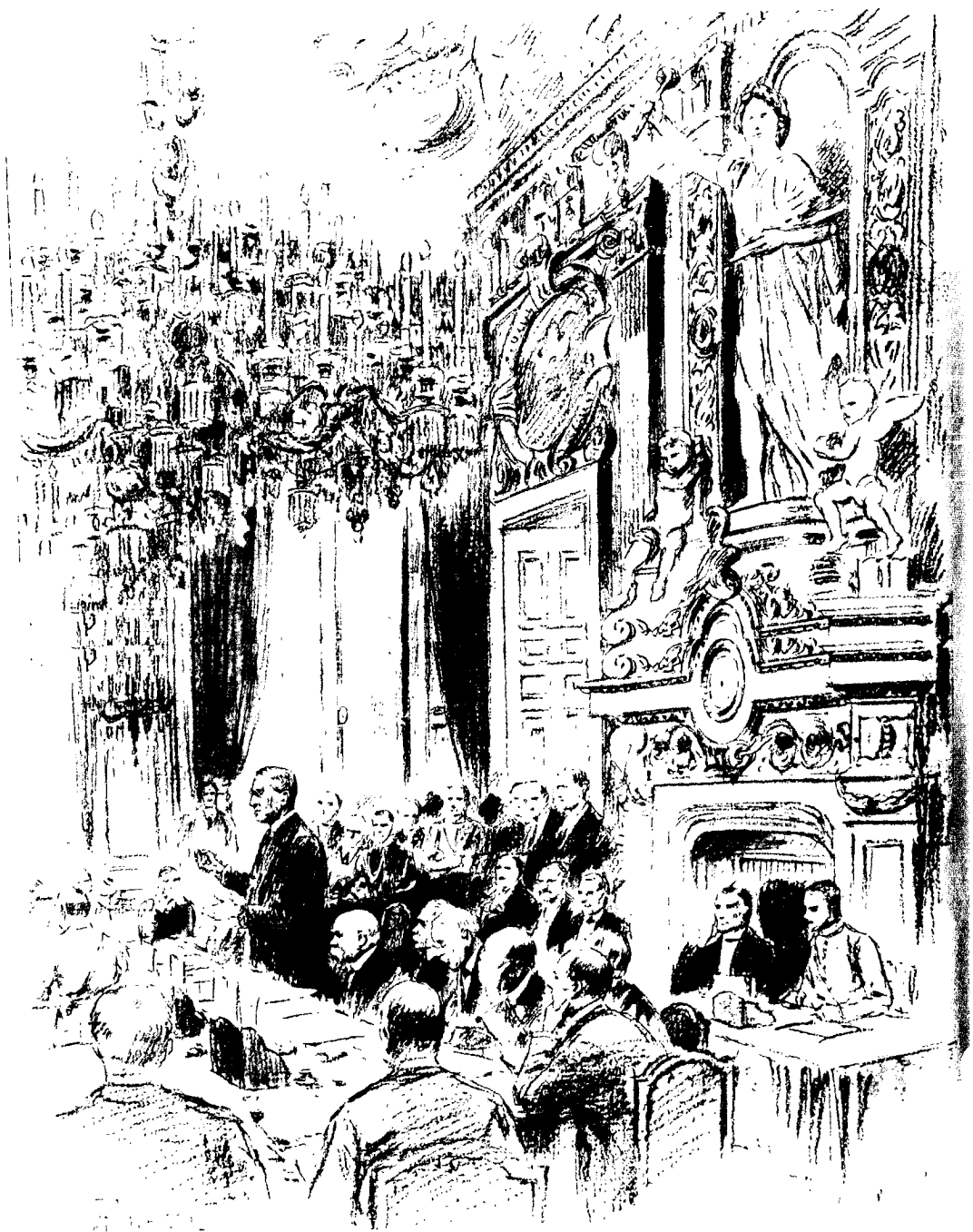


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## DIPLOMACY







## CHAPTER THIRTY

# The End of the Cold War: Reagan and Gorbachev

The Cold War had begun at a time when America was expecting an era of peace. And the Cold War ended at a moment when America was girding itself for a new era of protracted conflict. The Soviet empire collapsed even more suddenly than it had erupted beyond its borders; with equal speed, America reversed its attitude toward Russia, shifting in a matter of months from hostility to friendship.

This momentous change unfolded under the aegis of two rather im-

probable collaborators. Ronald Reagan had been elected in reaction to a period of America's seeming retreat to reaffirm the traditional verities of American exceptionalism. Gorbachev, who had risen to eminence through the brutal struggles of the communist hierarchy, was determined to reinvigorate what he considered a superior Soviet ideology. Reagan and Gorbachev each believed in the ultimate victory of his own side. There was, however, a crucial difference between these two unexpected collaborators: Reagan understood the mainsprings of his society, whereas Gorbachev had completely lost touch with his. Both leaders appealed to what they considered best in their systems. But where Reagan liberated his people's spirit by tapping reservoirs of initiative and self-confidence, Gorbachev precipitated the demise of the system he represented by demanding reform of which it proved incapable.

The collapse of Indochina in 1975 had been followed in America by a retreat from Angola and a deepening of domestic divisions, and by an extraordinary surge in expansionism on the part of the Soviet Union. Cuban military forces had spread from Angola to Ethiopia in tandem with thousands of Soviet combat advisers. In Cambodia, Vietnamese troops backed and supplied by the Soviet Union were subjugating that tormented country. Afghanistan was occupied by over 100,000 Soviet troops. The government of the pro-Western Shah of Iran collapsed and was replaced by a radically anti-American fundamentalist regime which seized fifty-two Americans, almost all of whom were officials, as hostages. Whatever the causes, the dominoes indeed appeared to be falling.

Yet, at this seeming nadir of America's international position, communism began to unravel. At one moment, at the beginning of the 1980s, it was as if communist momentum might sweep all before it; at the next, as history measures time, communism was self-destructing. Within a decade, the Eastern European satellite orbit dissolved and the Soviet empire fell apart, disgorging nearly all the Russian acquisitions since the time of Peter the Great. No world power had ever disintegrated so totally or so rapidly without losing a war.

