

**Commentary**

Kiron K. Skinner *An Alternative  
Concept of Mutual  
Cooperation*

The first part of the 1980s [was] the most dangerous period because the two sides mistrusted each other again as they did in the 1950s, but this time with much larger arsenals and weapons.<sup>1</sup>

ALEKSANDR A. BESSMERTNYKH  
Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister  
1987–1989

IN HIS ESSAY, Oleg Grinevsky makes a persuasive case that judicious decision making by American and Russian leaders is the primary reason that the superpowers avoided a catastrophic clash in the early 1980s. He recalls, however, that Soviet officials questioned President Ronald Reagan's control of his country's foreign and defense policies. For instance, following Reagan's March 23, 1983, announcement that he was authorizing research and development of a missile defense system, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), Grinevsky reports that Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov declared: "What's . . . Reagan's trick all about? He might be a sincere believer in all those fairy tales about [a] nuclear-free world. But Reagan is an actor, not a politician. But whose scenario is he performing? Who is the scriptwriter? Reagan just could not invent that SDI scheme!"

1. Quoted in William C. Wohlforth, ed., *Witness to the End of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.

Grinevsky presents a detailed analysis of deliberations and decisions by Soviet leaders and interactions of Soviet and American officials during the early 1980s, but leaves it to his responder to answer Andropov's questions. The following review of speeches and statements made by President Reagan and members of his administration is presented in order to establish that, in the early 1980s, there was a well-defined American national strategy based on anti-classical thinking about nuclear weapons and grand strategy.

In other words, Reagan disagreed with some of the prevailing views about the strategic posture of the United States. He did not believe that unilateral restraint would eventually lead to similar behavior by the Soviet Union. Furthermore, he disagreed with the focus of the arms control community, as expressed by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, that "if we make progress on SALT [the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty], then a lot of things will fall into place that do not fall into place otherwise."<sup>2</sup> He disagreed with the view that "a nuclear order based on mutual deterrence should be . . . [the] highest priority" for statesmen.<sup>3</sup> Reagan also disagreed with the détente-era argument that the Soviet Union should be treated as a normal state in the international system. He was in accord, however, with the predominant view that the superpowers should consistently undertake negotiations on nuclear weapons and engage in extensive cultural and scientific exchanges. In terms of nuclear weapons, Reagan advocated negotiations that would reduce the number of weapons, not merely control the pace of the arms race.

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2. The statement by Vance is found in the declassified minutes of the Special Coordinating Committee held at the White House on March 2, 1978. Reprinted in Odd Arne Westad, ed., *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations During the Carter Years* (Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 267.

3. Robert Gilpin, "Theory of Hegemonic War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (Spring 1988): 613. For social science research reflecting the view that unilateral restraint may reduce the likelihood of aggression, see Michael D. Wallace, "Old Nails in New Coffins: The Para Bellum Hypothesis Revisited," *Journal of Peace Research* 18, no. 1 (1981): 91–95.

Reagan's handwritten documents, which I discovered and subsequently reproduced in several co-authored books, show that even before he became president, Reagan had an abiding commitment to abolishing nuclear weapons and he forcefully opposed Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), yet he was a strong advocate of U.S.-Soviet engagement on the full range of issues under dispute.<sup>4</sup> Scholars have been using recently released archival evidence, including the documents in my books, as they contribute to the evolving reassessment of Reagan's role in the development of U.S. national security policy during the final decades of the cold war.<sup>5</sup> In my view, this reassessment requires further grounding in Reagan's own writings and in an interpretation of his presidential security directives based on these documents.

My research suggests that Reagan's philosophical orientation, as expressed in his public and private writings before and during his presidency, was the intellectual bedrock of U.S. strategy in the 1980s. His deepest imprint is found in three elements of that strategy: (1) engage the Soviets in negotiations (considered as important as the military buildup); (2) eliminate nuclear weapons; and (3) seek the peaceful implosion of the Soviet system, followed by its units joining the community of free states. Each of these elements will be examined following a review of the development of U.S. grand strategy during the early 1980s.

