

Commentary :

Alexei Arbatov : *What Lessons Learned?*

LOOKING BACK at the recent history of Soviet-U.S. relations is not only fascinating but instructive when coping with current and future issues. Ambassador Jack Matlock's chapter on the last, but crucial, turning point of the cold war in 1980–1983 is written with impressive knowledge, thoughtfulness, and a subtle touch of personal experience and involvement.

In the early 1980s, as the two superpowers and their allies were sliding into yet another round of dangerous confrontation, no one could imagine that only a decade later the cold war would be over and communism would collapse, while Russia and the West would embark on an unprecedented course of economic, political, and military cooperation with the goal of becoming strategic partners and even allies. Likewise, very few in the early 1990s would have predicted that ten years later Moscow and Washington would again enter a state of high tension and bitter controversy across a broad range of issues, treating each other with distrust, misunderstanding, and revived stereotypes of the cold war.

Understanding the domestic and external driving forces of these inexorable dynamics and learning what is good or bad for Soviet-U.S. relations is a great challenge for thinkers in both countries. Jack Matlock's essay is a valuable contribution to this endeavor.

Why did the détente of the first half of the 1970s collapse and give way to a new phase of the cold war in the first half of the 1980s? Matlock quite correctly points to the 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the U.S. reaction to it, as well as the U.S. failure to ratify SALT II, which shocked the Soviets. Furthermore, he rightly explains that Americans reacted vehemently because

they viewed the invasion of Afghanistan as final proof of the deep and unacceptable divergence between U.S. and Russian definitions of détente.

The United States considered that détente implied a broad cooperation on economic and security issues, restraint in arms buildup and intervention abroad, and Soviet softening on human rights and freedom of immigration. In contrast, Moscow believed détente meant U.S. credits and economic assistance unlinked from Soviet domestic affairs, security cooperation in Europe, final legalization of U.S.-Soviet strategic parity through SALT II, and unrestricted expansion of Soviet influence in the third world through “support for the national liberation movements.” Each side’s understanding and conduct of détente gravely disappointed the other; hence their return to a new round of confrontations between President Ronald Reagan during his first term and Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko on the Soviet side. But there was much more to the U.S.-Soviet rift of the early 1980s.

The beginning of the last two decades of the cold war saw an unprecedented U.S. military decline following its crushing defeat in Vietnam. The U.S. defense budget was cut by 35 percent between 1968 and 1976, U.S. armed forces were reduced from 3.6 million to 2.1 million, and nuclear and conventional modernization programs were curtailed. In 1976, the U.S. military had 400,000 troops in the Asia-Pacific and other regions, a reduction of 65 percent from its 1968 level. There were growing controversies with NATO allies in Europe over such issues as the neutron bomb and the Persian Gulf. The post-Vietnam War syndrome against military intervention abroad, the failing economy and high inflation at home, and the widening split between public opinion and the administration over foreign policy and arms control culminated in the humiliation of U.S. diplomats taken hostage in Iran and the failure of the U.S. rescue operation in April 1980. Ronald Reagan entered the White House with a clear mandate to restore American prestige and power abroad as well as self-respect, prosperity, and unity at home.

In stark contrast, during these decades the Soviet Union was ex-

perienching the peak of its power and foreign expansion not just since World War II but even as far back as the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. By the early 1980s the Kremlin had seemingly fulfilled Lenin's goal of making the backward rural country in the eastern backyard of Europe one of the world's two superpowers. Having built the second largest highly centralized and militarized economy in the world with a GNP equal to 60 percent of U.S. GNP, the USSR surpassed the United States in military expenditures and possessed the most powerful army in the world, numbering 3.9 million troops and exceeding the U.S. nuclear arsenal by 40 percent (45,000 versus 24,000 nuclear weapons, respectively). The Soviet foreign military presence of 800,000 personnel in Eastern and Central Europe, Mongolia, Afghanistan, North Korea, Vietnam, Aden, Syria, Libya, Iraq, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Cuba, and Nicaragua, as well as naval and air force deployments in the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, expanded its reach across the globe.

The Soviet defense industry was turning out massive quantities of weapons and equipment, lagging behind the United States only in the construction of aircraft carriers, heavy bombers, and nuclear-powered cruisers. In Europe, the Warsaw Pact had tripled Soviet superiority over NATO in conventional arms. The USSR had more weapons in certain categories than the rest of the world put together, including strategic and tactical nuclear munitions, surface-to-surface ballistic missiles of all ranges, surface-to-air missiles, tanks, nuclear-powered submarines, and military space launchers. The Soviet Union led the world in foreign arms sales (\$30 billion) and was the only country in the world that had active ABM and ASAT systems, a permanent space station in orbit, two nuclear test sites, and three missile space ranges.