The Soviet empire failed in part because its own history had tempted it inexorably toward overextension. The Soviet state was born against all odds, and then managed to survive civil war, isolation, and a succession of villainous rulers. In 1934–41, it skillfully deflected the looming Second World War into what it termed an imperialist civil war, and overcame the Nazi onslaught with the assistance of the Western Allies. Afterward, in the face of America's atomic monopoly, it managed to establish a satellite orbit in Eastern Europe and, in the post-Stalin period, to turn itself into a global superpower. At first, Soviet armies threatened contiguous areas

but later extended their reach to distant continents. Soviet missile forces were growing at a rate which caused many American experts to fear that Soviet strategic superiority was imminent. Like the British leaders Palmerston and Disraeli in the nineteenth century, American statesmen perceived Russia to be on the march everywhere.

The fatal flaw in all this bloated imperialism was that the Soviet leaders lost their sense of proportion along the way, overestimating the Soviet system's ability to consolidate its gains, both militarily and economically, and forgetting that they were challenging literally all the other major powers from a very weak base. Nor could Soviet leaders ever admit to themselves that their system was mortally deficient in its capacity to generate initiative and creativity; that, indeed, the Soviet Union, despite its military power, was still a very backward country. They failed the unforgiving test of survival because the qualities by which the Soviet Politburo rose to eminence stifled the creativity needed to enable their society to grow, let alone to sustain the conflict which they had provoked.

Quite simply, the Soviet Union was neither strong enough nor dynamic enough for the role its leaders had assigned it. Stalin may have had a foreboding of the real balance of forces when he reacted to the American arms buildup during the Korean War with his Peace Note of 1952 (see chapter 20). In the desperate transition period following Stalin's death, his successors misinterpreted their ability to survive without being challenged by the West as proof of Western weakness. And they beguiled themselves by what they perceived to be dramatic Soviet breakthroughs in the developing world. Khrushchev and his successors drew the conclusion that they could do the tyrant one better. Rather than dividing the capitalist world, which had been Stalin's basic strategy, they would defeat it with ultimatums over Berlin, missiles in Cuba, and adventurism throughout the developing world. That effort, however, went so far beyond the Soviet capacity as to transform stagnation into collapse.

The communist disintegration became visible during Reagan's second term and turned irreversible by the time he left office. Considerable credit is due to the presidencies preceding Reagan's, as well as to that of his immediate successor, George Bush, who presided skillfully over the denouement. Nevertheless, it was Ronald Reagan's presidency which marked the turning point.

Reagan's was an astonishing performance—and, to academic observers, nearly incomprehensible. Reagan knew next to no history, and the little he did know he tailored to support his firmly held preconceptions. He treated biblical references to Armageddon as operational predictions. Many of the historical anecdotes he was so fond of recounting had no

basis in fact, as facts are generally understood. In a private conversation, he once equated Gorbachev with Bismarck, arguing that both had overcome identical domestic obstacles by moving away from a centrally planned economy toward the free market. I advised a mutual friend that Reagan should be warned never to repeat this preposterous proposition to a German interlocutor. The friend, however, thought it unwise to pass on the warning, lest it drive the comparison all the more deeply into Reagan's mind.

The details of foreign policy bored Reagan. He had absorbed a few basic ideas about the dangers of appeasement, the evils of communism, and the greatness of his own country, but analysis of substantive issues was not his forte. All of this caused me to remark, during what I thought was an off-the-record talk before a conference of historians at the Library of Congress: "When you talk to Reagan, you sometimes wonder why it occurred to anyone that he should be president, or even governor. But what you historians have to explain is how so unintellectual a man could have dominated California for eight years, and Washington already for nearly seven."

The media avidly pounced on the first part of my statement. Yet, for the historian, the second part is by far the more interesting. When all was said and done, a president with the shallowest academic background was to develop a foreign policy of extraordinary consistency and relevance. Reagan might well have had only a few basic ideas, but these also happened to be the core foreign policy issues of his period, which demonstrates that a sense of direction and having the strength of one's convictions are the key ingredients of leadership. The question of who drafted Reagan's pronouncements on foreign policy—and no president drafts his own—is almost irrelevant. Folklore has it that Reagan was the tool of his speech-writers, but that is an illusion fostered by many a speech-writer. After all, Reagan had himself selected the people who crafted his speeches, and he delivered them with extraordinary conviction and persuasiveness. Any acquaintance with Reagan leaves little doubt that they expressed his actual views and, on some issues, such as the Strategic Defense Initiative, he was far ahead of his entourage.

In the American system of government, in which the president is the only nationally elected official, coherence in foreign policy emerges—if at all—from presidential pronouncements. These serve as the most effective directive to the sprawling and self-willed bureaucracy and supply the criteria for public or Congressional debates. Reagan put forward a foreign policy doctrine of great coherence and considerable intellectual power. He possessed an extraordinary intuitive rapport with the wellsprings of

American motivation. At the same time, he understood the essential brittleness of the Soviet system, a perception which ran contrary to most expert opinion, even in his own conservative camp.

Reagan had an uncanny talent for uniting the American people. And he had an unusually pleasant and genuinely affable personality. Even the victims of his rhetoric found it difficult to take it personally. Though he savaged me during his failed bid for the presidential nomination in 1976, I found it impossible to hold a lasting resentment, despite the fact that, as National Security Adviser, I had been briefing him for years without any protest on his part about the very policies he was now assaulting. When it was all over, I remembered not the campaign rhetoric but the combination of common sense and epigrammatic goodwill with which Reagan conducted himself during the briefing sessions. During the Middle East War of 1973, I told him that we would replace Israeli losses in aircraft but were uncertain as to how to limit the Arab reaction. "Why don't you say that you will replace all the aircraft the Arabs claim they have shot down?" Reagan suggested—a proposal which would turn the wildly inflated Arab propaganda against its originators.

Reagan's bland veneer hid an extraordinarily complex character. He was both congenial and remote, full of good cheer but, in the end, aloof. The bonhomie was his way of establishing distance between himself and others. If he treated everyone with equal friendliness—and regaled them all with the same stories—no one would have a special claim on him. The repository of jokes that were recycled from conversation to conversation served as protection against being blindsided. Like many actors, Reagan was the quintessential loner—as charming as he was self-centered. An individual widely perceived to have been an intimate of his said to me once that Reagan was both the friendliest and the most distant man he had ever known.