### ***American Grand Strategy During the 1980s***

Grinevsky refers to National Security Decision Directive 32 (NSDD-32), the "U.S. National Security Strategy," as evidence

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4. See Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Skinner, Anderson, and Anderson, eds., *Reagan, A Life in Letters* (New York: Free Press, 2003); and Skinner, Anderson, and Anderson, eds., *Reagan's Path to Victory: The Shaping of Ronald Reagan's Vision, Selected Writings* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

5. See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security During the Cold War*. Revised and expanded edition.

that the Reagan administration assumed it could win a nuclear war with the Soviet Union and that this assumption “laid the foundation for new U.S. defense policies.” He is correct in one sense but mistaken in another. Among the objectives of U.S. foreign policy listed in the May 20, 1982, White House document was the enhancement of the “strategic nuclear deterrent by developing a capability to sustain protracted nuclear conflict.” The directive also stated: “Deterrence is dependent on both nuclear and conventional capabilities. Nuclear forces will not be viewed as a lower-cost alternative to conventional forces. At the same time, the possible use of nuclear weapons must remain an element of our overall strategy.”

But NSDD-32 set out two other global goals and an overarching objective, which Grinevsky does not mention. One goal was “to strengthen the influence of the U.S. throughout the world by strengthening existing alliances.” The other was “to contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence throughout the world, and to increase the costs of Soviet support and use of proxy, terrorist, and subversive forces.” The principal objective was to foster “long-term liberalizing and nationalist tendencies within the Soviet Union and allied countries.” According to Thomas C. Reed, an adviser to President Reagan on security policy at the National Security Council and one of the drafters of the directive, NSDD-32 was a call for “the dissolution of the Soviet regime.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the directive was far more ambitious than President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s advocacy of rolling back Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.

Though a secret document, the essence of NSDD-32 was made public soon after it was issued.<sup>7</sup> President Reagan discussed the

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(New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); and Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005).

6. See Thomas Reed, *At the Abyss: An Insider’s History of the Cold War* (New York: Random House, 2004), 236–237.

7. NSDD-32 was declassified on February 16, 1996. A copy of this document, NSDD-75, other directives, and National Security Study Directives, are located in

substance of the strategy document in an address to members of the British Parliament on June 8, 1982: “The objective I propose is quite simple to state: to foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities, which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means. . . . 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. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

As John Lewis Gaddis observes, “No American president had ever before talked like this, and the effects were profoundly unsettling in Moscow.”<sup>9</sup> TASS declared, “[T]he American President slandered the Soviet Union and called for a crusade against communism.”<sup>10</sup> The Soviet news agency had a point. President Reagan had just let the world know that he was marshalling the resources of the United States to work toward the *dissolution* of the Soviet Union. Reagan was making a radical break with the doctrine of containment that had guided the United States’ Soviet policy since the 1940s. Under Reagan’s plan, the United States would exert pressure from every direction on the Soviet Union in an unrelenting effort to push the Soviet regime toward extinction. The pressure would come from substantial increases in defense spending, ongoing high-level contacts, cultural and educational exchanges, and negotiations on the full range of bilateral issues, including nuclear weapons. NSDD-32 offered a plan to prevail if nuclear war

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Records Declassified and Released by the National Security Council, Box 1, at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

8. The perspective presented in NSDD-32 was reflected in other public statements. See Clarence A. Robinson Jr., “Strategy Keys Military Plans to Policies,” *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, July 19, 1982. The article is based on an interview with Reed. See also a speech given by National Security Adviser William P. Clark at Georgetown University on May 21, 1982; Reed’s speech to the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association on June 16; and *At the Abyss*, p. 237. Reagan’s June 8, 1982, speech is found at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=42614&st=&st1=>.

9. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 356.

10. “Further Reaction to Reagan UK Parliament Speech,” *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Soviet Union*, June 10, 1982, G1.

occurred, but nuclear confrontation was not seen as a means of achieving goals.

Grinevsky does not mention NSDD-75, to which NSDD-32 was a precursor, but that January 17, 1983, directive on “U.S. Relations with the USSR” was the grand strategy blueprint of the Reagan administration.<sup>11</sup> It listed three objectives: (1) resist and roll back Soviet imperialism; (2) pressure the internal political structure within the Soviet Union in order to weaken its capacity to pursue aggressive policies abroad; and (3) engage in negotiations with the Soviet government that are based on “strict reciprocity.” The primary instruction of NSDD-75 was to foster “antitotalitarian changes within the USSR and refrain from assisting the Soviet regime to consolidate further its hold on the country,” as National Security Adviser William P. Clark wrote in a December 16, 1982, memorandum to President Reagan.<sup>12</sup>