Yet beneath the surface of this impressive military power and foreign influence were serious signs of the deep internal deterioration of the Communist empire. In fact, just as Soviet power reached its pinnacle, it began its decline toward eventual collapse one decade later. Besides the USSR's wide rift with China and instability

in the occupied countries of Eastern Europe, which led to a Polish crisis in 1980, the deepening inefficiency of the Soviet economy undercut the foundations of the Communist regime and its huge defense establishment. But the sheer magnitude of Soviet Union resources dedicated to defense (approximately 12 percent of GNP and 40 to 50 percent of the state budget, compared with 5 percent and 20 percent, respectively, in the United States) was not the whole problem. As a matter of fact, the radical 90 percent reduction in Soviet defense expenditures from 1992 to 1998 did not lead to economic growth, but further exacerbated the country's economic crisis.

The crisis grew out of the organization of the Soviet economy. Massive military production, which relied on centralized planned allocation of material and human resources and strict control over prices and incomes, had become inefficient by the late 1960s. The extra revenue from foreign oil sales following the 1973 OPEC embargo had disappeared by the late 1970s. There were no sources of intensive growth through efficient capital investment or the introduction of high technology because there was no self-generating consumer market economy. The state-owned and state-planned economy could achieve efficiency only through meticulous regulation.

Growing shortages of consumer goods and services, the rapidly declining quality of state social safety nets (communal services, housing, health care, and education), the falling standard of living of the general population, cultural stagnation, and massive legal emigration from the Soviet Union were irreversibly eroding the ideological foundations and political dominance of the regime. The system was collapsing because of the widening gap between its outdated economic, political, and ideological mechanisms, and the demands and expectations of its urban educated populace.

During the 1970s, the liberalization of Soviet society, if not the Soviet state, became intertwined with détente in foreign affairs and the avalanche of contacts, goods, and information coming from abroad. In another unique development of the late 1970s, the

Kremlin's foreign policy and defense programs were challenged from inside for the first time. Some departments of the foreign ministry, the academic community (the Institute of U.S. Studies, IMEMO, and the Institute of Europe), professional journals, public organizations such as the Committee of Scientists for Peace, and even members of the CPSU Central Committee began to doubt the wisdom of the intervention in Afghanistan, the massive military buildup and deployment of SS-20 medium-range missiles, the official stance on Reagan's SDI, START and INF talks, and the reduction of conventional arms in Europe in the early 1980s.

Public challenges would not arise until the Gorbachev era, but in closed sessions and in the Aesopian language used by the mass media, it was apparent that a pluralism of opinion on the most important issues of national security was developing. These alternative assessments undermined the traditional monopoly of the military establishment and the aging Communist leadership.

Whereas formerly the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Council of Ministers, and Gosplan (the State Planning Committee) had ruled with a Stalinist iron fist, by the 1980s they had been transformed into a forum of competing lobbying groups and vested interests. The entire ruling class of *nomenklatura* had split into numerous central and regional clans and groups of corporate interests, such as the KGB "firm," military top brass, nuclear complex, energy elite, and agricultural "mafia." The elite establishment was losing its former homogeneity, discipline, and stringent organization. Deeply plagued by corruption, cynicism, and materialism, and stagnant from inbreeding and nepotism, it was rotting from the inside. A decade later, most of the *nomenklatura* were so demoralized and cowardly that they did not put up any serious resistance when the rule of the CPSU, the USSR, and the Communist system was collapsing in 1991. Instead, they waited passively for the outcome of the infighting in Moscow.

After 1991, the *nomenklatura* adapted quickly to the new Russian system of quasi-market economy and quasi-democracy by moving en masse into new semi-criminal businesses and leftist, na-

tionalist, and power-state (*derzhavnye*) political parties. Eventually, most of them, having easily shed Communist ideology, joined the new *nomenklatura* and concentrated around the ruling party, United Russia, which formed the political base of President Vladimir Putin's regime.

Ambassador Matlock's assessment of the ideological motivation of the Kremlin gerontocracy is only partially correct. No doubt the old party and state leaders referred to Marxist-Leninist teachings to justify their decisions and policies. Moreover, sometimes their ideological cover had its own momentum, committing Moscow to actions that it would not have taken otherwise, such as overextending itself in Africa in the 1970s. However, with few exceptions, the men in the Kremlin did not really believe in Marxist or Leninist ideologies (which, perhaps with the exception of Mikhail Suslov, they understood only superficially and mostly through popular quotations), or in class struggle or the eventual victory of communism in the cold war. They were merely operating within an established, convenient, and utopian ideology, ironclad since Stalin's times, while in fact they were cautious, pragmatic, and conservative imperial rulers whose primary concern was preservation of the Soviet empire.