Reagan's 1976 campaign rhetoric notwithstanding, there was no significant conceptual difference among the various assessments of the international environment by the Nixon, Ford, and Reagan Administrations. All three were determined to resist the Soviet geopolitical offensive and considered history to be on the side of the democracies. There was, however, an enormous difference in their tactics and in the way in which each of these administrations explained its policies to the American people.

Shocked by the domestic divisions of the Vietnam War, Nixon had believed that a prior demonstration of serious efforts on behalf of peace was the precondition for sustaining whatever confrontations might be necessary to prevent further Soviet expansion. Leading a country that was

tired of retreat, Reagan justified resistance to Soviet expansionism by an insistently confrontational style. Like Woodrow Wilson, Reagan understood that the American people, having marched throughout their history to the drumbeat of exceptionalism, would find their ultimate inspiration in historic ideals, not in geopolitical analysis. In this sense, Nixon was to Reagan as Theodore Roosevelt had been to Woodrow Wilson. Like Roosevelt, Nixon had had a far better understanding of the workings of international relations; like Wilson, Reagan had a much surer grasp of the workings of the American soul.

Reagan's rhetoric about America's unique moral standing mirrored what almost every other president has said at one time or another in this century. What rendered Reagan's particular variant of American exceptionalism unique was his literal interpretation of it as a guide to the everyday conduct of foreign policy. Whereas Reagan's predecessors had invoked American principles as the underpinning of a particular initiative—say, the League of Nations or the Marshall Plan—Reagan mobilized them as weapons in the day-to-day struggle against communism, as in this speech before the American Legion on February 22, 1983:

By wedding the timeless truths and values Americans have always cherished to the realities of today's world, we have forged the beginnings of a fundamentally new direction in American foreign policy—a policy based on the unashamed, unapologetic explaining of our own priceless free institutions. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Reagan rejected the "guilt complex" which he identified with the Carter Administration, and proudly defended America's record as "the greatest force for peace anywhere in the world today."<sup>2</sup> In his very first press conference, he labeled the Soviet Union an outlaw empire prepared "to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat," in order to achieve its goals.<sup>3</sup> It would be the precursor of his 1983 description of the Soviet Union as the "evil empire," a direct moral challenge from which all his predecessors would have recoiled. Reagan overrode conventional diplomatic wisdom, and he oversimplified America's virtues in pursuit of a self-appointed mission to convince the American people that the East-West ideological conflict mattered and that some international struggles are about winners and losers, not about staying power or diplomacy.

The rhetoric of Reagan's first term marked the formal end of the period of detente. America's goal was no longer a relaxation of tensions but crusade and conversion. Reagan had been elected on the promise of militant anticommunism, and he was true to his word. In the fortunate



position of dealing with a Soviet Union in precipitate decline, he rejected Nixon's emphasis on national interest as being too relativistic and disdained Carter's diffidence as being too defeatist. Instead, Reagan presented an apocalyptic vision of the conflict made more bearable by the historical inevitability of the outcome. In a speech at Westminster Hall in London in June 1982, he described his perception of the Soviet Union:

In an ironic sense Karl Marx was right. We are witnessing today a great revolutionary crisis, a crisis where the demands of the economic order are conflicting directly with those of the political order. But the crisis is happening not in the free, non-Marxist West, but in the home of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union. . . .

Overcentralized, with little or no incentives, year after year the Soviet system pours its best resources into the making of instruments of destruction. The constant shrinkage of economic growth combined with the growth of military production is putting a heavy strain on the Soviet people.

What we see here is a political structure that no longer corresponds to its economic base, a society where productive forces are hampered by political ones.<sup>4</sup>

When Nixon and I had said much the same thing ten years earlier, it had intensified the conservative critique of detente. Conservatives distrusted the invocation of historical evolution in the service of detente because they feared that negotiations with the communists might lead to moral disarmament. But they found the concept of inevitable victory appealing as a tool of confrontation.

Reagan believed that relations with the Soviet Union would improve if he could make it share his fear of nuclear Armageddon. He was determined to bring home to the Kremlin the risks of continuing expansionism. A decade earlier, his rhetoric would have driven domestic civil disobedience out of control and might have led to confrontation with a still confident Soviet Union; a decade later, it would have appeared antiquated. In the conditions of the 1980s, it laid the foundation for a period of unprecedented East-West dialogue.

Inevitably, Reagan's rhetoric came under sharp attack from believers in the established orthodoxies. "TRB," in *The New Republic* of April 11, 1983, was outraged at Reagan's description of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," calling it "primitive prose and apocalyptic symbolism";<sup>5</sup> "primitive" was also the reaction of Anthony Lewis in *The New York Times* of March 10, 1983.<sup>6</sup> In 1981, the distinguished Harvard Professor Stanley Hoffmann denounced Reagan's militant style as "machismo," "neo-nation-

alism," and a form of "fundamentalist reaction" that had little to offer to a complex world in which American economic weaknesses were said to be no less serious than those of the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup>

As it turned out, Reagan's rhetoric did not thwart major negotiations, as the critics had predicted. On the contrary, during Reagan's second term, an East-West dialogue of a scope and intensity not seen since the Nixon period of detente took place. This time, however, the negotiations enjoyed the support of public opinion and were applauded by the conservatives.

If Reagan's approach to the ideological conflict was a simplified version of Wilsonianism, his concept of the resolution of that struggle was equally rooted in American utopianism. Though framing the issue as a struggle between good and evil, Reagan was far from arguing that the conflict had to be fought to the finish. Rather—in typical American fashion—he was convinced that communist intransigence was based more on ignorance than on congenital ill will, more on misunderstanding than on purposeful hostility. Hence, in Reagan's view, the conflict was likely to end with the conversion of the adversary. In 1981, while recuperating from an attempt on his life, Reagan sent a handwritten letter to Leonid Brezhnev that tried to dispel Soviet suspicions of the United States—as if seventy-five years of communist ideology could be removed by a personal appeal. It was, almost verbatim, the same assurance which Truman had extended to Stalin at the end of World War II (see chapter 17).

