don't show them the full hand right away', so he was the better negotiator

GS: Yes

CR: But the sticking point on that agreement at Reykjavik was confining SDI to the lab for 10 years; despite some progress with research at the moment, do you think looking back now that it would have been agreeable to limit research to the lab for 10 years?

GS: No I think that would have...limiting to the lab is eliminating it. Depending by what you mean by 'lab'. Afterwards, several months later Gorbachev said 'Laboratory wouldn't have been so bad'. Anyway, their proposal essentially was to stop missile defense research.

CR: Ronald Reagan always said that when you are negotiating, you never push the other side into a corner. And Gorbachev did that when he said, 'It's either laboratory or goodbye' and that's when the summit broke up.

GS: Well it broke up on the other hand....In a negotiation all these things are put on the table and you can't get them off the table. So Reykjavik actually did achieve the zero option, cutting strategic weapons in half and also achieved putting human rights on the agenda. A lot of people don't recognize that.

CR: Were those few days the most extraordinary days of your tenure?

GS: Yes, they were. It was denounced at the time as a failure but in retrospect we have come to see its importance.

CR: Do you ever feel that the nuclear abolition issue was a missed opportunity?

GS: I think that

CR: Or were the realities of SDI and so on that there could have never been an agreement on that, as Reagan and Gorbachev had different visions on how to go down the path of abolition? Reagan tied it to deployment of SDI while Gorbachev absolutely didn't want that. So there could never have been an agreement.

GS: If you start down the road of abolishing nuclear weapons, if you start to do that, you realize how many important difficult steps need to be taken as you try to get to that objective. So it would have been a start; an important start towards nuclear abolition.

CR: Do you think that its greatest importance was maybe a psychological breakthrough, that both sides realized that they no longer had to fear each other as neither side would launch a first strike and that both sides were on the same page about abolishing nuclear weapons?

GS: I think that it's sort of the other way around. That we began to feel that things were changing; the Cold War was beginning to break open. There was a sense of euphoria around Gorbachev's visit to Washington in December in 1987.

CR: When he got out of the limo....

GS: ...because people could see that he was a different sort of leader, and you could feel it in many different ways. So, as Reagan said, 'We don't have disputes because of weapons we have

weapons because of disputes. So let's try and work on the disputes'.

CR: So how important was the human factor in that, with Ronald Reagan's personal friendship with Gorbachev?

GS: I think it helped. There was something...

CR: Chemistry

GS: ..where they both clicked. They were two very different people, but at the same time they had a lot of respect for one another.

CR: And with the end of the Geneva summit, that statement 'Nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought'. Nixon refused to make a statement like that because it would reduce America's nuclear deterrent; that there needed to be ambiguity whether America would fight a nuclear war. Nixon felt that if he had a statement like that then countries like Japan would feel that they couldn't rely on America's nuclear umbrella. Was there any fear that by Reagan constantly saying that 'nuclear war must never be fought' and that 'we should abolish nuclear weapons' that this would reduce America's nuclear deterrent?

GS: Well nuclear deterrence is relevant to the nuclear world. So if we were to disarm...[inaudible]

CR: When Ronald Reagan came back from NORAD he said that in the event of a nuclear attack the president has two untenable options: one, watch LA or Washington be destroyed or two, launch a retaliatory strike killing millions of people. He said that neither of those two options are good. Do you think that in the event of an attack on America that he would have responded, that he would have launched a counter attack?

GS: I don't know.

CR: You can't say how he would respond in that situation?

GS: The system is such that all a president would have to do is push the button. It would be done in a very short time period.

CR: So the president would only have a few minutes?

GS: Thirty minutes.

CR: And looking at Reagan as a peacemaker, its obvious from his memoirs that after the assassination attempt he felt that God had 'spared him' to end the Cold War, which he defined as ending the nuclear standoff between the superpowers. Michael Deaver said that he actually ran for president because he felt pre-destined to end the Cold War. Can you recall a conversation with him where he spoke in these terms of destiny?

GS: That's what he campaigned on in 1976 when he was up against Gerald Ford. He campaigned against the concept of détente. Détente said, 'We're here, you're there, that's life. So what we should try to do is get along'. Reagan said, 'We're here, and they are there in a very unstable system. Sooner or later they are going to have to change'. So we negotiate, because that country has all those nuclear weapons, but we don't do it under the assumption that they will always be there.

CR: Do you think that détente was working while Nixon was in office? That it required a strong leader that was willing to make the tough decision to make it work. That Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter didn't understand that on the one hand it required negotiations but at the same time quick responses to issues like the Middle East when Nixon put America's forces on nuclear alert, and always played hardball with the Soviets, and for détente to work it required this leadership and Ford and Carter didn't understand this?

GS: I think they understood it perfectly well. On the other hand, I was speaking with Henry Kissinger and he said that the hardest advice he would have to give the president was whether to

tell the president to launch a nuclear strike knowing that hundreds of thousands would die.

CR: Kissinger is known as a strong realist, Secretary of State James Baker is known as a pragmatist /politician ; do you see yourself in terms of a 'Wilsonian values' Secretary of State trying to promote freedom, or would you prefer to be remembered as a realism/values Secretary of State?

GS: Well if you don't have a sense of realism you aren't going to get very far. So I think the idea that they are two very different things is not correct.

