INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

Kiron K. Skinner

Talking Across the Cold War Divide

There were sound reasons for the apocalyptic predictions that abounded after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. In retaliation for its aggression, President Jimmy Carter imposed economic and political sanctions on the Soviet Union, increased defense spending, began a covert assistance program for Afghanistan's mujahedeen, and tabled the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II), which both sides had signed after seven years of negotiations. However rocky, superpower détente had provided a respite during the cold war. Now it was over.

By 1983, U.S.-Soviet relations appeared to be in an uncontrollable free fall. That year, President Ronald Reagan dubbed the Soviet Union an "evil empire"; he announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a massive military research and development program; and he succeeded in obtaining permission from the governments of Western European nations to deploy intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) on their soil. The Soviet government, which had been supporting the "peace offensive" to undermine the defense policies of governments in the West, retaliated by walking out of the INF and Strategic Arms Reductions Talks. *Time* declared: "The suspensions left the superpowers for the first time in 14 years with no arms-control talks of any kind in progress and with even regular diplomatic contacts frosty."[1]

Yet, as these events were unfolding, "the first successful negotia-

1. "Men of the Year," *Time*, January 2, 1984.

tion with the Soviets in the Reagan administration'' was taking place.[2] Throughout the first half of 1983, Reagan and General Secretary Yuri Andropov privately negotiated the release of two Soviet Pentecostal families who had taken refuge in the U.S. embassy in Moscow four years earlier. The families had sought asylum from religious persecution as well as safe transport out of the Soviet Union in order to practice their faith freely. The release of the Pentecostals served to encourage bilateral contact on other issues, as reflected in the correspondence between Reagan and Andropov in the summer of 1983 about their mutual desire to eliminate the nuclear threat and advance the cause of peace.[3]

Unprecedented improvements in bilateral relations took place in the years that followed. In 1985, Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, the new Soviet leader, held their first summit and jointly declared, ''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.'' While in Moscow three years later, Reagan was asked whether he still considered the Soviet Union an evil empire. He replied, ''I was talking about another time, another era.'' A few months later, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher proclaimed, ''We're not in a Cold War now.''[4] Between 1988 and 1991, revolutions spread throughout Eastern Europe as the Warsaw Pact nations embraced democracy. And at the conclusion of the December 1989 shipboard summit at Malta between President George H. W.

2. George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 171.

3. Reagan's July 1983 letter to Andropov, which he wrote by hand, is reproduced in Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds., *Reagan, A Life in Letters* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 742–743.

4. The U.S.-Soviet communiqué covering the Reagan-Gorbachev summit of November 19–21, 1985, is reprinted in the *New York Times*, November 22, 1985. For Reagan's statement, see Russell Watson with Thomas M. DeFrank, John Barry, Robert B. Cullen, Joyce Barnathan, and Steve Strasser, ''Reagan's 'Moscow Spring,''' *Newsweek*, June 13, 1988, 16. Thatcher's statement is found in Don Oberdorfer, ''Thatcher Says Cold War Has Come to an End; Briton Calls for Support of Gorbachev,'' *Washington Post*, November 18, 1988, A1.

Bush and General Secretary Gorbachev, the Soviet leader declared that "many things that were characteristic of the cold war should be abandoned, also the stake on force, the arms race, mistrust, psychological and ideological struggle, and all that. All that should be things of the past."[5] In response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, the Soviet Union joined an international coalition that quickly forced Hussein to retreat in January 1991. On December 25 of the same year, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was dissolved, and the newly constituted Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was renamed the Russian Federation.

These historic events defied widespread expectations. The renewed cold war briefly turned colder, but it did not produce a freeze. In fact, bipolarity gave way to a most interesting transformation of the international system; one side abandoned its adversarial role and joined the other in a broad community of free states. Why and how did this happen? Many experts expected the cold war to end with a nuclear war. Why were they proved wrong? And, what, exactly, defines the end of the cold war?