It is often implied . . . that we have imperialistic designs, and thus constitute a threat to your own security and that of the newly emerging nations. There not only is no evidence to support such a charge, there is solid evidence that the United States, when it could have dominated the world with no risk to itself, made no effort whatsoever to do so. . . . May I say, there is absolutely no substance to charges that the United States is guilty of imperialism or attempts to impose its will on other countries, by use of force. . . .

Mr. President, should we not be concerned with eliminating the obstacles which prevent our people, those you and I represent, from achieving their most cherished goals?<sup>8</sup>

How was one to reconcile the conciliatory tone of Reagan's letter and the author's assumption that he possessed some special credibility with the recipient with Reagan's assertion, made only a few weeks earlier, that Soviet leaders were capable of any crime? Reagan felt no need to explain this apparent inconsistency, perhaps because he deeply believed in *both*

propositions—the evil of Soviet conduct as well as the susceptibility of Soviet leaders to ideological conversion.

Thus, following Brezhnev's death in November 1982, Reagan sent a handwritten note—on July 11, 1983—to Brezhnev's successor, Yuri Andropov, once again disclaiming any aggressive designs.<sup>9</sup> When Andropov soon died as well and the infirm and aged Konstantin Chernenko became his successor (an obvious interim appointment), Reagan confided to his diary, which was clearly intended for publication:

I have a gut feeling I'd like to talk to him about our problems man to man and see if I could convince him there would be a material benefit to the Soviets if they'd join the family of nations, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Six months later, on September 28, 1984, Gromyko paid his first visit to the White House during the Reagan Administration. Again, Reagan had recourse to his diary, to the effect that his principal goal was to remove the Soviet leaders' suspicions of the United States:

I have a feeling we'll get nowhere with arms reductions while they are as suspicious of our motives as we are of theirs. I believe we need a meeting to see if we can't make them understand we have no designs on them but think they have designs on us.<sup>11</sup>

If Soviet conduct had been caused by suspicion of the United States for two generations, Reagan might well have assumed that the feeling was ingrained in the Soviet system and history. The fervent hope—especially in so vocal an anticommunist—that the Soviets' wariness could be removed in a single conversation with their Foreign Minister (who moreover represented the quintessence of communist rule) can only be explained by the irrepressible American conviction that understanding between peoples is normal, that tension is an aberration, and that trust can be generated by the strenuous demonstration of goodwill.

So it happened that Reagan, the scourge of communism, found nothing strange about describing the night before his first meeting with Gorbachev in 1985 and his feelings of nervous anticipation in terms of the hope that the meeting would settle the conflicts of two generations—an attitude closer to that of Jimmy Carter than of Richard Nixon:

Starting with Brezhnev, I'd dreamed of personally going one-on-one with a Soviet leader because I thought we might be able to accomplish things our countries' diplomats couldn't do because they didn't have

the authority. Putting that another way, I felt that if you got the top people negotiating and talking at a summit and then the two of you came out arm in arm saying, "We've agreed to this," the bureaucrats wouldn't be able to louse up the agreement. Until Gorbachev, I never got an opportunity to try out my idea. Now I had my chance.<sup>12</sup>

Despite his rhetoric about ideological confrontation and the reality of conducting a geopolitical conflict, Reagan did not in his own heart believe in structural or geopolitical causes of tension. He and his associates considered concern with the balance of power too confining and too pessimistic. They strove not for gradualism, but for a final outcome. This faith gave the Reagan team an extraordinary tactical flexibility.

A biographer has written about one of Reagan's "dreams," which I too have heard him recount:

One of Ronald Reagan's fantasies as president was that he would take Mikhail Gorbachev on a tour of the United States so the Soviet leader could see how ordinary Americans lived. Reagan often talked about it. He imagined that he and Gorbachev would fly by helicopter over a working-class community, viewing a factory and its parking lot filled with cars and then circling over the pleasant neighborhood where the factory workers lived in homes "with lawns and backyards, perhaps with a second car or a boat in the driveway, not the concrete rabbit warrens I'd seen in Moscow." The helicopter would descend, and Reagan would invite Gorbachev to knock on doors and ask the residents "what they think of our system." The workers would tell him how wonderful it was to live in America.<sup>13</sup>

Reagan clearly believed that he had a duty to speed Gorbachev's, or any other Soviet leader's, inevitable recognition that communist philosophy was in error, and that once Soviet misconceptions about the true nature of America had been cleared up, an era of conciliation would rapidly follow. In this sense, and despite all of his ideological fervor, Reagan's views on the essence of international conflict remained strictly American-utopian. Since he did not believe in irreconcilable national interests, he could discern no insoluble conflicts between nations. Once Soviet leaders had changed their ideological views, the world would be spared the sorts of disputes which had characterized classical diplomacy. And he saw no intermediate stages between permanent conflict and lasting reconciliation.

Nevertheless, however optimistic, even "liberal," Reagan's views were of the ultimate outcome, he meant to reach his goal by means of relent-

less confrontation. According to his way of thinking, dedication to ending the Cold War did not require creating a "favorable" atmosphere or granting the unilateral gestures which were so beloved by the advocates of permanent negotiations. Sufficiently American to view confrontation and conciliation as successive stages of policy, Reagan was the first postwar president to take the offensive both ideologically and geostrategically.

The Soviet Union had not been obliged to deal with such a phenomenon since the tenure of John Foster Dulles—and Dulles had not been president, nor had he ever seriously attempted to implement his "liberation" policy. By contrast, Reagan and his associates took their professions literally. From the time of Reagan's inauguration, they pursued two objectives simultaneously: to combat Soviet geopolitical pressure until the process of expansionism had been first arrested and then reversed; and, second, to launch a rearmament program designed to stop dead in its tracks the Soviet quest for strategic superiority, and to turn it into a strategic liability.