The directive “contained no suggestion of a desire to destroy the Soviet Union to establish U.S. military superiority, or to force the Soviet Union to jeopardize its own security,” explains Jack F. Matlock Jr., a Soviet specialist on the NSC staff from 1983 to 1986 and U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1987 to 1991. “In fact,” he continues, “it aimed for agreements that not only enhanced U.S. interests and were reciprocal, but also served a ‘mutual interest.’”<sup>13</sup> In a meeting on May 21, 1983, Secretary of State George P. Shultz reminded the president that NSDD-75 called for cultural and sci-

11. NSDD-75 was declassified on July 16, 1994.

12. Clark’s memorandum was a status report to the president on the interagency work being done on NSDD-75. Ten days before his memo was sent to the president, L. Paul Bremer III, the executive secretary of the State Department, transmitted an interagency paper to Clark. The paper cast NSDD-32 in a narrowly military context and referred to the forthcoming NSDD-75 as a political strategy: “U.S. military strategy for successfully contending with peacetime, crisis, and wartime contingencies involving the USSR on a global basis is detailed in NSDD 32. This military strategy must be combined with a political strategy. . . .” See Records Declassified and Released by the National Security Council, Box 1, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

13. See Jack F. Matlock Jr., *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 53.

entific exchanges with the Soviets as a means of influencing people inside the Communist bloc. He also made the case that the “opening of U.S. and Soviet consulates in Kiev and New York would have the advantage of getting us onto new Soviet terrain.” Shultz writes that he “ran into intense opposition from the NSC staff” and believed they were less inclined to put the cooperative elements of the new strategy into practice.<sup>14</sup>

Despite bureaucratic battles, by mid-1983 President Reagan had endorsed the four-part agenda as a means of activating NSDD-75. It was a rejection of the Nixon-era strategy of “linkage,” or making superpower progress in one area dependent on progress in another. Instead, the four-part agenda called for simultaneous bilateral negotiations on arms control, human rights, regional issues, and bilateral exchanges. It became a central aspect of the Reagan administration’s Soviet policy.<sup>15</sup>

Naturally, there were members of the Reagan administration who attempted to downplay the messages contained in the speeches and statements of the president and secretary of state by leaking to the press their view that the administration was not fully committed to negotiations with the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> As will be discussed in the next section, however, Reagan “stayed on message”

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14. George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 276.

15. Shultz presented an outline of the four-part agenda in a memorandum to the president in early March 1983. See Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 266. The ideas driving the four-part agenda were presented in Shultz’s June 15, 1983, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Reagan’s televised address to the nation on January 16, 1984. These statements and others by Reagan, Shultz, and Vice President George H. W. Bush are found in a State Department publication that categorizes speeches and statements in such a way that each dimension of the four-part agenda is emphasized. See *Realism, Strength, Negotiation: Key Foreign Policy Statements of the Reagan Administration* (Washington, DC: United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs), May 1984. The most comprehensive statement about the four-part agenda was Shultz’s speech in Los Angeles on October 18, 1984. See “Managing the U.S.-Soviet Relationship Over the Long Term,” *Current Policy* No. 624, Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs.

16. See Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 85.

in his public and private statements and acted upon the strategy of cooperation presented in the directive, even when advisers disagreed. Furthermore, the objectives of NSDD-75 are fully consistent with the Soviet strategy that Reagan drafted in writings before and during his presidency.

The Strategic Defense Initiative was another component of the president's strategy. In his SDI speech, Reagan asked whether MAD was an ethical means of deterring nuclear war, and he authorized research and development on a future defensive shield that would "begin to achieve our ultimate goal of eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles." He then added: "This could pave the way for arms control measures to eliminate the weapons themselves."<sup>17</sup>

Determined to move quickly, Reagan issued NSDD-85 on "Eliminating the Threat from Ballistic Missiles" two days after his SDI announcement. His newest directive was an unequivocal instruction to his national security team to abandon conventional deterrence, including MAD: "I would like to decrease our reliance on the threat of retaliation by offensive nuclear weapons and to increase the contribution of defensive systems to our security and that of our allies. To begin to move toward that goal, I have concluded that we should explore the possibility of using defensive capabilities to counter the threat posed by nuclear ballistic missiles." The president added that "these actions will be carried out in a manner consistent with our obligations under the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty," but in two earlier directives, NSDD 59 and 61, tacit support was given to breaking out of the 1972 agreement with the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup> In a private letter, President Reagan clarified his view on the constraints imposed on missile defense

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17. Reagan's SDI speech may be found at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=41093&st=&st1=>.