Scholars and statesmen have debated these questions for many years and will undoubtedly continue to do so for decades to come, but most agree on two main points: (1) there is no one answer as to why or how the cold war ended; and (2) the end of the U.S.-Soviet era was very much a process, and understanding that process is as important as the specific event that one favors. These general points of agreement provide the catalyst for this book.

In the late 1990s, Condoleezza Rice and I invited American and Russian scholars, statesmen, and policymakers to engage in candid discussions across the cold war divide about the turning points they considered central to ending the cold war. We instructed them to identify and analyze pivotal decisions, events, or policies of the final decades of the cold war, from the 1970s through the early 1990s. Those who served in government during this period were

5. Quoted in "Transcript of the Bush-Gorbachev News Conference in Malta," *New York Times*, December 4, 1989, A12.

asked to consult and make reference to their private records. We asked that all assessments be based on arguments and evidence rather than polemics or ideology. To encourage this type of conversation, we asked several scholars and statesmen to submit short commentaries on essays by authors from the other side of the cold war divide.

Numerous scholarly conferences have focused on emerging evidence that sheds light on what brought the cold war to a close. Transcripts of some of these meetings have been published and erudite treatises have been written about the implications of the end of the cold war for international relations theory and international history.[6] We sought to build on these studies to produce a scholarly work that systematically addresses and analyzes the end of the cold war from a comparative perspective.

Contributors to this study were interested primarily in elucidating turning points, but some included analyses of events they considered to be the most causative moments in the final years of the cold war. For instance, Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, White House officials during the administration of President George H. W. Bush, contend that German unification signified the end. Alexei Arbatov, a specialist in U.S.-Soviet relations and member of the Russian parliament (State Duma) from 1994 to 2003, maintains that it was Gorbachev's rise to power in March 1985 that triggered the end of the cold war. He asserts that the new Soviet leader and his colleagues initiated a revolution from above that was based on discarding old Communist concepts and policies. An-

6. For a few studies on the end of the cold war see Richard K. Herrmann, *Ending the Cold War: Interpretations, Causation, and the Study of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Richard Ned Lebow, *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Gabriel Partos, *The World that Came in from the Cold* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1993); Silvio Pons and Federico Romero, *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War: Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); William C. Wohlforth, *Witness to the End of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and William C. Wohlforth, ed., *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

other Russian specialist in U.S.-Soviet relations, Georgi Mirski, considers Gorbachev's rise to power as the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to be a watershed event. He points out that the Soviet Union's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was initially made in a Politburo meeting during Gorbachev's first year in office. Gorbachev's genuine desire to humanize the Soviet system provided strong reinforcement for that decision.

The dynamic nature of international diplomacy is demonstrated as the authors identify unanticipated turning points on the road to the end of the cold war. Robert Hutchings, former special adviser to Secretary of State James Baker and director of European affairs at the National Security Council, contends that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe process, which many American conservatives regarded with great skepticism, opened the door for trans-European social and political interaction as well as arms control proposals that undermined bipolarity.

Oleg Grinevsky, director of the Soviet foreign ministry's Middle East department in the early 1980s, provides a vivid account of the dilemmas and vulnerabilities of maintaining an extended empire in the third world, especially in the Middle East. He reveals how these challenges influenced the Soviet government to reassess its longstanding foreign policy based on expansionism.

Other contributors submit that perestroika, or economic restructuring, and the new political attitude toward foreign policy were turning points. These policies unleashed forces, unanticipated by Gorbachev, that fundamentally undermined the system that the Soviet leader had sought to reform. According to Michael McFaul, professor of Russian politics at Stanford University, a decisive moment in the unraveling of the cold war was Gorbachev's realization that political reform was necessary to break the bonds of the CPSU's *nomenklatura*, who were blocking economic reform measures. The reforms instituted by the Soviet general secretary opened the door for political contenders such as Boris Yeltsin, who eventually advanced political liberalization far beyond anything

Gorbachev had envisioned. The Soviet leader wanted to reform, not end, socialism, but McFaul notes that Yeltsin's campaign to give birth to an independent Russia raced on at an astonishing pace. In McFaul's opinion, the transformation of the international system was not fully evident until the Soviet Union ceased to exist at the end of 1991.