CR: They are intertwined?

GS: Yes.

CR: And you said to your testimony to the Senate in 1982 that 'realism and strength could deter aggression but negotiation would lead to peace'. Do you think that's the formula of how the Cold War ended?

GS: As I said at the start of the interview, 'Realism, strength, diplomacy'; these three things guided everything.

CR: And you said that the Cold War was over by the time that Reagan left office.

GS: Not officially, but it was already beginning to show. There were things to be completed, the re-unification of Germany etc.

CR: Would you say at its core that the issue was that nuclear standoff?

GS: At the core the issue was the system of government the Soviets had.

The tape recorder then cut out:

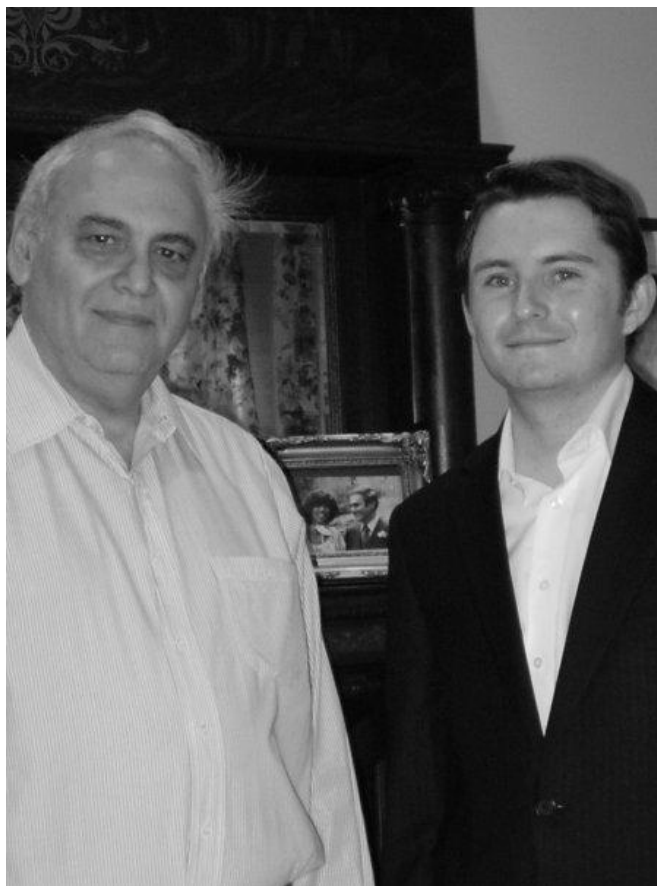
CR and GS then discussed various scenarios that caused the ending of the Cold War: The idea that the military modernization program cornered the Soviets, the ‘Gorbachev factor’, the Chernobyl disaster etc. GS concluded that it was a combination of numerous factors.

On that note the interview ended at 10:45, at which time CR thanked GS for his interview and gave him a 2004 bottle of Australian ‘Cabernet Sauvignon’ by the Brown Brothers. GS expressed thanks and stated that Australian wine is ‘very good’ and that it was competition to the Californian wine industry.

Susan Schendel, assistant to GS came in and took two photos, and GS signed a copy of his memoirs and stated that CR’s thesis was an ‘important topic’ and wished him the best of luck.

APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD PERLE



**Interview between Richard Perle and Ciaran Ryan at Mr Perle's home at Chevy Chase,
Maryland; November 15, 2007
10:30-11:30am**

RP: On the several occasions when I was together with Reagan and Gorbachev, Reagan really led the conversations, shaped the agenda, and uh, and I don't think there is much doubt that if Gorbachev had had his way, the Soviet Union would still exist. He was trying to save it: and he said so!

CR: And I think that if you look at what Reagan did with the arms buildup, and his rhetoric and the INF deployment-it was all cornering the Soviets-and I think that by '84 they realized that they needed to negotiate and then, that decision was made prior to Gorbachev, so the thesis that Gorbachev came along as the great reformer and caused this....

RP: I think that Gorbachev wanted to reform the performance of the communist party and the institutions of the Soviet Union. I had a conversation with him at a state dinner and he made that

very clear. He was very interested in how we handled centralization verses federal authority, he was interested in how American companies managed far flung subsidiaries: he was an intelligent man and he was thinking all the time 'How do I...I've inherited this mess, an unproductive economy, massive waste, fraud, corruption-how do I reform this so that we can survive?' And, he tried 'glasnost'. Its not that Gorbachev was a democrat, he wasn't. And he would have been perfectly happy to remain in power as General Secretary of the Soviet Union..

CR: For life.

RP: For life, with a competitive Soviet Union. He just didn't know how to make that happen. And with glasnost which was an instrument and not an end in itself, actually unleashed a lot of forces within the Soviet Empire and even within the Soviet Union and so the whole thing collapsed. But he was horrified [by] what happened on his watch. And its now fashionable in the West to think of him a great reformer, but he was nothing of the sort.

CR: And if you look at the negotiating record, he was all about getting rid of SDI and so on and he ended up giving up those types of demands and gave into Reagan's agenda.