18. See Christopher Simpson, *National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations: The Declassified History of U.S. Policy and Military Policy, 1981-1991* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 233. The quote from NSDD-85 is found on page 287.

under the ABM treaty: “I still . . . have problems with the ABM treaty. . . . I can tell you though I will not let the treaty or anything else hold us back. If we agree to any times for deploying etc. they will be based on our own knowledge of when we believe we’ll be ready which is still down the road a way.”<sup>19</sup>

Andropov was not alone in wondering who was responsible for the SDI concept. Arms controllers around the world were mystified. In rejecting MAD—the doctrine designed to prevent nuclear war by allowing populations in both the United States and the Soviet Union to be vulnerable to a nuclear attack—as the basis for the nation’s national security policy, the U.S. president had jettisoned decades of theorizing about nuclear deterrence. His announcement was truly a bolt out of the blue. Did Reagan really mean that he wanted to eliminate nuclear weapons? If so, he was aligning himself with the nuclear freeze and peace movements.

### ***Ronald Reagan and the Three Elements of American Strategy***

Grinevsky concisely reviews many of the moves and countermoves by the superpowers in hot spots all over the world that constituted the crisis of the early 1980s. To understand the United States’ contribution to preventing that crisis from erupting, national strategy is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. The other condition has to do with political leadership. Was the strategy actually deployed? If so, what, if anything, did President Reagan do on behalf of the national strategy? These are, in effect, the questions Andropov asked.

### ***Negotiating with the Soviet Union***

Critics expected that Reagan’s defense policies would ratchet up the nuclear arms race while further eroding bilateral contacts and

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19. Reagan to William A. Rusher, April 1, 1987, in *Reagan, A Life in Letters*, ed. Skinner et al., 430.

negotiations, many of which had been cancelled or put on hold by President Jimmy Carter in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Reagan's critics either ignored or considered as election-year rhetoric his campaign pledge to engage the Soviets in negotiations and to develop closer ties. In a major campaign speech on August 18, 1980, Reagan declared: "I think continued negotiation with the Soviet Union is essential. We need never be afraid to negotiate as long as we keep our long term objectives (the pursuit of peace for one) clearly in mind and don't seek agreements just for the sake of having an agreement."<sup>20</sup> Reagan's commitment to bilateral negotiations, even in the face of opposition from conservatives, was particularly evident in the area of human rights.

Reagan discussed his commitment to U.S.-Soviet negotiations and his negotiating style in private correspondence written during his presidency. In a July 9, 1981, letter he wrote:

I know I'm being criticized for not having made a great speech outlining what would be the Reagan foreign policy. I have a foreign policy; I'm working on it.

I just don't happen to think that it's wise to always stand up and put in quotation marks in front of the world what your foreign policy is. I'm a believer in quiet diplomacy and so far we've had several quite triumphant experiences by using that method. The problem is, you can't talk about it afterward or then you can't do it again.<sup>21</sup>

The president's statement could be read as defensive posturing in a letter responding to a concerned American citizen, but a proposal he made to Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev was consistent with the message in that letter.

In March 1977, Anatoli Shcharansky, a Soviet dissident, was arrested. After 16 months in Lefortovo prison, he was exiled to Sibe-

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20. Skinner et al., eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 484.

21. Reagan to John O. Koehler, July 9, 1981, in *Reagan, A Life in Letters*, ed. Skinner et al., 375.

ria in July 1978. In the same year, seven Soviet Pentecostals rushed past guards and entered the U.S. embassy in Moscow in protest against the Soviet government's policies that barred them from freely practicing their religion. Responding to a May 25, 1981, letter from Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, Reagan requested that the Pentecostals and Shcharansky be allowed to leave the Soviet Union. The method Reagan suggested for their release was consistent with the quiet diplomacy he advocated. In the June 16 draft of his letter, Reagan wrote:

If you could find it in your heart to do this [allow Shcharansky to emigrate to Israel] the matter would be strictly between us which is why I'm writing this letter by hand.