All of their domestic and external actions may be explained as the behavioral patterns of an imperial, nationalistic, statist, totalitarian, corporate establishment. The Soviet Union in the 1980s was like medieval Europe, when Christian dogmas and disputes framed and masked politics that were driven by materialistic motives. A widely circulated joke in the 1980s was that the best deterrent to a possible Soviet attack was not U.S. strategic force but the fact that the children and grandchildren of the Soviet elites were serving in diplomatic missions and other sinecures in the West.

The Soviet Union's moves to expand its influence in the third world were not motivated by a desire to compensate for the liabilities of the system at home by pointing to its growing power abroad, even if only indirectly and remotely. In contrast to the romantic periods of the 1920s, the 1950s, and the 1960s, by the 1980s

Moscow's costly support of the national liberation movements abroad, poised against the background of economic decline and ideological disillusionment at home, caused universal irritation among the public and diminished the appeal of the Soviet Communist regime. The December 1979 intervention in Afghanistan was met with resentment and even horror by the majority of the population despite a massive official propaganda campaign. The people's sober assessment that Afghanistan was the "Soviet Vietnam" proved to be correct. Totalitarian empires cannot afford defeat, even in a remote war. The debacle in Afghanistan was not only a turning point in the Soviet expansion of the 1970s and 1980s but also a crushing blow to the empire, accelerating its demise. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was followed by its retreat from Germany, most of the third world countries, Eastern and Central Europe, and finally by the collapse of the USSR itself.

Soviet interventions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were driven by the bureaucratic momentum of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, the foreign ministry, the KGB, the ministry of defense, and the GKES (State Committee on Foreign Economic Cooperation dealing with military assistance and arms transfers). The strategy was to seek low-risk tactical gains and self-promotion in a never-ending geostrategic competition with the West and China. Similarly, the massive and persistent arms buildup was seldom motivated internally (and then, mostly at tactical and operational levels) or justified by the overt goal of achieving strategic superiority over the United States and its allies, regardless of how it may have seemed to foreign observers. For instance, the Soviet Union justified its obvious superiority in tanks by the prospect of heavy losses in armor due to enemy air strikes and the use of tactical nuclear weapons, areas in which NATO countries allegedly dominated.

With the monopoly of the ministry of defense and the KGB over all relevant intelligence and military assessments, presentations made to the Kremlin always aimed at negating real or projected Western strategic advantages and emphasizing parity and the

defensive capability of the Socialist camp. Anyone on the inside who challenged those assessments and proposals would immediately forfeit his career. The traditionally paranoid Kremlin gerontocracy, who retained a vivid memory of the disaster of June 22, 1941, generally accepted such proposals at face value. Thus the Soviet elites overburdened the economic resources of their empire while fortifying the rigidity of the system at a time when reforms were urgently needed to prevent revolution and make the transition less tumultuous and devastating.

Paul Kennedy has precisely described the dialectics of external decline and domestic erosion in his book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*:

Wealth is usually needed to underpin military power, and military power is usually needed to acquire and protect wealth. If, however, too large a portion of the state's resources is diverted from wealth creation and allocated instead to military purposes, then that is likely to lead to a weakening of national power over the longer term. In the same way, if a state overextends itself strategically—by, say, the conquest of extensive territories or the waging of costly wars—it runs the risk that the potential benefits from external expansion may be outweighed by the great expense of it all—a dilemma which becomes acute if the nation concerned has entered a period of relative economic decline.¹

Kennedy's description accurately fits what was happening in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1980s.

Such was the setting in the international arena and within the USSR when President Reagan came to power. Without a proper assessment of these circumstances, it is impossible to understand the effects of Reagan's policies on U.S.-Soviet relations and the causes of the final spasm of the cold war at the beginning of the

1. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), xvi.

1980s. Jack Matlock addresses some very important points, but it is worthwhile to add a few other observations.

First, the Reagan administration's national security personnel, selected by the president's "kitchen cabinet," ensured that Reagan's policies would be very tough. Many of these individuals came from the Committee on the Present Danger and the notorious Group B, which included 50 posts altogether from conservative business circles, defense industries, and the anti-SALT II press. The most prominent among them were Alexander Haig, Caspar Weinberger, Richard Allen, William Casey, Richard Pipes, Richard Burt, Fred Ikle, Richard Perle, Richard DeLauer, John Lehman, Eugene Rostow, Edward Rowny, Paul Nitze, and T. Harding Jones, all of whom were either staunchly conservative or outright hawkish.