RP: Yes, absolutely; including the arms reductions which were American proposals. The US proposed eliminating Intermediate Range missiles. The US proposed the 50% cut in offensive weapons, that in fact was ultimately agreed to. And both of these were rejected out of hand by all Soviet leaders up to and including Gorbachev in the beginning. So, that's the real history. And I know it's not popular.

CR: Yes, I've read articles that said that America just accepted the gift that was given them.

RP: That's complete rubbish.

CR: And that Reagan just happened to be lucky enough to be in power when Gorbachev came along.

RP: No reading of the history brings you to that conclusion.

CR: No.

RP :It was the US that proposed what became the agreements that are now mis described as a 'gift'. Its absurd.

CR: And was Reagan like, how would you describe him as a leader. Was he a visionary thinker? And how would you compare him to another president you had dealings with, Jimmy Carter.

RP: Well Carter never saw the big picture because he was always down in the minutiae; And didn't have a very clear understanding of the world, in my view. Reagan had definite ideas, which were elaborated in many years of commentary and letters, I'm sure you've seen '*In his hand*' and so forth. He's left a very good documentary record. The diary is pretty interesting too.

CR: Which proves that he was thinking through the same issues...

RP: Absolutely and long before he became president.

CR: And how much do you think he was influenced by people like yourself and Senator Jackson in the 1970s who were part of this similar type of movement.

RP: I don't know how much he was influenced by Jackson-he wouldn't have taken any notice of me. But uh, he admired Scoop greatly and wanted to bring him into the administration. So, I infer from that he had a lot of interest in Scoop's ideas and he appointed him to his Central American Commission. But by the way, have you talked to Dick Allen? Cause he's in your neighborhood in New Zealand.

CR: Yes..he's agreed to an email interview.

RP: Good. Well Dick was one of the people who I think brought Scoop to Reagan's attention. And they had conversations about Jackson. So its worth talking to Dick Allen.

CR: And what role did Reagan envision for Jackson in the administration?

RP: Well, my understanding is that he wanted to offer him either Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense and the so called 'kitchen cabinet' the group of mostly Californian conservatives who were around him were horrified at the idea.

CR: Of bringing a Democrat in.

RP: Because these were old fashioned conservatives and interested principally in the domestic agenda and they worried about brining a democrat into the administration. They were just rather shallow partisans and they worried about brining a democrat into the cabinet.

CR: So, talking about some of the key players: what would you say about Casper Weinberger's role?

RP: Well, he was very important not in shaping the ideology the ideas, the framework, that was Reagan, though it was shared by Weinberger, but Weinberger was the implementer, he was the person who was tasked with restoring American defenses and restoring them in a way that recognized that for some years prior to Reagan, American defenses had been allowed to deteriorate: Under Nixon and then under Ford to some degree and then of course under Carter. And all this while the Soviets were building their military forces; so an imbalance or an apparent imbalance had developed. And it was Reagan's view that needed to be fixed and that Weinberger was the man to fix it.

CR: And the idea underpinning that was 'deterrence, peace through strength'?

RP: Yes. I also think, I didn't think immediately at the time, but Reagan better than anyone,

better than any of his advisers, instinctively understood that the Soviet Union was vulnerable, that the combination of political illegitimacy, and the failed economy made them vulnerable. And he wasn't prepared to accept the prevailing doctrine of all the presidents who had preceded him which was to accept the permanence of the Soviet Union and find a way to get along with it. Sometimes it was called 'peaceful co-existence', some times it was called 'détente' sometimes it was called establishing a modus vivendi, but in every case, it began with the assumption that the Soviets were a fact of life and that they were there forever.

CR: And what do you make of Richard Nixon's switch in 1980 when he wrote 'the Real War', it seemed that he rejected détente himself and became a 'hawk' again.

RP: You know I didn't pay...I think I actually reviewed that book at one point, but I don't.. As a matter of fact I do now vaguely recall pointing out the inconsistencies between what Nixon was saying then...

CR: And what he had just a few years ago

RP: and what he had been doing as president.

CR: Do you think that it might have been opportunism, that he knew that Reagan was going to be there so he needed to switch and become the hard-line anti-communist again

RP: I think that's entirely possible. Nixon was a man who always wanted to be with the majority of people he cared about.

CR: He wanted influence.

RP: He wanted influence. But there was also some things had changed: there was the invasion of Afghanistan, for example, the collapse of the SALT talks, so, but it struck me reading that book at the time that the views expressed there didn't sound at all like the views he was expressing when we were fighting with him.

CR: And you were in Defense when Al Haig was Secretary of State...

RP: I was.

CR: What was the relationship like between Defense and the State Department like with him in control?

RP: Well, its never a good relationship. Though from time to time a month or two. But there is an inbuilt difference in perspective and mission that inevitably causes conflict. The Defense Department seeks to maximize within its budget and a larger budget if it can get one, American military capabilities and military strengths. The State Department is always looking for deals that will improve relations with other countries, including adversaries. So their mentality is not to...

CR: It's kind of an inbuilt hostility and conflict?

RP: Yes, and they think that an aggressive military program can be an impediment to the kind of diplomacy they want. By military program I mean not the actual use of force but strengthening our position vis-a-vis various adversaries.

CR: And did it change at all when Shultz came in? Because I seem to...