The ideological vehicle for this reversal of roles was the issue of human rights, which Reagan and his advisers invoked to try to undermine the Soviet system. To be sure, his immediate predecessors had also affirmed the importance of human rights. Nixon had done so on the issue of emigration from the Soviet Union. Ford had taken the biggest step forward with Basket III of the Helsinki Accords (see chapter 29). Carter made human rights the centerpiece of his foreign policy and promoted it so intensely vis-à-vis America's allies that his call for righteousness occasionally threatened their domestic cohesion. Reagan and his advisers went a step further by treating human rights as a tool for overthrowing communism and democratizing the Soviet Union, hence as the key to a peaceful world—as Reagan pointed out in his State of the Union Address on January 25, 1984: "Governments which rest upon the consent of the governed do not wage war on their neighbors."<sup>14</sup> At Westminster in 1982, Reagan, hailing the tide of democracy around the world, called on the free nations

... 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.<sup>15</sup>

The appeal to improve democracy at home was a prelude to a classically Wilsonian theme: "If the rest of this century is to witness the gradual growth of freedom and democratic ideals, we must take actions to assist the campaign for democracy."<sup>16</sup>

In fact, Reagan took Wilsonianism to its ultimate conclusion. America would not wait passively for free institutions to evolve, nor would it confine itself to resisting direct threats to its security. Instead, it would actively promote democracy, rewarding those countries which fulfilled its ideals and punishing those which fell short—even if they presented no other visible challenge or threat to America. The Reagan team thus turned the claims of the early Bolsheviks upside down: democratic values, not those of the Communist Manifesto, would be the wave of the future. And the Reagan team was consistent: it pressed both the conservative Pinochet regime in Chile and the authoritarian Marcos regime in the Philippines for reform; the former was induced to agree to a referendum and free elections, which replaced it; the latter was overthrown with American cooperation.

At the same time, the crusade for democracy begged fundamental questions which are of particular relevance to the post-Cold War period. How was one to reconcile this crusade with the long-held American doctrine of nonintervention in the domestic affairs of other states? To what extent should other objectives such as national security be subordinate to it? What price would America be willing to pay to promote its values? How was it to avoid both overextension and abdication? The post-Cold War world, which make the early Reagan years seem like distant history, will have to answer these questions.

Yet when Reagan took office, such ambiguities did not worry him as much as devising a strategy to interrupt the relentless Soviet advance of the previous years. The goal of Reagan's geostrategic offensive was to bring home to the Soviets that they had overreached. Rejecting the Brezhnev Doctrine on the irreversibility of communist gains, Reagan's strategy expressed the conviction that communism could be defeated, not merely contained. Reagan brought about the repeal of the Clark Amendment, which had prevented American aid to anticommunist forces in Angola, greatly stepped up support for the Afghan anti-Soviet guerrillas, developed a major program to resist communist guerrillas in Central America, and even extended humanitarian aid to Cambodia. It was a remarkable tribute to American cohesion that, a little more than five years after the debacle in Indochina, a determined president should again be contesting Soviet expansion around the world, this time successfully.

Most of the Soviet gains of the 1970s were reversed—though several of these retreats did not take place until the Bush Administration. The Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia was ended in 1990, elections were held in 1993, and refugees prepared to return home; Cuban troops withdrew from Angola by 1991; the communist-backed government in Ethio-

pia collapsed in 1991; in 1990, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua were brought to accept free elections, a risk no governing Communist Party had ever before been prepared to take; perhaps most important, Soviet armies withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. All of these developments contributed to a decline in communist ideological élan and geopolitical conviction. Observing the collapse of Soviet influence in the so-called Third World, Soviet reformers were soon citing Brezhnev's costly and futile adventures as proof of the bankruptcy of the communist system, whose undemocratic style of decision-making they believed to be in urgent need of revision.<sup>17</sup>

The Reagan Administration achieved these successes by putting into practice what became known as the Reagan Doctrine: that the United States would help anticommunist counterinsurgencies wrest their respective countries out of the Soviet sphere of influence. This meant arming the Afghan mujahideen in their struggle with the Russians, supporting the contras in Nicaragua, and aiding anticommunist forces in Ethiopia and Angola. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviets had abetted communist insurgencies against governments that were friendly toward the United States. Now, in the 1980s, America was giving the Soviets a taste of their own medicine. Secretary of State George Shultz explained the concept at a February 1985 speech in San Francisco:

For many years we saw our adversaries act without restraint to back insurgencies around the world to spread communist dictatorships . . . any victory of communism was held to be irreversible. . . . Today, however, the Soviet empire is weakening under the strain of its own internal problems and external entanglements. . . . The forces of democracy around the world merit our standing with them. To abandon them would be a shameful betrayal—a betrayal not only of brave men and women but of our highest ideals.<sup>18</sup>

The high-flying Wilsonian language in support of freedom and democracy globally was leavened by an almost Machiavellian realism. America did not go "abroad in search of monsters to destroy," in John Quincy Adams' memorable phrase; rather, the Reagan Doctrine amounted to a strategy for helping the enemy of one's enemy—of which Richelieu would have heartily approved. The Reagan Administration dispensed aid not only to genuine democrats (as in Poland), but also to Islamic fundamentalists (in cahoots with the Iranians) in Afghanistan, to rightists in Central America, and to tribal warlords in Africa. The United States had no more in common with the mujahideen than Richelieu had had with the Sultan of the

Ottoman Empire. Yet they shared a common enemy, and in the world of national interest, that made them allies. The results helped to speed the collapse of communism but left America face-to-face with the tormenting question it has tried to avoid through most of its history, which happens to be the statesman's central dilemma: what ends justify which means?

Reagan's most fundamental challenge to the Soviet Union proved to be his military buildup. In all his electoral campaigns, Reagan had deplored the inadequacy of the American defense effort, and had warned of approaching Soviet superiority. Today we know that these fears reflected an oversimplification of the nature of military superiority in the Nuclear Age. But, whatever the accuracy of Reagan's perception of the Soviet military threat, it managed to rally his conservative constituency far more than Nixon's evocations of the geopolitical perils.

Prior to the Reagan Administration, a standard argument of the radical critique of American Cold War policy had been that arms buildups were pointless because the Soviets would always, and at every level, match the American effort. That turned out to be even more inaccurate than the perception of imminent Soviet superiority. The scale and pace of the American buildup under Reagan reinforced all the doubts already in the minds of the Soviet leadership as a result of debacles in Afghanistan and Africa, about whether they could afford the arms race economically and—even more important—whether they could sustain it technologically.