During 1981 and 1982, public declarations by these officials on the possibility of conducting and winning a protracted nuclear war, on strategic superiority, on the arms race, and on arms control were overtly provocative, causing panic not only in Moscow but also in the United States and Western Europe. Statements of this kind could fill an anthology, but it will suffice to present two of them. The first is by President Reagan, who formulated in his distinctive way a clear readiness to sanction a preemptive nuclear strike: "Suppose you're the President, and suppose you have on unassailable authority that as of a certain hour the enemy is going to launch those missiles at your country—you mean to tell me that a President should sit there and let that happen. . . ?"² The second is a statement on the possibility of nuclear victory by Vice President George Bush, who was certainly not the most hawkish member of the administration and who had a more statesmanlike outlook on strategic affairs: "You have a survivability of command and control, survivability of industrial potential, protection of a percentage of your citizens, and you have a capability that inflicts more damage

2. Robert Scheer, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush, and Nuclear War* (New York: Random House, 1982), 240–241.

on the opposition than it can inflict upon you. That's the way you can be a winner."³

These and numerous other similar statements may be dismissed as flamboyant rhetoric, which stemmed from lack of knowledge or was geared for domestic consumption and did not reflect U.S. strategic policy or planning. However, it goes without saying that official declarations made by such high-level officials are in and of themselves part of practical policy and may affect relations with other states more than secret concepts and plans for actual deployment of military weapons. The "peace-loving" propagandistic declarations of Soviet leaders certainly contradicted their actions in the arms race and in foreign interventions, but had they instead mirrored U.S. rhetoric, tensions and the threat of war would have risen still higher.

In contrast to Matlock's arguments, the practical policies of Reagan's administration mainly conformed to the tough and aggressive rhetoric used by its representatives from 1981 to 1982. Its overall defense program envisioned a crash buildup of all armed services and a large-scale procurement of a panoply of ground-, air-, sea-, and space-based weapons, equipment, and systems. The defense budget was immediately increased by \$32 billion in the 1981–1982 fiscal years and cumulatively reached almost \$1.8 trillion for the 1984 through 1988 fiscal years.

In the area of strategic nuclear forces, the expenditure of \$180 billion for the 1983 through 1987 fiscal years included the restoration of the B-1B bomber procurement program (100 airplanes), deployment of 100 MX ICBMs and 1,000 Midgetman light mobile ICBMs, expansion of the construction of Trident SSBNs from 13 to 18 boats, accelerated deployment of Trident-2 SLBMs, and expansion of the procurement programs from 3,400 to 4,300 ALCM and 700 SLCM missiles. Altogether, the envisioned buildup of strategic power by number of warheads was only about 10 percent, but

3. Ibid., 261.

conceived qualitative shifts were much more significant. The plan was to increase by the mid-1990s: counterforce-capable warheads by a factor of 4.5; counterforce-capable warheads on survivable platforms by a factor of 4; and survivable counterforce capability on “fast-flyers” (ballistic delivery vehicles) by a factor of 20. In Europe, the new administration was determined to proceed with the planned deployment of 572 Pershing II and GLCM missiles.

In March 1983, Reagan announced the SDI program to create a space-based antimissile defense, which was to violate the ABM treaty of 1972 and undercut Soviet strategic deterrence. The scale of the arms race was so unprecedented that before long it stirred opposition in the U.S. Congress and the academic community and provoked a popular antimissile movement in Western Europe. Although Matlock describes the SDI program as unrealistic in its ambitions, the Pentagon, the research-industrial complex, and the conservative community conceived of it as a major strategic breakthrough toward U.S. superiority. They clearly understood all the destabilizing and provocative implications for the military balance of power and arms control. The USSR maintained an inefficient operational ABM system around the city of Moscow. It was conducting various research programs on space arms and directed energy weapons, but in most cases the Soviet Union lagged far behind the United States in SDI programs, and in many areas the USSR had nothing analogous to U.S. technical developments.

With respect to arms control, the administration maintained its pre-election position. In particular, SALT II, the subject of six years of exhausting negotiations, was declared “dead as a coffin nail” and in 1986 it was violated by the United States. In fact, its numerical limitations were rather moderate in terms of actual required reductions. SALT II was much more impressive, however, in its qualitative limitations, transparency, and cooperative measures, which had a greater limiting effect than numerical ceilings. After a failure to prohibit the introduction of any new type of ICBM (proposed by Moscow in May 1978), the parties agreed to confine themselves to only one new light type of ICBM each. This limit on

new weapon types was an unprecedented achievement in restraining the qualitative arms race, which was unfortunately abandoned in later disarmament treaties. Another breakthrough was the limit on increasing the number of warheads on existing MIRVed missiles. New ICBM and SLBM types could not carry more than the maximum number on existing missiles (10 and 14, respectively). By the same logic, no more than an average of 28 ALCMs could be placed on heavy bombers and no more than 20 on existing types. Other cruise missile types were covered by a treaty that prohibited their deployment until the end of 1981. The treaty itself was to continue through 1985.