RP: Well Shultz was a much easier person to work with. Although Weinberger and him didn't get along very well. Haig's problem was that he thought he was president. And Reagan, in his diaries, some of which, excerpts of which has now been published says exactly that. He says at one point in there, 'Either Al Haig is going to run our foreign policy or I am'.

CR: Were you surprised by anything you read in the diaries?

RP: I was surprised by one thing: there was a reference to me and an instant that I hadn't known about, so that was kind of amusing. And it was just a very short entry before the Geneva summit between Reagan and Gorbachev. And it simply reads, 'The Soviets have complained that Richard Perle is part of our delegation for Geneva. They are not going to tell me who I can bring, Perle stays'. And what I concluded reading that, and knowing how these things work, is that they had complained through diplomatic channels, the State Department dutifully related the complaint...

CR: To Reagan..

RP: To Reagan, and Reagan almost certainly with a recommendation..

CR: By Shultz...

RP: that they leave me in Washington rather than...

CR: Just the idea of them dictating to him who he could bring I think he would say no.

RP: And so, he overruled the State Department advice.

CR: And Gorbachev didn't shake your hand at that summit.

RP: That's the occasion on which he refused to shake my hand. So they obviously had a bad impression of me at that point.

CR: I think he did the same to Edward Teller when he met him once.

RP: I didn't know that.

CR: He said that he thought the man was 'the devil'. So moving onto INF, you were the man who originated the brilliant idea of 'zero weapons' that put the Soviets on the defensive and made America appear as the more reasonable party. Can you tell me how you came up with that

decision?

RP: Well, the idea had been kicked around but, mostly when people referred to it before we tabled it as a proposal it meant 'zero' for us. Nobody, I don't know of anyone who was suggesting that the SS-20 program be abandoned. Yes, it seemed to me that we were in a very difficult political position because there was a great deal of opposition to our deployment. And I didn't think that it was an entirely valuable deployment. The system seemed vulnerable to me. In theory, they achieved survivability by their mobility but in practice it seemed to me very unlikely that we could utilize their mobility because to do that we clearly were not to keep these weapons in constant motion, so it was intended that they would be at fixed places and move on alert. Well, when you start moving large numbers of nuclear weapons on alert, you create a crisis if there hasn't been one already. And if there has been one already the argument is against deepening the crisis by..

CR: by moving them..

RP: By moving them... So I thought we were deploying sitting ducks. And there was an illusion that were survivable. And in the context of deterrence the last thing you want is to provide the incentive to the other side to act preemptively. So I was quite happy to be rid of those weapons if we could get rid of the SS-20s.

CR: And so it was a real proposal, it wasn't propaganda?

RP: No it was a real proposal with an unusual characteristic which was, if we didn't get it we were still ahead of the game because it would help us politically. And if we did get it, we ahead of the game, because I didn't think the weapons were very useful.

CR: What did you think of Al Haig's opposition to it?

RP: Well, the State Department's reaction was typical. They are always interested in getting an agreement. And this was such a bold and aggressive proposal that they immediately concluded that there was no chance. And therefore, if we proceeded with this, there would be no agreement.

CR: So, when that went forward, the deployment, Jay Winik has in his book that you had a 'smile' on your face and that someone else popped a bottle of champagne. Is that true?

RP: I don't recall that, but I was certainly very pleased that deployment went forward. Not because I liked the weapons but because failure to deploy would have been such a catastrophe for NATO. So this was a hurdle that we had to surmount.

CR: And what was Ronald Reagan's leadership with NATO like?

RP: Well, he was very effective dealing one on one with individuals, particularly with Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl and even Mitterand.

CR: So he could be persuasive?

RP: He could be persuasive. But, most of all he conveyed that sense of clarity and determination that permitted the people who dealt with allies day in and day out to have come credibility.

CR: And Gorbachev in his memoirs says the weapons were like a 'literal pistol to the head', he seems to see them as a massive threat to the Soviet Union. Was that the case or was he overstating their importance?

RP: Well, he every reason to claim that because the whole Soviet propaganda campaign particularly, the campaign aimed at influencing German opinion was intended to create that sense. That we were aggressors, we were threatening them, they were simply responding to our threat. In fact, if they had a competent evaluation of the pershing and cruise missiles they would have understood that they have a very limited pre-emptive capability.

CR: Could they strike Moscow?

RP: Barely. Some, and not all. So that we had ICBMS that could do the job in about the same time. So..

CR: It was more a symbolic act of NATO resolve?

RP: Yes, and it started with the ss-20s.

CR: And looking at Reagan's rhetoric, what was your reaction to, first of all to the 'Evil Empire' speech?

RP: Well, the 'Evil Empire' speech and other speeches of a similar nature were intended to raise fundamental questions about the legitimacy of the Soviet dictatorship. And did. And I believe that was essential to ending the Cold War. It was essential to the Western victory. Because by silence, or worse, previous administrations had accepted the legitimacy of the Soviet government and even the empire.

CR: And what did you think in January of '84 when he gave that speech that emphasized dialogue. Did you see that as a retreat or?

RP: No, no, no...that was fine. Dialogue, but dialogue from a position from strength. And by then we had deployed and we were in a very strong position. We had deployed, he had proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative, the Soviets were seriously worried about whether they could maintain their position. That was exactly the right time for real dialogue.