Reagan restored weapons systems which had been abandoned by the Carter Administration, such as the B-1 bomber, and began deployment of the MX missile, the first new American land-based intercontinental missile in a decade. The two strategic decisions which contributed most to ending the Cold War were NATO's deployment of American intermediate-range missiles in Europe and the American commitment to the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

The NATO decision to deploy intermediate-range missiles (of 1,500-mile range) in Europe dated from the Carter Administration. Its purpose was to assuage West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's outrage at the unilateral American cancellation of the so-called neutron bomb—designed to make nuclear war less destructive—which Schmidt had supported over the opposition of his own Social Democratic Party. The intermediate-range weapons (partly ballistic missiles, partly ground-launched cruise missiles) were in fact designed for a different problem—to counter the large number of new Soviet missiles (the SS-20s) that were capable of reaching all European targets from deep within Soviet territory.



In its essence, the argument in favor of the intermediate-range weapons was political, not strategic, and it stemmed from the same concerns which twenty years earlier had generated allied debates about strategy; this time, however, America tried to allay Europe's fears. Bluntly put, once again the issue was whether Western Europe could count on the United States' using its nuclear weapons to repel a Soviet attack that was confined to Europe. Had America's European allies truly believed in America's willingness to resort to nuclear retaliation from the continental United States or from weapons based at sea, the new missiles on European soil would have been unnecessary. But America's resolve to do that was precisely what European leaders continued to doubt. For their part, American leaders had their own reasons for responding to European anxieties. It was part of the flexible response strategy to bring about options between all-out war focused on America and acceding to Soviet nuclear blackmail.

There was, of course, a more sophisticated explanation than a subliminal mutual distrust between the two sides of the Atlantic partnership. And that was that the new weapons organically linked the strategic defense of Europe with that of the United States. The argument went that the Soviet Union would not attack with conventional forces without first seeking to destroy the intermediate-range missiles in Europe which, because of their proximity and accuracy, could knock out Soviet command centers and ease the way for a devastating first strike by American strategic forces. On the other hand, attacking American intermediate-range missiles while leaving America's retaliatory force intact would be too risky as well. Enough intermediate-range missiles might survive to do serious damage, enabling the undamaged American retaliatory force to emerge as the arbiter of events. Thus the intermediate-range missiles closed a gap in the spectrum of deterrence. In the technical jargon of the times, the defenses of Europe and of the United States would be thereby "coupled": the Soviet Union would not be able to attack either area without incurring an unacceptable risk of a general nuclear war.

Technical "coupling" responded as well to a growing fear of German neutralism in the rest of Europe, especially in France. After the overthrow of Schmidt in 1982, the German Social Democratic Party seemed to be returning to nationalism and neutralism—to the point that, in the 1986 elections, one of its leaders, Oscar LaFontaine, urged that Germany leave the integrated NATO command. Massive demonstrations against missile deployment rocked the Federal Republic.

Sensing an opportunity to weaken Germany's ties to NATO, Brezhnev and his successor, Andropov, made opposition to the deployment of intermediate-range missiles the linchpin of Soviet foreign policy. In early

1983, Gromyko visited Bonn to warn that the Soviets would walk out of the Geneva arms control talks the day the Pershings arrived in West Germany, a threat certain to inflame the German protesters. When Kohl visited the Kremlin in July 1983, Andropov warned the German Chancellor that, if he accepted the Pershing IIs,

[t]he military threat for West Germany will grow manifold. Relations between our two countries will be bound to suffer certain complications as well. As for the Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, they would have, as someone [*Pravda*] recently put it, to look at one another through thick palisades of missiles.<sup>19</sup>

Moscow's propaganda machinery unleashed a major campaign in every European country. Mass demonstrations by various peace groups urged that disarmament rather than the new missile deployment be given priority and that a nuclear freeze be instituted immediately.

Whenever Germany seemed tempted by neutralism, which, in the French mind, spelled nationalism, French presidents attempted to provide Bonn with a European or Atlantic alternative. In the 1960s, de Gaulle had been a staunch defender of the German point of view on Berlin. In 1983, Mitterrand emerged unexpectedly as the chief European supporter of the American plan to deploy intermediate-range missiles. Mitterrand campaigned for the missiles in Germany. "Anyone gambling on uncoupling the European continent from the American would, in our view, jeopardize the balance of forces and therefore the maintenance of peace," Mitterrand told the German Bundestag.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, for the French President, France's national interest in seeing the intermediate-range missiles in Germany transcended any ideological affinity his French Socialists might feel for their German Social Democratic brethren.

Reagan came up with a ploy of his own to blunt the Soviet diplomatic offensive, offering to trade American intermediate-range missiles for the Soviet SS-20s.<sup>21</sup> Since the SS-20s were more of a pretext for the American deployment than its cause, the proposal raised grave questions about "decoupling" the defense of Europe from that of the United States. However, while the arguments for "coupling" were esoteric, the proposal to abolish an entire category of weapons was easy to understand. And since the Soviets overestimated their bargaining position and refused to discuss any part of Reagan's offer, the so-called zero option made it easier for European governments to go through with the missile deployment. It was a stunning victory for Reagan and for German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had staunchly stood by the American plan. And it showed that the

infirm Soviet leadership was losing its capacity to intimidate Western Europe.

The deployment of intermediate-range missiles improved deterrent strategy; but when, on March 23, 1983, Reagan announced his intention to develop a strategic defense against Soviet missiles, he was threatening a strategic breakthrough:

... I call upon the scientific community in our country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace: to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.<sup>22</sup>

Those last words, "impotent and obsolete," must have had a chilling ring in the Kremlin. The Soviet nuclear arsenal was the keystone of the Soviet Union's entire superpower status. For the twenty years of Brezhnev's tenure, achieving strategic parity with the United States had been the principal Soviet objective. Now, with a single technological stroke, Reagan was proposing to erase everything that the Soviet Union had propelled itself into bankruptcy trying to accomplish.

If Reagan's claim of a 100 percent effective defense came even close to realization, *American* strategic superiority would become a reality. An American first strike might then succeed because the defensive system might be able to contain the relatively small and disorganized Soviet missile force which had survived. At a minimum, Reagan's proclamation of SDI put the Soviet leadership on notice that the arms race they had started so recklessly in the 1960s would either consume their resources or lead to an American strategic breakthrough.