While on this subject may I also enter a plea on behalf of the two families who have been living in most uncomfortable circumstances in our embassy in Moscow for three years. . . . Again as in the case of Shcharansky this is between the two of us and I will not reveal that I made any such request. I'm sure however you understand that such actions on your part would lessen my problems in future negotiations between our two countries.<sup>22</sup>

Reagan continued to make such pleas to Brezhnev's successors. Two months after declaring the Soviet Union an evil empire, he confided to a friend in a letter that his administration had "more contact with the Soviets than anyone is aware of and whether to have a meeting or not is on the agenda at both ends of the line."<sup>23</sup> The president was most likely referring to the discussions under way with Moscow on human rights issues such as the plight of the Pentecostals and Shcharansky.

By the summer of 1983, at the height of the cold war chill, Reagan and Andropov had privately worked out the details of the Pentecostals' release from the U.S. embassy in Moscow and the families were allowed to leave the country. As Secretary Shultz

22. Ibid., 741 and 742.

23. Reagan to Paul Trousdale, May 23, 1983, *ibid.*, 409.

writes in his memoir, this “was the first successful negotiation with the Soviets in the Reagan administration.” Shultz further notes, “The president’s own role in it had been crucial.”<sup>24</sup> On February 11, 1986, Shcharansky was allowed to leave the Soviet Union; he arrived in Israel that evening. On May 13, Reagan received Shcharansky at the White House, where the human rights leader thanked the president for working toward his release from the Soviet Union.

Most of the president’s advisers were unaware of the fact that Reagan had persistently advocated the release of the Pentecostals and dissidents such as Shcharansky in his nationally syndicated radio program, which was heard by between 20 and 30 million people each week throughout the late 1970s.<sup>25</sup> In a private letter he wrote during this time, Reagan revealed that he was using the unique national platform that his radio program provided to address the plight of Soviet dissidents: “Thank you very much for your letter and the material on Ida Nudel [a Jewish Refusenik under confinement in the Soviet Union]. . . . I’ve already done some radio commentaries on this general subject and will continue to call attention to this continuing tragedy. I agree with you about the Soviet susceptibility to public opinion. Maybe I can be of help in arousing public opinion by calling attention to the situation of Mrs. Nudel.”<sup>26</sup> In October 1987, Nudel was granted an exit visa and she relocated to Israel. President Reagan declared that the United States rejoiced over her release and that of other Soviet Jews.<sup>27</sup>

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24. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 171.

25. Shcharansky is mentioned in a radio broadcast taped on September 1978, and the Soviet Pentecostals are the subject of an October 2, 1979, radio commentary. See Skinner et al., eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 147–148 and 177–178. For a review of the statistics regarding the listening audience of Reagan’s radio program, see Skinner et al., eds., *Reagan’s Path to Victory*, xiv.

26. Reagan to Mrs. Alvin Turken, circa November 1976, in *Reagan, A Life in Letters*, ed. Skinner et al., 374. A November 30, 1976, radio commentary was devoted to Nudel’s plight. Skinner et al., eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 144–145.

27. See “Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for President Chaim Herzog of Israel,” November 10, 1987. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 1309.

Working toward the liberation of those seeking religious freedom was one of the American president's primary agenda items when he interacted with Soviet officials.

### ***Eliminating Nuclear Weapons***

In a major speech on the second strategic arms control treaty (SALT II) on September 15, 1979, Reagan argued that the main reason he opposed the treaty was that "SALT II is not a strategic arms limitation; it is a strategic arms buildup."<sup>28</sup> He repeated his position throughout this period in private letters, writing in April 1980 that he wanted to see the superpowers "negotiate a legitimate reduction of nuclear weapons on both sides to the point that neither country represented a threat to the other." Three years later, he made a similar entreaty in a letter to Andropov, which he wrote by hand: "If we can agree on mutual, verifiable reductions in the number of nuclear weapons we both hold could this not be a first step toward the elimination of all such weapons. What a blessing this would be for the people we both represent. You and I have the ability to bring this about through our negotiations in the arms reduction talks."<sup>29</sup>

Reagan also kept a conversation going with those in the peace and nuclear freeze movements. He typically reminded them, as he did in a letter to a Catholic bishop in April 1983, that "we have no disagreement about the absolute necessity of achieving peace in the world. Possibly we only differ with regard to the path we take to reach our goal." He was more explicit in his disagreement with the freeze movement in his SDI speech: "A freeze now would make us less, not more, secure and would raise, not reduce, the risks of war. It would be largely unverifiable and would seriously undercut our

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28. Reagan delivered this speech before the San Diego convention of the Republican State Central Committee of California. A copy of the speech is found in Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 3 Folder RR Speeches 1979. Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

29. Reagan to Charles Burton Marshall, April 8, 1980, and Reagan to Andropov, draft circa July 8, 1983, in *Reagan, A Life in Letters*, ed. Skinner et al., 399 and 742-743.

negotiations on arms reduction. It would reward the Soviets for their massive military buildup while preventing us from modernizing our aging and increasingly vulnerable forces. With their present margin of superiority, why should they agree to arms reductions knowing that we were prohibited from catching up?”