CR: And then the 'tear down this wall' speech, seemed to move from condemning them, to talking about dialogue to then challenging Gorbachev saying, 'If you are serious about reform, then this is what you need to do'.

RP: Well, Reagan saw that Gorbachev was doing some things that were understood in the West as reform and in the Soviet context were reforms, but intended to strengthen the Soviet Union

not pave the road to its abolition. So he wanted to drive home the fact that it remained an empire, it remained a totalitarian state that was governing otherwise independent people.

CR: And looking at nuclear arms reduction, first of all there was the INF treaty but Reagan actually went further and wanted total nuclear abolition. When did that first reach the Pentagon that Reagan had these types of ideas and what was the reaction like?

RP: Well I never believed that that was his underlying idea. I was wrong about that, because there has been subsequent research that shows that he had been thinking in terms of total nuclear disarmament for a very long time, in some of his earlier writings and so forth. I understood him to take a more immediate and tactical position. And at Reykjavik he proposed, in terms of serious proposals, not the back and forth talk, he proposed the elimination of offensive ballistic missiles. But did not put on the table anything in writing that suggested eliminating all nuclear weapons.

CR: But there is that time when Gorbachev said, 'Are we talking about everything?' and Reagan says, 'Let's do it'.

RP: Yes, but I didn't take that all that seriously because the work of the negotiators, who picked up after these conversations between the leaders were focused on a much narrower agenda.

CR: You can see that Shultz was a little bit confused because he thought 'strategic' meant ballistic missiles but Gorbachev believed it involved all types of nuclear weapons. Is it true that Shultz wanted to accept that 10 year limitation and that the details could be worked out later?

RP: I think he was willing to accept it.

CR: And Reagan turned to you?

RP: Well he turned to everyone on the delegation and went around the room and asked us our opinions.

CR: And what did you say?

RP: My opinion was rather narrowly focused and I said that I didn't believe that SDI could continue if we accepted that. I didn't say, I don't have a transcript of it, there probably is one somewhere that will be produced someday, uh, I didn't say 'you shouldn't do this', I confined myself to observing that if we accepted this I didn't see how the SDI program could continue.

CR: I've got a quote from Winik's book: did he interview you for his book?

RP: Yes.

CR: It says, 'Shultz agreed to this saying that the details could be worked out later. Reagan turned to Perle and said, 'Can we carry out research under the restraints the Soviets are proposing?'' It says that your mouth was 'dry', you felt 'short of breath', Reagan was asking you

for a reason. If you said 'yes', it gave Reagan cover with the conservatives, (ie: 'Richard Perle assured me) if you said no, you would be arguing against Shultz. You then said no.

RP: I said I didn't believe we could do that. Because in confining the program to the laboratory, by which they meant within four walls, they didn't mean a test range. Uh, that's pretty much what happened. But it wasn't so much that I would give cover for conservatives, it was that Reagan wanted an honest answer, he wanted to know...

CR: He never thought about political ramifications did he?

RP: He wasn't, at that moment, he certainly wasn't thinking about that. He was thinking about whether SDI could continue. He believed in SDI. He believed that a defense against ballistic missiles was the practical and moral way to maintain stable deterrence.

CR: And what did you think when you first heard it? I think you were in Portugal with Weinberger at the time.

RP: Yes, well there's been some confusion about that. I favored a ballistic missile defense program.

CR: So you didn't think it was 'ludicrous'?

RP: No, I didn't think it was ludicrous, but I was unhappy with the way it was about to bust into the world stage. Because we hadn't done any of the preparatory work with our allies.

CR: I think that Reagan knew that if he went through the usual process then it would probably die.

RP: Well, he was probably right about that I was probably wrong. Although I still think that we could have, Weinberger could have been authorized but wasn't to say 'The president is going to announce..' Now if he'd said that much in advance it would have leaked out of the NATO ministers meeting and it wouldn't have been a good thing. We should have timed it for simultaneous release. That is Weinberger should have said, 'In a few minutes the president is going to give a speech in which he is going to say the following...'

CR: Do you still think that SDI can be achieved or is worth achieving?

RP: Oh yes, the idea that we will go on into the indefinite future without any defense against ballistic missiles seems to me quite absurd. Ballistic missile technology is becoming more widely available. It all depends on your time horizon. If you are thinking five years, seven years, that's one thing, if you are thinking 50-100 years...I can't imagine that a hundred years from now there will be no defenses against ballistic missiles. And if they are going to develop then you have got to get started at some point. The time to start is before you are facing ballistic missiles, possibility in the hands of people who would happily use them.

CR: They always painted it as a 'pipe-dream' that was 'silly', but the idea that there is no

defense against incoming missiles is just....

RP: Well it was a 'pipe-dream' to defend the United States against the full weight of the Soviet arsenal, so that the Soviets could not deliver any nuclear weapons on American territory. That never made sense to me, I never endorsed that, I never believed in that. You didn't have to believe in that to believe that a limited defense had very substantial virtues. It could deal with an accident, it could deal with a miscalculation, it could deal with an unauthorized launch. And it could deal with capabilities that might emerge in third countries, and were almost certain to emerge. It was never intended to deprive the Soviets of a deterrent. It was intended to make deterrence more stable. The calculations that were widely believed to be performed before a decision to strike first were entirely different if there was no defense. You could make rather precise calculations. There would always be uncertainty. If you had a defense the uncertainty became enormous.