Reagan's SDI proposal touched a sore spot in the debate about American defense policy. Before the Nuclear Age, it would have been considered preposterous to base a country's defense on the vulnerability of its population. Afterward, the strategic debate assumed a novel character, in part because so much of it was conducted by an entirely new group of participants. Before the Nuclear Age, military strategy was thrashed out within general staffs or at military staff colleges with a few outside kibitzers, mostly military historians like B. H. Liddell Hart. The vast destructiveness of nuclear weapons made traditional military expertise less relevant; anybody who understood the new technology could play, and the players were, in the main, scientists, joined by a few other academicians.

Appalled by the destructiveness they had unleashed, the majority of technical experts convinced themselves that politicians were sufficiently

irresponsible that, if they perceived even a minimal chance of making nuclear war tolerable, they might be tempted to unleash it. Therefore, it was the moral duty of scientists to advocate strategies so catastrophic as to scare even the most reckless policymaker. The paradox of that approach was that those who, quite rightly, considered themselves as most concerned about the future of civilization ended up advocating a nihilistic military strategy of civilian extermination.

Defense scientists had come to this view only gradually. During the first decade of the Nuclear Age, many of them had still been urging defense against an as yet largely nonexistent Soviet air threat. Deeply committed to preventing nuclear war, the scientists no doubt had in the back of their minds the utility of diverting resources from offensive weapons and thereby reducing the incentives for an American pre-emptive attack. After the emergence of an ever-growing Soviet nuclear capability with enough power to devastate the United States, the scientific community's prevailing advice paradoxically changed. Henceforth, the majority passionately advocated the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction, which based deterrence on the assumption that, given a high enough level of expected civilian casualties, neither side would start a nuclear war.

The theory of Mutual Assured Destruction marked a deliberate flight from rationality in strategic theory by basing defense on the threat of suicide. In practice, it conferred a vast advantage, certainly psychologically, on the side capable of posing challenges from which its adversary could only extricate itself by resorting to general nuclear war. In the 1960s and 1970s, this side had clearly been the Soviet Union, whose conventional military forces were generally assumed to be far superior to those of the West. At the same time, such a strategy guaranteed that nuclear war would destroy civilization itself. Thus, SDI found adherents especially among those who sought to avoid the intolerable choice between surrender and Armageddon.

The majority of the media and defense intellectuals, however, stuck to the generally accepted wisdom and opposed SDI. The best and fairest compendium of the various reservations was found in a book edited by Harold Brown, who had served as Secretary of Defense in the Carter Administration and as Secretary of the Air Force in the Johnson Administration.<sup>23</sup> Brown favored a research effort but argued that SDI was not yet practical.<sup>24</sup> One of his collaborators, Richard Betts, took the position that, at any level of deployment, the Soviets would find it possible to saturate the defense system, and at a lower cost than that of the American deployment.<sup>25</sup> Johns Hopkins Professor George Liska took the opposite tack. He assumed that SDI might work but that, once protected, America would

lack incentive to defend its European allies.<sup>26</sup> Robert Osgood combined all of the above criticism with a concern about undermining the 1972 ABM Treaty and complicating new arms control efforts.<sup>27</sup> Representing the view of many Western allies, British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe warned against trying to create a "Maginot Line in space:"

Many years of deployment may be involved. Many years of insecurity and instability cannot be our objective. All the Allies must continue at every stage to share the same sense that the security of NATO territory is indivisible. Otherwise the twin pillars of the Alliance might begin to fall apart.<sup>28</sup>

It was a novel and, in the long run, demoralizing concept that the price of maintaining an alliance should be keeping the civilian population of each ally totally vulnerable. It was also fallacious. For surely America's willingness to risk nuclear war on behalf of its European allies would increase in nearly direct proportion to America's capacity to protect its civilian population.

The experts had all the technical arguments on their side, but Reagan had got hold of an elemental political truth: in a world of nuclear weapons, leaders who make no effort to protect their peoples against accident, mad opponents, nuclear proliferation, and a whole host of other foreseeable dangers, invite the opprobrium of posterity if disaster ever does occur. That it was not possible at the beginning of a complicated research program to demonstrate SDI's maximum effectiveness was inherent in the complexity of the problem; no weapon would ever have been developed if it first had had to submit to so perfectionist a criterion.

The fashionable argument—that any defense could be defeated by being saturated—ignored the fact that saturation does not work in a straight line. Up to a certain level, SDI might work almost as Reagan described it; after that, it would progressively decline in effectiveness. But if the price of launching a nuclear attack were high enough, deterrence would increase, especially since the attacker could not know which warheads would get through or to what targets. Finally, a defense capable of intercepting a substantial number of Soviet missiles would be even more effective against the much smaller attacks of new nuclear countries.

Reagan was impervious to much of the technical criticism because he had not advocated SDI in strategic terms in the first place. Instead, he had presented it in terms of the "liberal" cause of bringing about the abolition of nuclear war. The postwar president most committed to building up America's military strength, including its nuclear capacity, stood at the

same time for a pacifist vision of a world from which all nuclear weapons were banished. Reagan's overused epigram that "a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought"<sup>29</sup> was indistinguishable from the stated objectives of his radical critics. Yet, just as in the duality of his approach to dealing with the Soviet Union, Reagan was deadly serious about both his arms buildup and his pacifism. Reagan described his attitude toward nuclear weapons in his memoirs:

*No one* could "win" a nuclear war. Yet as long as nuclear weapons were in existence, there would always be risks they would be used, and once the first nuclear weapon was unleashed, who knew where it would end?