In order for the parties to similarly interpret and verify these limitations, they undertook an unprecedented effort in transparency and cooperation. Meticulous definitions were given to each term used in the treaty, including classes and types of weapon systems, MIRV systems, and missile launch-weights and through-weights. Direct figures were exchanged on the existing numbers of various classes of strategic arms and all types of missile warheads. New type limits dictated strict rules governing permitted modernization or modification of existing ICBM types as to their number of stages, length, diameter, launch-weight and through-weight, weight of warheads, and type of propellant in each stage. There were also flight-test rules including, in particular, dispensing MIRV warheads from the “bus.” In order to facilitate verification, concealment measures, including telemetry encryption during flight tests, were prohibited. The “rule of type” and the requirement that treaty-limited systems have “functionally related observable differences” restricted the technological freedom of each side by putting a price tag on noncompliance.

The Soviet Union cancelled its SS-16 mobile ICBM system and made a promise not to extend the range of the Tu-22M bomber, provide it with air-refueling capacity, or increase the production rate of Backfires. Both sides had to modify their strategic modernization plans (in particular, the MIRVed missile and ALCM deployment programs) in technical characteristics, scale, and rate of

introduction and withdrawal of strategic weapons. All in all, with its rather high aggregate ceilings and marginal enhancement of strategic stability, SALT II would have gone far toward placing qualitative restrictions, establishing the “book of rules” and “dictionary” of arms control, and initiating transparency and cooperative verification measures.

It was undoubtedly a misfortune of historic proportions that the superpowers failed to separate their strategic nuclear relationship and SALT II from foreign policy tensions over the 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, in contrast to their success in doing so with SALT I and the war in Vietnam in 1972. Almost 20 years later, a similar situation would arise in connection with START II, which Russia failed to ratify in late 1998 and early 1999 because of U.S. strikes against Iraq and NATO aggression toward former Yugoslavia. If SALT II had been ratified and implemented in the 1980s, it would certainly have taken far less than 12 years to take the next step with the START I treaty in 1991. Matlock seems to underestimate the strategic liabilities related to the loss of SALT II.

Under Reagan, U.S. arms control proposals were not designed to reach an agreement with the USSR. In fact, they were formulated in such a way that they would never be accepted by Moscow, as was vividly described later by Strobe Talbott, a high official in successive Democratic administrations.⁴ The INF “zero option” advanced by President Reagan in November 1981 was designed to cool the popular European antimissile movement, and the START proposal of May 1992 was aimed primarily at pacifying a disturbed U.S. Congress and calming proponents of the American antinuclear movement. On this topic, it is impossible to agree with Matlock’s benign assessment of the Reagan administration’s motives.

Moscow later accepted the INF “zero option” in an even more radical version of “double zero” that included tactical missiles (INF-SRF). By contrast, START I, signed in 1991, was very different from Reagan’s START proposal of May 1982, which did not

4. See Strobe Talbott, *Deadly Gambits* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

include any limits on bombers and called for the virtual elimination of heavy ICBMs and put severe limits on other MIRVed ICBMs. With medium-range missiles, Mikhail Gorbachev was determined to make a real breakthrough and demonstrate new political thinking. Thus, he went even further than realistic compromise, such as that agreed upon during the famous “walk in the woods” might suggest. Besides, it had been broadly recognized since the early 1980s that the USSR itself had created the problem by starting an unprovoked massive deployment of SS-20 missiles. But in the early 1980s, in the environment of a resumed cold war, an accelerated arms race, and heated anti-Soviet rhetoric from Washington, Reagan’s arms control initiatives could not be, and were not meant to be, a serious proposition for a disarmament deal.

The eventual fate of these proposals, particularly the INF treaty, was not the result of Reagan’s prophetic insight but rather a historic coincidence caused by social and political transformations of a very different nature. INF-SRF, CFE, START I, and other historic achievements in Soviet-Western relations occurred during a distinctly different stage in world politics associated with Gorbachev’s rise to power and the second term of Reagan’s presidency, which began in 1985. No doubt the changes in Soviet policy were much greater than those in U.S. rhetoric and actions, but contrary to Matlock’s contention, Reagan’s second term was quite different from his first.

After 1984, the United States softened its stance due to broad opposition to its strategic policy in Western Europe, escalation of tensions with the USSR, and the breakdown of negotiations on nuclear arms in 1983 and 1984. In addition, there were setbacks to U.S. interventions, such as that in Lebanon in 1983. Congressional cuts in unrealistic defense budget requests, which led to a curtailment of weapons programs, including SDI, Reagan’s favorite; rising domestic opposition to the administration’s defense policy; the Senate’s rejection of the broad interpretation of the ABM treaty; disputes within the administration over policies toward the USSR; and changes in its personnel, such as the appointment of George

Shultz as secretary of state: all led to a tangible softening of U.S. policy in 1984.

President Reagan, advancing in years and holding rather simplistic views on foreign relations, may have sincerely believed that his policies from 1985 to 1988 were consistent with those he had espoused from 1981 to 1984. Similarly, Soviet elders might have thought that their policies of the early and late 1970s were basically the same. But in both cases, policies differed distinctly between the first and second halves of the decades, and they were reflected in changing U.S.-Soviet relations.