CR: And that would deter them from making a first strike.

RP: Absolutely.

CR: But to the Soviets it looked like America was preparing for a first strike.

RP: Well, that's what they said. On the other hand, when we put it to them, as we did in the arms control negotiations, 'Why do you object to defense once the missiles have been eliminated'? They never had a convincing answer to that.

CR: Reagan also said that they'd share technology.

RP: Yes.

CR: And with the Geneva summit I read that there was some sort of disagreement with the talking points that that president was going to use. Do you even know if he used the talking points prepared, because I get the sense reading the transcripts that he just said what he felt-that it was kind of a free-wheeling discussion..

RP: Yeah, he was not the sort of person who would glance down at his talking points. He often ignored them completely. He handled the Geneva summit brilliantly. I think he was seriously underestimated by Gorbachev and that changed with Geneva. Because Reagan was in command of that summit from day one, from moment one. And it was little things, little symbolic things. It was quite cold....

CR: Yes, because Gorbachev came out of the limo quite coated up.

RP: That's right, and Reagan was not bundled up, he looked relaxed. He could overcome the weather was while Gorbachev was...It was psychological and symbolic, but, Geneva was full of things like that.

CR: And the final statement had no reference to human rights...

RP: No, that's not true. It did. Well, the final statement that was issued at the time..

CR: Oh, it had a different word...

RP: We had two: we had an English version and a Russian version. And the English version said 'human rights'. The Russian version said, I think 'Humanitarian concerns'. And I remember that part of the negotiation because I was the one that suggested that we use the two language approach, which the Soviets set themselves up for when they said, 'We can't say 'human right's because there is no Russian translation for that term'. And I said to Berserzmick who was in charge of the Soviet delegation at the negotiating table at four in the morning, I said, 'Well, what is the closest Russian equivalent?' And he said, 'humanitarian concerns'. It would translate into humanitarian concerns. And I said, 'So why don't we say 'human rights' in the English version and you can say the Russian words 'humanitarian concerns' in the Russian version. And that was agreed. And that was a huge victory for us, because the whole world read the...

CR: The English version.

RP: The English version. Now I'm told but I've never researched this, that, the Soviets complained subsequently and the State Department went back and changed the wording of the English communiqué. But what mattered, in my view, is what went out to the world while we were still in Geneva. That was the communiqué and any subsequent revision would be unimportant.

CR: And at the Washington Summit you were seated at Gorbachev's table. Was that in thanks for the INF 'zero option'?

RP: I don't know. I don't know whether that was so or not. But Nancy Reagan said to me, 'You're seated next to me...that for...I need moral support'. So I was on side of Nancy and Gorbachev was on the other.

CR: And what was the discussion about?

RP: Well it was pretty wide ranging. But among other things I asked him about the Soviet defense budget. And I said, 'How big is it as a percentage of GNP?' And he said, 'That's a secret'. And I said, 'Do you know'? Knowing full well that he probably didn't, that it was very difficult to calculate. That the official figures that he would be given would be understated...And he said, 'I am chairman of the defense council, I know everything'. And he said it with, almost with a wink, which I took as a confirmation that he really didn't know, and he knew that he didn't know.

CR: And I read that, when they were discussing numbers, that certain people had to leave the room because it was a state secret how many weapons that they had.

RP: Well, from time to time in negotiations we would use a number and you would see the

Soviet negotiator recoil, because they knew that there were people in the room who weren't cleared to hear that.

CR: And was the defense department in the Kremlin was quite separate from the foreign affairs department the ss-20 went ahead without their state department knowing anything about it. It was a power unto itself.

RP: Well it was the predominant power and the diplomats came second. That was clear. And during the Gromyko period it didn't matter if the diplomats came second because Gromyko was as tough and hawkish as anybody in the military.

CR: And do think the those types of agreements could have been made if he remained in power as foreign minister?

RP: He was pretty intractable. I think Shevardnadze was with the program. That is, he understood that the Soviet Union couldn't survive in an all out arms competition with the United States and therefore agreements were in their interest. And I don't think Gromyko ever accepted that.

CR: And, going back to the Jackson-Vanik amendment. Nixon, Kissinger and Ford were quite angry about that and said that they actually got more immigration when it was done quietly.

RP: Well, they had numbers that showed that after the amendment there was fall off and they are right about that happening. Again it's a question of time horizon. The immigration was more and more restricted at the point when we offered the Jackson-Vanik. They were discriminating against people with educations by imposing exorbitant taxes. And for a while the people were actually raising the money to pay these taxes. But it was sixty to seventy-thousand dollars per person, and they were arbitrary in the way they granted the emigration permissions. So a bus driver from Kiev could get it, but a school teacher might not.

CR: They would separate families and so on...

RP: And it was just a matter of time before they really put a stop to it. At least there was no reason to assume that it would go on-there was no agreement establishing that it would go on. The harassment of people who applied was pretty severe. People lost their jobs, more or less immediately. It was an intolerable situation. And while it was true that they were allowing a trickle, it was not stable, it was not permanent. And the effect of the amendment, ultimately, was to open the floodgates. And so more than a million people leave. In the beginning it was a few thousand a year.

CR: So eventually it had the effect.