Karen Brutents, deputy head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU during the 1980s, holds that the false political premises about the Warsaw Pact were readily exposed when the movement toward political liberalization began within the Soviet Union. While Gorbachev presumed that such liberalization throughout the Soviet bloc would remain within acceptable boundaries, member states were moving toward a break with Communist rule.

German unification is another example of how the Soviet leader's authority was being overtaken by the very events he helped initiate. Zelikow and Rice report that Gorbachev expected change in the German Democratic Republic to occur gradually. He was thus unprepared for the onslaught of diplomatic activity that ultimately led to a unified Germany becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Yet the Soviet leader is hardly portrayed as a helpless bystander who witnessed history unfold. Anatoli Cherniaev, senior foreign policy adviser to the Soviet general secretary from 1986 to 1991, calls attention to Gorbachev's December 7, 1988, speech at the United Nations in which he deliberately renounced the international class struggle.[7] The speech represented a point of no return

7. In his speech before the General Assembly of the United Nations, Gorbachev said, "The new phase [of Soviet foreign policy] also requires de-ideologizing relations among states. We are not abandoning our convictions, our philosophy or traditions, nor do we urge anyone to abandon theirs. But neither do we have any intention to be hemmed in by our values. That would result in intellectual impoverishment, for it would mean rejecting a powerful source of development—the exchange of everything original that each nation has independently created. In the course of such exchange, let everyone show the advantages of their social system, way of life or values—and not just by words or propaganda, but by real deeds. That would be a fair rivalry of ideologies. But it should not be extended to

for Gorbachev. The Soviet Union had embraced a policy of mutual cooperation with the West that was far more sweeping than anything it had previously advocated, and the cold war, already in demise, would never regain its former dominance over international relations.

Gorbachev was not alone in playing a causative role in ending the cold war, according to the authors. Oleg Grinevsky and I posit that the judicious diplomacy practiced by both Andropov and Reagan prevented the dangerous course of U.S.-Soviet relations from sliding toward Armageddon in the early 1980s. And Nikolai Petrov, a Russian presidential adviser in the mid-1990s, concurs with McFaul that Boris Yeltsin was a central figure in the end of the cold war. But Petrov states that Yeltsin used democratic processes not to promote political reform but to advance his own electoral ambitions. Once in control, he turned against the very ideals that had elevated him to power.

Debate about which leader was most responsible for the cold war's end is often overshadowed by the authors' acknowledgments that many key actors took part in the strategic interactions that precipitated its conclusion. For instance, Peter Rodman, director of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department in the mid-1980s, notes the influence of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. He states that the Soviet reappraisal of its expansion into the third world under the Brezhnev Doctrine stemmed from an awareness of the West's unrelenting military and political pressure, especially during the Reagan administration.

Most of those who assign great responsibility to Ronald Reagan and his presidency repudiate the victory, or cold war triumphalism, perspective frequently proffered by conservative writers.[8] Jack Matlock, U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1987 to 1991,

relations among states." See "Excerpts From Speech to U.N. on Major Soviet Military Cuts," *New York Times*, December 8, 1988, A16.

8. For an important challenge to cold war triumphalism, see Ellen Schrecker, ed., *Cold War Triumphalism: The Misuse of History After the Fall of Communism* (New York: New Press, 2004).

contends that Reagan had no master plan when he assumed the presidency. Instead, claims Jack Matlock, he embraced a set of axioms that guided his Soviet policy. Yet, I have unearthed original writings by Reagan that suggest that he did formulate what was, in effect, a grand strategy before taking office. These ideas and strategies were directly reflected in the core national security directives of his presidential administration. Matlock and I agree that Reagan's policies of realism, strength, and negotiation served to hasten, rather than prolong, the end of the cold war. But neither of us seeks to deny the important endgame contributions made by Soviet leaders of the 1980s and 1990s.