Following the Reykjavik summit where he met with Gorbachev for the second time, Reagan wrote to a friend: “I have never entertained a thought that SDI could be a bargaining chip. I did tell Gorbachev that if and when we had such a system they would join us in eliminating nuclear missiles; we’d share such a defense with them. I don’t think he believes me.” In a letter to William Buckley Jr. on May 5, 1987, Reagan reminded the conservative writer that “when I announced SDI I made it plain it should be based on the elimination of ballistic missiles and that I favored sharing it with everyone.”<sup>30</sup>

Reagan considered SDI a potential escape route from MAD. He had a long-standing concern about the moral implications of making civilian populations vulnerable to a nuclear attack as a means of preventing nuclear war under MAD. It is well known that in the fall of 1967 Governor Reagan attended a briefing on the testing of the ballistic missile defense system under way at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. It is also well known that Reagan’s speech at the Republican convention on August 19, 1976, was a veiled statement against MAD and nuclear weapons: “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.” Reflecting Reagan’s policy positions, the Republican platform of 1980 advocated the development of a program of “strategic and civil defense which would protect the American people against nuclear war at least as well as the Soviet population is

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30. Reagan to Bishop Mark J. Hurley, April 19, 1983; Reagan to Laurence W. Beilenson, October 16, 1986; and Reagan to William Buckley Jr., *ibid.*, 393, 419, 429. For Reagan’s SDI speech see <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=41093&st=&st1=>.

protected.”<sup>31</sup> During his presidency, Reagan publicly revealed that SDI was his idea and he reported that before announcing SDI he met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and asked whether “it would be worthwhile to see if we could not develop a weapon that could perhaps take out, as they left their silos, those nuclear weapons. . . . [W]hen they did not look aghast at the idea and instead said yes, they believed that such a thing offered a possibility and should be researched, I said, ‘Go.’” In private correspondence, Reagan wrote, “[SDI] was my idea to begin with and we will deploy when it is ready.”<sup>32</sup>

Until recently, few were aware that Reagan crystallized his ideas on domestic and foreign policy during the late 1970s. And although he was ignored by many elites and scholars, Reagan formulated his policy positions in full view of the public. In January 1975, he began broadcasting a nationally syndicated radio program, writing a nationally syndicated newspaper column, and giving numerous speeches around the country on behalf of conservative causes. Eliminating nuclear weapons, challenging the limits set by the ABM treaty of 1972, and thinking through the problems of MAD were the subjects of numerous radio commentaries that Reagan wrote himself.<sup>33</sup> For instance, in a radio commentary taped on March 23, 1977, Reagan stated: “They [the Soviets] have developed 6 new strategic nuclear systems and apparently are engaged in a

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31. For a review of Reagan’s briefing at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, see Edward Teller, *Memoirs: A Twentieth-Century Journey in Science and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2001), 509. Reagan’s speech at the 1976 convention is found in Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA. The statement from the 1980 Republican platform is found in George Thomas Kurian, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Republican Party*, vol. 2 (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 692.

32. “The President’s View: Reagan discusses Star Wars, MX and the Arms Talks,” *Newsweek*, March 18, 1985, 21. The meeting with the JCS that Reagan is referring to was held on December 22, 1983, three months before he publicly announced SDI. For confirmation of the meeting, see The President’s Daily Diary, Box 8, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA. For the private correspondence about SDI, see Reagan to Robert Dick, July 7, 1988, in *Reagan, A Life in Letters*, ed. Skinner et al., 431.