RP: Eventually it had the effect because they had to choose between restrictive emigration policy and some sort of economic relationship with the United States. By the way, the 'Wilson Centre Cold War History Project' has published a number of transcripts including a transcript of a discussion about Jackson-Vanik between Brezhnev, Andropov and others. It's fascinating.

Brezhnev says, 'What are we going to do about this?' He asks Andropov for some figures, 'How many people are we letting out? How much are we charging with this new tax we are imposing'? And he says, 'Well, I'll have to get back to you on that'. He doesn't know. It's a very amusing conversation. But what is very clear is that this got Brezhnev's attention. He wanted to get rid of the amendment, one way or another. And, he was prepared to make concessions to do it.

CR: And during the '80s when you realized that the Soviets knew about you and didn't like you, were you ever concerned that you were being spied upon by the Soviets? Or that they might tap your phones?

RP: No, I never thought much about that.

CR: It's just that, 'the Kremlin knows about you'...

RP: Well, I wasn't going to the Soviet Union in the '70s. And they had sent one of their agents to try and establish a relationship with me. A fellow who was a 'diplomat', operating under a diplomatic cover, a KGB agent working in New York at the UN.

CR: He tried to make you a 'double-agent'?

RP: I don't know what he had in mind. The relationship never got far enough. But the FBI was very interested in him, so at their request I gave a little dinner party for this spy and invited among others an FBI agent who was posing as a student, because they wanted a close up look at him.

CR: And there was Robert Hansen, the US double agent operating back then. Did you know at the Defense Department that there was somebody..?

RP: I certainly had no idea about it. But I wouldn't have been informed on something like that.

CR: Have you looked into that case at all?

RP: No. I saw the movie [laughs].

CR: Because apparently he did quite a bit of damage to America.

RP: Oh he did, there's no question.

CR: And that amendment for equal ceilings for weapons, didn't America have an advantage in different areas and the Soviets had advantage in different areas so that, the effect of this amendment was that the America had to build up in other areas as well?

RP: Well the effect of the amendment was to sober people on the euphoria that surrounded arms control. And to make it much tougher to enter into a questionable agreement after that. It was a very clever amendment. And it was actually proposed, the original idea came from Freddie Clay, who was the director of the arms control and disarmament agency. He was in no position to

propose it, but he mentioned it to me. I then saw that Jackson introduced it. And it annoyed the hell out of Kissinger, because it really did tie his hands. Which was fine, because we wanted to tie his hands. Not because we were opposed to any agreement, but we were concerned that the interim agreement, if made permanent, was made favorable to the Soviets. And interim agreements have a way of becoming permanent.

CR: You opposed SALT II the entire time.

RP: Oh yeah, because it did not entail the kind of deep reductions that we thought were necessary.

CR: And why did Reagan go along with it for a while, when he had been against it as a candidate?

RP: Well he, he was persuaded not to abandon it as soon as he took office. He rejected it as a legal obligation for the United States. So we informally subscribed to the limits. But he had complete flexibility, at any time to bail out of those limits, whereas formal ratification would have bound us to those limits, in a legal sense.

CR: And who came up with a broad interpretation of ABM?

RP: A lawyer by the name of Phil Consberg.

CR: So it wasn't you?

RP: No, he uh...The way this came about, and nobody believes this, but this is how things sometimes happen in government. A man by the name of Don Hicks had been nominated to be under-secretary of defense and Don was an industry type from the Northrop Corporation and he went before the arms services committee and had to answer a lot of questions, and some of the questions had to do with interpretations. The SALT II Treaty and... he didn't know how to answer those questions, it wasn't his area of expertise. So an inter-agency committee was set up to provide him with a briefing book so that he could answer the questions. And to draft answers to the questions that were requested of him in writing. And I chaired that working group, and we went around the table to get answers to specific questions that various senators had put and there was an immediate disagreement on how to answer the question of the interpretation of one article of the ABM treaty, the one dealing with 'future systems'. And I said as chairman, I said, 'We can't have differing interpretations, we've got to get an agreed interpretation'. And we couldn't get an agreed interpretation within the working group, inter-agency committee. So I grabbed a young lawyer, who had not been previously involved in this, he was doing other work, he had come to defense from the CIA. A smart young lawyer, and I said, 'Would you take a week to read the treaty and read all the associated memoranda of conversations and provide an answer to these questions. And he did, and he prepared a very thorough, very careful memo. And the memo established, beyond any doubts, that the Soviets had never agreed to ban new technologies-technologies based on other physical principles. And when you looked at the exchanges between United States representatives and the Soviet representatives, we were pushing for the banning of systems based on other physical principals and the Soviets rejected it. They said, 'You can't ban

something that you can't define'. So, this was a discovery for me: I'd never looked at the details of the negotiating record. And when Phil drafted this report, we sent it immediately to the State Department. It was reviewed there by the State Department lawyer, Abe Zofer, and he agreed with it. He said he found it, 'very convincing'.

CR: People didn't think that he'd agree with it, did they?

RP: No...there was a group of people within the State department who had been involved in those negotiations who took a different interpretation. But what was very clear was, was that the record didn't support that interpretation. They were arguing for an interpretation that reflected their preferences, not what had actually been agreed.

CR: And then Senator Biden then introduced an amendment about treaties...