What impact did Reagan's policies have on the Soviet Union's international conduct and domestic evolution? In politics, it is often difficult to link outcomes to specific causative factors; therefore all the conclusions presented here are highly speculative. However, in contrast to Matlock's arguments, it seems that the effects of Reagan's influence were quite controversial.

It was not the first time that the Kremlin had met with an aggressive White House; in the early 1960s, there was the case of Nikita Khrushchev and John Kennedy. But it certainly was the first time in the history of U.S.-Soviet relations since 1933 that top Soviet leaders found themselves facing an opponent who was more inexperienced and naïve in terms of world affairs, more blinded by ideological dogma, more nationalistic and self-righteous, more blunt in his rhetoric, and more devoted to simplistic fixes of complex problems than they themselves were. The Soviet leaders saw their own image reflected in Reagan's posturing, and it was a frightening phenomenon. Apparently there was a widespread visceral feeling in the Kremlin that, when dealing with Reagan, Moscow could not afford any miscalculations or sharp turns, because they could no longer count on wise and safe conduct by the other side. They believed there was an even more reckless driver at the helm in Washington than there was in Moscow. Hence, the practical policies of Moscow were twice as cautious from 1981 to 1984, with the exception of the KAL shooting, which was unintentional. For all the renewed hostility and threatening posturing by both sides,

there were no serious confrontations comparable to the crises of 1956, 1962, or 1973. Whether that achievement was attributable to Reagan's administration or to sheer luck is an issue of great contention.

Soviet leaders were also seriously frightened by the U.S. arms buildup, especially the intention to deploy Pershing II and GLCM systems in Europe and proceed with the SDI program. Their fear was largely caused by their ignorance in strategic matters and their isolation from alternative views at home and from foreign information and analysis. They fully relied on one-sided assessments from the Soviet military and the KGB, both of which had vested interests in inflating the U.S. threat in order to obtain still greater resources for their own programs and to toughen positions in arms control talks. For instance, the commonly accepted view was that U.S. missiles in Europe could reach Moscow in five minutes, thus effectively launching a decapitating strike against the USSR that would deprive it of its retaliatory capability. Soviet gerontocrats were unaware that Pershing II ballistic missiles lacked the range to reach Moscow, whereas GLCMs had sufficient range but, being subsonic, had a two-hour flight time and, in a massive strike, could not penetrate Soviet airspace unnoticed by the multilayered Soviet air defense. They were also led to believe that the Soviet launch-on-warning system could be undercut by U.S. INF deployments. Ironically, under Gorbachev this self-generated fear was used by the proponents of INF to justify the "double-zero" element of the treaty that envisioned eliminating three times more Soviet missiles than U.S. missiles. Such an idea would never have been accepted by the United States had the tables been turned.

The situation was similar with respect to SDI. Uninformed of the basic Kepler-Newton laws of astrodynamics, Kremlin autocrats believed that laser space battle stations would permanently hang over their heads, threatening instant annihilation by scorching beams. As Matlock correctly points out, the reasons for Moscow's alarm were autosuggestion, mirror imaging, and the subservience of intelligence institutions. But the net effect was not a softening of

Moscow's posture but, on the contrary, tougher and more unrealistic propositions by the USSR for INF counting and limits, and proposals for a treaty to ban arms in outer space. In addition, under pressure from the military, the Soviets approved an "asymmetric response" to SDI. It envisioned unprecedented weapons programs to develop a variety of antimissile systems analogous to SDI, SDI-killers (mostly of the antisatellite type) intended to directly counter space-based SDI platforms, and a huge offensive arms modernization effort to enhance missile-penetration capabilities against all layers of U.S. defenses.

Was this program responsible for the economic collapse of the USSR? No, without any doubt, it was not. Beyond the complicated interaction between the Soviet economy and defense industries, or the allocation of resources for strategic and conventional forces, there are more simple and direct arguments to prove this point. In a normal cycle of development and deployment of major weapons programs, the asymmetric response and its economic burden would not have begun to take effect until the late 1990s, at the earliest. The present Topol-M ICBM system is one of the very few leftovers from this program.

But the Soviet Union collapsed a decade earlier for reasons of a very different nature. President Reagan's policies did not hasten this collapse. On the contrary, they made the Soviet system tougher, for the last time, when its foundations were already melting down. This melting process was triggered most of all by a generational turnover in Soviet leadership beginning in 1985 that matched new leadership with a deeply transformed society ready to discard the outdated Communist ideology, economy, and political regime.