33. See Skinner et al., eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 64–128.

crash program to develop an effective anti-ballistic missile system. You'll remember we bargained away our right to have such a weapon for the protection of our cities. That was one of our contributions to détente."<sup>34</sup>

During the late 1970s, after he had substantial national political experience behind him—having served two terms as governor of California and having made four trips abroad on behalf of the Nixon administration—Reagan began to ground his anticlassical ideas about defense policy and deterrence with more extensive evidence. It is worth noting that NSC-68, the containment-strategy document written under the direction of Paul Nitze while he was director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff from 1949 to 1950, was the subject of two of Reagan's radio commentaries in May 1977, two years after the document was declassified.<sup>35</sup> Reagan's advocacy of missile defense and his criticism of MAD were not based on a script he was given but on an analysis he developed as he read some of the most important strategic documents of the cold war era.

One of the most important findings in my co-edited volumes of these radio essays is Reagan's extensive use of sources and expert testimony as he developed arguments about defense policy for his listening audience. His sources included basic conservative fare such as *Human Events* and *National Review*, but he also cited the contemporary writings and statements of Nitze and other defense experts and referred to numerous government documents as he presented his defense policy views, which were at odds with prevailing perspectives favoring arms control, détente, and MAD.<sup>36</sup>

34. *Ibid.*, 119.

35. *Ibid.*, 109–113. In the years following its declassification, NSC-68 became the subject of numerous scholarly analyses. See Samuel F. Wells Jr., "Sounding the Tocsin: NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat," *International Security* 4 (Autumn 1979): 116–158; and John Lewis Gaddis and Paul Nitze, "NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat Reconsidered," *International Security* 4 (Spring 1980): 164–176.

36. The section on defense policy, for example, in *Reagan, In His Own Hand* is replete with references to defense experts, articles, and books. See pages 64–128. In October 1978, Reagan devoted more than a week's worth of radio commentaries to the views on the second strategic arms control treaty (SALT II) of Eugene

### ***Dissolving the Soviet Union and Ending the Cold War***

Reagan's national security directives reviewed in this essay were a major departure from the containment doctrine that had guided the United States' Soviet policy earlier in the cold war. Some interpreted these directives as war plans, but they called for bilateral negotiations, and especially for reducing, instead of controlling, nuclear weapons. As Richard Pipes, a Soviet specialist at the National Security Council during the early 1980s, writes, NSDD-75 "... contained clauses that ran counter to all the policy statements that had previously guided American policy toward Moscow in that it called for not merely punishing unacceptable Soviet behavior but for doing all in our power to avert such behavior by inducing changes in the nature of the Soviet regime on the premise that it was the source of Soviet behavior." Pipes continues, "Without taking undue credit, I believe I can claim this idea as my main contribution to the Reagan administration's foreign policy."<sup>37</sup>

As with the other dimensions of his national security policy, Reagan was actually the architect of the concept to which Pipes refers. In a speech he appears to have delivered around 1963, which I located in the Hoover Institution Archives and which my coauthors and I reproduced in *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, Reagan expressed his vision about how the cold war should end: "If we truly believe that our way of life is best aren't the Russians more likely to recognize that fact and modify their stand if we let their economy come unhinged so that the contrast is apparent? . . . [I]n an all out race our system is stronger, and eventually the enemy gives up the race as a hopeless cause. Then a noble nation believing in peace extends the hand of friendship and says there is room in the world for both of us."<sup>38</sup>

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Rostow, a Yale professor who became the first director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency during Reagan's presidency. See pages 92-99.

37. Richard Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 188.

38. Skinner et al., eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 442.

In a January 1977 meeting with Richard V. Allen, a foreign policy expert who would become President Reagan's first national security adviser, Reagan presented his blunt assessment of what should happen in the cold war: "My view is that we win and they lose." Allen later recalled, "I was flabbergasted. I'd worked for Nixon and Goldwater and many others, and I'd heard a lot about Kissinger's policy of détente and about the need to 'manage the Cold War,' but never did I hear a leading politician put the goal so starkly."

Back in 1977, Reagan "was able to *see* a post-Soviet world."<sup>39</sup> He envisioned that world coming about not through nuclear war but through the Soviet side joining the community of free states. Reagan authorized and signed directives such as NSDD-75 because they represented his views, most of which he had worked out years before he had any advisers.

As Grinevsky aptly demonstrates, Ronald Reagan and U.S. policy during his presidency were essential elements in preventing an escalation of the crisis in superpower relations in the early 1980s.

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39. Peter Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan Changed My Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 72. The meeting between Reagan and Allen is recounted on pages 71 and 72 of Robinson's book and in Richard V. Allen, "Peace Through Strength: Reagan's Early Call: Win Cold War," *Human Events* (online), October 24, 2003.