RP: I don't recall that: I do recall that it was pretty explosive.

CR: With the Senate...

RP: Because it had been made to appear that we were...

CR: ...re-writing treaties?

RP: That we had conjured up some interpretation in order to permit SDI to go forward. And, it was very badly handled, and I sometimes think deliberately badly handled by Bud McFarlane, who simply blurted out this new interpretation before there had been any consultations..

CR: On 'Meet the Press'

RP: On 'Meet the Press', and when you looked at the document on Phil's paper and the quotations from the record, it was so clear, that I think we could have convinced members of the Arms Services Committee for example, and the time to announce this interpretation was after that work had been done. Coming as it did, blurted out on a Sunday talk show, there was an immediate...

CR: No consultation with allies...

RP: No, it was just...And to this day I don't know whether McFarlane was sabotaging that interpretation or not, and I don't think he would ever say.

CR: What did you think of him as a National Security Adviser?

RP: I thought he was in over his head.

CR: Was that the case with most of Reagan's National Security Advisers?

RP: No, I think Clark was very good. I think Allen was very good. Clark was derided, ridiculed because he didn't seem to know some of the...

CR: Shultz didn't seem to like him in his memoirs, because he wore cowboy boots.

RP: Well, there were stylistic....one of the good reasons that Bush is disliked is his style. And I think you've got to look beyond style. But Clark didn't know the name of some African president, you know, so what? He had very good instincts and he certainly understood what, where Reagan was coming from and that's really important.

CR: And what was Colin Powell like?

RP: Well Colin was...

CR: Was he just a manager? He wasn't really....

RP: He's a manager. He's never been very strong, in my view, conceptually. He's a leader, he's charismatic, he's a manager: he's a very capable man in many respects, but he's not a strategist.

CR: Because I got the sense...I looked at his papers in the Reagan archives, that he was just a manager; he didn't really propose new ideas to the president.

RP: I think that's right.

CR: And when you left the Pentagon, you were given a farewell meeting with Reagan, what did you tell him?

RP: Oh, well that was an interesting meeting. I told him that I thought that the dream of zero nuclear weapons was unrealistic. And remember at that time I didn't know how much he had written about this previously. Its interesting that no-one had done this work in the archives before this, now maybe they weren't available, but certainly a lot of his public stuff was. And I remember offering what I thought was a very powerful argument, put in the kinds of terms that he liked to use when he making an argument, that is in images. So I said, 'So you have to imagine Mr. President the day on which the last remaining nuclear weapons are turned over. And you have to imagine the Soviets producing their last weapons and we produce our last weapons, for destruction'. I said, 'I have no doubt that we would produce ours, but I don't believe that the Soviets would produce theirs. Because if they withheld them, from the moment ours were destroyed, they would have a nuclear monopoly, and that would be an intolerable situation.

CR: How did Reagan react?:

RP: He said, 'That's why we need SDI!'

CR: He didn't say, 'Trust but verify?'

RP: No, and of course I had argued that verification down to zero was virtually impossible.

CR: You could always hide some, and you would expect that they would. You'd expect both sides to some, wouldn't you, as a back up?

RP: Yes, of course. He makes a reference to this in his diary, he refers to the conversation. He very kindly describes me as 'brilliant', but he says something like, 'Had a talk with Richard Perle, or he did the talking' something like that [laughs] But I went in there thinking I should use the opportunity to discourage this.

CR: Instead of just a photo-op?

RP: Yes, no it was a substantive conversation that went on for about an hour.

CR: Wow And any final thoughts about Ronald Reagan and the ending of the Cold War?

RP: I believe that Reagan was a great president. He saw things in broad terms, he knew how to delegate, he knew how to take decisive action, and he didn't read the polls in the way most politicians do.

CR: He wasn't poll driven?

RP: Not at all poll driven: he had a set of ideas, he had a set of purposes, things he wanted to accomplish and he set about doing it and stuck with it even when it was hard. He knew for example in Reykjavik that had he come back with a treaty he would have been celebrated around the world. All that abuse he'd taken, all those years, about being a cowboy with a six shooter in each hand, all of that would have evaporated. And he'd probably get a Noble prize. It was in October, as I recall, and there was the November elections...it had huge benefits...

CR: An 'October surprise'...

RP: Huge benefits, and he refused to be suborned by those benefits because he believed that SDI was essential to maintaining the American position and ending the Cold War. So he was a remarkable man, he was also a very warm personality; he was a pleasure to be around.

CR: And did you think that he was correct in his estimation of Gorbachev at the time, or have you changed your view about that: because he was criticized a lot for being 'too friendly with Gorbachev'.

RP: I think he was trying to test Gorbachev. And if he had maintained a hostile posture, it wouldn't have worked. It wouldn't have worked as a test, it wouldn't have worked as an instrument of American policy. So I think he pretty much did the right thing. But he never abandoned the tough policies, he just expressed and portrayed an openness to agreement on his terms.

CR: OK, thanks a lot for the interview.

RP: OK, all the best.

End of verbatim transcript.

Following this interview, RP and CR had an off the record discussion on the George W. Bush Administration, the issue of the Iraq War, and the lingering problem of Iran's nuclear ambitions. The discussion was serious, but greatly informative. RP posed for some photographs, and thus ended a very pleasant morning of talks.