Gorbachev was deeply and negatively impressed by the last spasm of the cold war from 1980 to 1984, and he came to power determined to finish it once and for all. He certainly realized that the USSR bore a large part of the responsibility for this confrontation and had to take the first step to change this pattern. Hence the new political thinking and a long sequence of unilateral concessions

by Moscow beginning in 1987, which led to a series of breakthroughs in disarmament and the end of cold war. Quite unexpectedly for Gorbachev and his supporters, this also quickly brought about the reunification of Germany, the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact, and, finally, the collapse of the USSR as well as the global Communist economic and political system. But SDI had nothing to do with these grandiose historic events; actually, the “Star Wars” program had been largely curtailed by that time.

Reagan’s course in the early 1980s sent a clear signal to Gorbachev and his associates of the dangerous and counterproductive nature of the Soviet Union’s further expansion, which was overstretching its resources, aggravating tensions, and provoking hostile reactions across the globe. However, Reagan obviously overreacted, and the momentum of U.S. foreign policy and arms buildup, as well as the toughening posture and accelerating arms buildup by Moscow, complicated and delayed genuine improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations until the late 1980s, although Gorbachev was ready for it as early as the 1986 Reykjavik summit. In this sense, it may well be argued that Reagan’s policies prolonged the cold war. Besides SDI and Soviet countermeasures, huge resources were wasted on the last round of the arms race in the second half of the 1980s that certainly could have been used for better purposes.

Eventually, the end of the cold war coincided with the disintegration of the USSR and certainly, in some respects, encouraged it, since the system had been built unequivocally for war and confrontation, not for transparency and cooperation. At first, this disintegration led to an unprecedented improvement in U.S.-Russian relations and a degree of multifaceted cooperation that would have been unthinkable even by the most optimistic experts in 1981, only a decade earlier. But further trends in Russian domestic evolution, as well as changes in the international environment, including U.S. and NATO conduct, led to new U.S.-Russian controversies and tensions at the turn of the century.

Which of Reagan’s beliefs proved to be correct? The historic record is mixed indeed. He believed that nuclear weapons could be

abolished only if overall relations between the two countries improved, leading to increased confidence and less suspicion, but marginal limitations created more problems than they resolved. However, in an era of unprecedented cooperation and trust between the United States and Russia during most of the 1990s, strategic forces were actually decreased from about 10,000 warheads for each side to around 5,000. Further reductions now envisioned by Russia are the result of economic limitations and have nothing to do with trust in the United States, which at present is probably as low as it was in the early 1980s. (One noteworthy difference is that in the past this mistrust was imposed on the people by official propaganda but it was never really accepted, whereas now it reflects the genuine mood of a majority of the public.)

Besides, START I, START II, START III, and the 2002 Moscow SORT were nothing but partial cuts and limitations, and the abolition of nuclear arms is now as unlikely as ever; even the most radical version of SORT would leave both sides with nuclear forces at levels of the late 1960s. Moreover, during the 1990s, NATO failed to completely withdraw tactical nuclear weapons from Europe, failed to cut conventional forces seriously below CFE levels, as negotiated in the 1980s, and refused to abandon the first-nuclear-use doctrine. Russia followed suit and readopted this doctrine in 1993 and later expanded such strategies from 2001 to 2003 under President Putin's leadership.

These points make Reagan's belief seem quite detached from complicated political-military realities. No doubt, improvement of political relations and increased trust among nations are essential for the progress of nuclear disarmament. However, as the experiences of the 1990s demonstrated, these are not sufficient to achieve nuclear disarmament. Persistent and complicated negotiations and treaties are necessary, and they must be developed in gradual steps. It is precisely such steps that improve political relations, enhance trust and confidence, and make this process less prone to setbacks. Good political relations are not a substitute for technical arms con-

trol negotiations, but they are a necessary condition for facilitating such talks and creating stronger treaties. Without them, nuclear proliferation would continue its self-generating momentum and eventually undercut political relations among nations. Apparently, this dialectic was not understood by either President Reagan or U.S. and Russian leaders during the 1990s and the first half of the current decade, and the ensuing deterioration of both military and political relations between the two nations is evident today.

Reagan was convinced that a democratic Soviet Union would not be a threat to the United States or its neighbors. Again, as correct as such a maxim looks on the surface, it is unrelated to political reality. The development of democracy based on a civilized market economy is a long, complicated, controversial, and sometimes painful process, especially for a nation such as Russia, which was under Communist rule for so many years. It would be naïve to expect that one day Russia would become a full-fledged democracy and then the West would open its doors to a new member of the club. Russia's domestic evolution is deeply intertwined with the dynamics of its international relations. For Russia, foreign policy is not just a matter of relations with other countries; it is largely a matter of choosing a model for its own economic and political development. Hence, all actions by the West that estrange Russia internationally or provide negative examples to follow are highly detrimental to Russia's democratic development since they undermine positions of liberal pro-Western political parties and movements inside the country.