Alexei Arbatov offers a different appraisal. He contends that by early 1986, less than a year after he assumed the post of general secretary of the CPSU, Gorbachev was prepared for genuine improvement in bilateral relations. But Reagan's arms buildup, among other stringent policies directed at the Soviet Union, hardened the Soviet position for a final round of cold war competition.

Arbatov also presents hard-hitting analysis of recent complications in U.S.-Russia relations, placing blame on leaders and policies on both sides for what appears to be a move to reprise old cold war differences on arms control, security threats in the Middle East, and economic policy. On a related point, the analysis provided throughout this volume on the difficulty of finding a way toward mutual cooperation sometimes bears chilling resemblance to great power rivalry in the twenty-first century. Consequently, these essays offer lessons of historical caution for those studying and engaging in contemporary international relations.

Anatoli Cherniaev, who discusses how Western leaders affected General Secretary Gorbachev's policies, reinforces the view that deep interaction between the Soviet Union and the United States in the 1980s contributed to the transformation of Soviet strategy. He writes:

> Gorbachev's talks with President Reagan in Reykjavik also gave him impetus to add the issue of human rights to the new political thinking. He could feel the importance of this problem for global politics

not only at the summit meetings; it also was often raised during his numerous contacts with representatives of the Western scientific and cultural elite. Gorbachev was becoming increasingly convinced that unless changes took place in this area, it was hopeless to expect significant improvement in relations with the West and progress on the issue of disarmament. As a result, the problem of human rights soon appeared on the domestic agenda as an indispensable component of perestroika.

Thus the new level of strategic interaction between the Soviet Union and the United States initiated by Gorbachev not only led to considerable improvement of the international political climate but also brought about radical political changes within the Soviet system.

Robert Hutchings adds complexity to the political leadership narrative by analyzing Europe as the international system was changing in the 1980s. He observes that Prime Minister Thatcher desired internal political change both within the Soviet Union and throughout its bloc. But she was skeptical about the likelihood of such change, and she was concerned about its implications for the cohesiveness of the Western alliance. Her strategic analysis emboldened her to encourage the administration of President Bush to join in a coordinated Western effort to bolster Gorbachev's political initiatives. Like Britain, France was apprehensive about Gorbachev's overtures, but President François Mitterrand emerged as an important leader in the construction of a new Europe. West German officials such as Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher moved forward with Gorbachev's policies of political openness, which were central to unifying Germany.

Analyzing German unification and its implications for the West, Zelikow and Rice portray President Bush and Secretary of State Baker as wise statesmen. On one hand, the American president's decision to support Germany's desire for unification, and especially the efforts of Prime Minister Helmut Kohl in December 1989, made it difficult for the British and French to launch a counteroffensive. On the other hand, the U.S. leaders worked to ensure

that the unified German state would be a democracy and a member of NATO, thus making it a strong bulwark against the Soviet Union.

David Holloway asserts that Gorbachev's new political thinking not only liberalized Soviet foreign policy but turned international attention to the Soviet leader's precepts of universal human values. These precepts form the basis for current discussions about globalization policies. According to Holloway, this unintended consequence continues to make Gorbachev relevant in international politics.

The stimulating analyses in this volume are accompanied by the authors' recognition that, despite the significance of individual events, the end of the cold war was produced by a series of turning points, each building upon and reinforced by its predecessor. The authors further acknowledge that future historians, who will benefit from additional evidence and a broader perspective gained through time, may arrive at quite different conclusions.

.....

I invited George P. Shultz, U.S. secretary of state from 1982 to 1989, and Pavel Palazhchenko, Gorbachev's interpreter and one of his closest advisers, to contribute to this volume. Drawing upon recollections of their first-hand involvement in the diplomacy and negotiations that helped transform the international system, Shultz and Palazhchenko have written forewords that offer revealing glimpses across the cold war divide.