NATO military action against Yugoslavia in 1999 and unjustified extension to the east (including the planned expansion into post-Soviet space, right up to Russian borders); the United States' arbitrary use of force in Iraq in 2003; its failure to ratify CTBT and its withdrawal from the ABM treaty against Russian objections; its rejection of Moscow's proposals to cut nuclear arms deeper than SORT envisions (down to between 1,000 and 1,500 warheads); and its foot-dragging at negotiations on Russia's acceptance to WTO

and reluctance to cancel the 1972 Jackson-Vanik Amendment: these are just a few of the most conspicuous examples of policies that have been deleterious to Russia's democratic evolution.

Moreover, owing to failures of a joint Western-Russian reform program implemented in Russia during the 1990s, a large number of Russians presently—and certainly wrongly—believe what Soviet leaders before Gorbachev believed: that a planned egalitarian economy and a stringent political regime, as well as constant vigilance against the evil intentions of the West, are in the interest of the people. And Mikhail Gorbachev's popularity rating, even after all the disenchantment with his opponent Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s, undeservedly never rises above one percent.

All historic analogies are distorting, but in some respects the situation in the first years of the twenty-first century was reminiscent of that in the early 1980s, but with the sides reversing their respective positions. The United States was self-assured, prosperous, building up its military power, expanding its influence, and intervening around the globe on its own and with its allies, even without UN approval. Russia was in deep economic crisis, politically split at home, and suffering from an inferiority complex, with liberals and democrats in full retreat and populist and nationalist leaders rising to take over the government. The state was challenged by armed Muslim fundamentalists but the West provided no real support and condemned Moscow's "excessive use of force," just as the USSR condemned "state terrorism" in the early 1980s. Russia was (and still is) militarily vulnerable and faced the superior conventional and nuclear power of foreign states and alliances. The Kremlin was engaging in irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, parliament and the general public were dissatisfied with arms control and hostile to the United States, and Russia as a whole was keen to reassert its international status and regain its self-respect.

In relative and absolute terms, Russia is now much weaker internally and externally than the United States was 20 years ago. The West has much stronger leverage to influence Russia's conduct at home and abroad. But is the United States capable, willing, and

interested in using this leverage wisely and with full understanding of its implications? Is it more sensitive than the USSR was two decades ago, and farsighted enough to take seriously Russia's deep feeling of humiliation, which is fueling nationalism and revanchism and precipitating a new round of confrontation abroad? Is the West sufficiently flexible and stable to check some of its own aggressive trends, including the first-nuclear-use doctrine, the buildup of military power, unilateral military interventions abroad, and the application of double standards to foreign arms transfers and nuclear technology sales, while preserving cooperation in other areas to avoid provoking confrontation across the board? Will the United States be too conservative (as the USSR was in the early 1980s) to use opportunities for fast, radical arms control endeavors and security cooperation? Apart from the economic advantages, these opportunities include deep cuts in strategic nuclear weapons beyond the SORT framework, radical reduction and restructuring of conventional arms in Europe, development of joint missile early-warning and antimissile-defense systems, common nuclear nonproliferation strategies, and genuine peacekeeping cooperation with the full involvement of Russia in NATO's decision-making process.

Sadly, it seems that yet another turning point occurred between 2001 and 2003. After the tragedy of 9/11, President Putin, acting in opposition to the majority of the Russian political community, offered full support to the United States for the operation of the antiterrorist coalition in Afghanistan. In contrast to Putin's possible expectations, Washington responded to this support by withdrawing from the ABM Treaty; expressing unwillingness to create, with a two-page SORT, a substantive arms reduction agreement (with appropriate counting rules, weapons-dismantling procedures, and a verification system); pushing forward the next phase of NATO expansion; and launching a unilateral military intervention in Iraq in 2003.

Since then, the United States has sunk deeper into the Iraqi quagmire and soaring oil prices have increased Russia's self-confidence.

Despite changing circumstances, Americans are finding it hard to abandon the model of relations with Russia that evolved during the 1990s, while Russians regard it with a “never again” attitude. As a result, the two nations face growing controversies over developments in Iran, post-Soviet space and energy export issues, Russian domestic politics, Moscow’s relations with China, and general nuclear balance and nonproliferation issues. In a more general sense, the two nations are once again in a widening disagreement on their respective international roles and on the long-term prospects of their relationship. Their cooperation has neither a solid economic foundation nor influential domestic lobbying groups, while the regime of arms control treaties is quickly disintegrating.

How will the United States and Russia overcome another forthcoming tense and difficult period in their relations? What positive and negative lessons, if any, they will draw from the history of the 1980s remains to be seen. Unfortunately, many current examples confirm the statement by Vasili Kliuchevski, a great Russian historian of the nineteenth century, that “History does not teach anybody anything—it only punishes for not learning its lessons.”