My dream, then, became a world free of nuclear weapons. . . .<sup>30</sup>

Reagan's personal abhorrence of nuclear war was reinforced by a highly literal belief in the biblical prophecy of Armageddon. I heard him expound these views along lines nearly identical to what his biographer has described:

Speaking as if he were describing a movie scene, he related a terrifying episode in the Armageddon story where an invading army from the Orient, 200-million strong, is destroyed by a plague. Reagan believes that the "plague" was a prophecy of nuclear war, where "the eyes are burned from the head and the hair falls from the body and so forth." He believes this passage specifically foretold Hiroshima.<sup>31</sup>

No member of the Peace Movement could have condemned the use of nuclear weapons more eloquently than Ronald Reagan. On May 16, 1983, he coupled an announcement that he was deploying the MX intercontinental missiles with the expression of his fervent hope that, somewhere along the line, the process would be reversed and that all nuclear weapons would be eliminated:

I can't believe that this world can go on beyond our generation and on down to succeeding generations with this kind of weapon on both sides poised at each other without someday some fool or some maniac or some accident triggering the kind of war that is the end of the line for all of us.<sup>32</sup>

When Reagan put forward SDI, it was in language as passionate as it was unorthodox, even after it had been filtered through the bureaucratic "clearing process" to which all presidents are subject. In the event that

negotiations on arms control went on too long, America would unilaterally end the nuclear peril by building SDI. American science, Reagan believed, would render nuclear weapons obsolete.<sup>33</sup>

Soviet leaders were not impressed by Reagan's moral appeals, but they were obliged to take seriously America's technological potential and the strategic impact of even an imperfect defense. As had happened with Nixon's ABM proposals fourteen years earlier, the Soviet reaction was the opposite of what the arms control advocates had predicted; SDI served to unlock the door to arms control. The Soviets returned to the arms control talks they had broken off over the intermediate-range-missile issue.

Critics alleged that Reagan was being cynical and that his sweeping vista of the elimination of all nuclear weapons was a cover for his efforts to spur the arms race. Reagan, however, was anything but cynical, giving expression to the optimistic faith of all Americans that that which is necessary is also attainable. Indeed, all his most eloquent statements on abolishing nuclear weapons were uttered extemporaneously.

Thus came about the paradox that the president who did so much to modernize America's strategic arsenal also contributed in a major way to delegitimizing it. Adversaries or allies who took literally what Reagan was saying publicly about nuclear weapons and privately about the imminence of Armageddon could only conclude that they were dealing with a president who was extremely unlikely to resort to the very weapons around which American defense had been built.

How often could a president repeat his standard line that "nuclear war must never be fought" before the credibility of the nuclear threat became eroded? How many reductions of nuclear weapons could be undertaken before the strategy of flexible response became technically unfeasible? Fortunately, the Soviets had by this time grown too weak to test this potential vulnerability, and America's worried allies were swept along by the accelerating decline of the Soviet Union.

That Reagan was anything but cynical became evident whenever he thought he saw an opportunity to implement his dream of a non-nuclear world. Convinced that the abolition of nuclear war was objectively of such overriding importance that all reasonable persons would agree with him, Reagan was quite prepared to proceed bilaterally with the Soviets on the most fundamental matters without consulting allies whose national interests might be equally involved. This happened most dramatically at Reagan's 1986 summit meeting with Gorbachev at Reykjavik. In a tumultuous and emotional roller-coaster ride lasting forty-eight hours, Reagan and Gorbachev agreed in principle to reduce all strategic forces by 50 percent within five years, and to destroy all ballistic missiles within ten

years. At one point, Reagan came close to accepting a Soviet offer to abolish nuclear weapons altogether.

In this way, Reykjavik approached the Soviet-American condominium which allies and neutrals alike had feared for so long. If the other nuclear powers refused to go along with the Soviet-American agreement, they would suffer public opprobrium, superpower pressure, or isolation; if they agreed, Great Britain, France, and China would in effect have been obliged by the United States and the Soviet Union to abandon their independent nuclear deterrent, something the incumbent Thatcher and Mitterrand governments and China's leaders were not even remotely prepared to do.

The Reykjavik deal failed at the last moment for two reasons. At that still-early stage of his rule, Gorbachev simply overplayed his hand. He tried to link abolishing strategic missiles to a ban on SDI testing for a ten-year period but misjudged his interlocutor as well as his bargaining position. A wise tactic for Gorbachev would have been to propose publishing what had been agreed—namely the abolition of missile forces—and to refer the issue of SDI testing to the arms control negotiators in Geneva. This would have frozen what had already been agreed, and would have surely produced a major crisis, both in the Atlantic Alliance and in Sino-American relations. By pressing for more, Gorbachev came up against a promise Reagan had made before the summit—not to use SDI as a bargaining chip. When Gorbachev persisted, Reagan responded in a way no foreign policy professional would have advised: he simply got up and left the room. Years later, when I asked a senior Gorbachev adviser who had been present at Reykjavik why the Soviets had not settled for what the United States had already accepted, he replied: "We had thought of everything except that Reagan might leave the room."

Shortly afterward, George Shultz gave a thoughtful speech describing why Reagan's vision of eliminating nuclear weapons was actually to the West's advantage.<sup>34</sup> But the language of his speech, artfully phrased in support of a "less nuclear world," showed that the State Department—painfully conscious of allied concerns—had not yet signed on to Reagan's vision of the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

After Reykjavik, the Reagan Administration pursued that part of the Reykjavik agenda that was immediately realizable: the 50 percent reduction in strategic forces, which had been envisioned as the first stage of an overall agreement banning all missiles. Agreements were reached to destroy American and Soviet intermediate- and medium-range ballistic missiles in Europe. Because this agreement did not affect the nuclear forces of Great Britain and France, the interallied disputes of twenty-five years



earlier did not break out again. By the same token, the process of denuclearizing Germany was started, and, therefore, its potential decoupling from the Atlantic Alliance. Germany would draw the full benefit from its incipient denuclearization only by adopting a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons—quite inconsistent with NATO strategy and American deployments. Had the Cold War continued, a more national, less alliance-oriented foreign policy in the Federal Republic might well have resulted, which was why British Prime Minister Thatcher was so worried about the emerging trend in arms control negotiations.

Reagan had transformed what had been a marathon race into a sprint. His confrontational style linked to a risk-taking diplomacy would probably have worked at the beginning of the Cold War, before the two spheres of interest had been consolidated, and immediately after the death of Stalin. Such a diplomacy was essentially what Churchill had proposed when he returned to office in 1951. Once the division of Europe was frozen and so long as the Soviet Union still felt confident, the attempt to force a settlement would have almost certainly produced a major clash and strained the Atlantic Alliance, the majority of whose members wanted no unnecessary tension. In the 1980s, Soviet stagnation made a forward strategy appropriate again. Did Reagan recognize the degree of disintegration of Soviet willpower, or did self-will and opportunity coincide?

In the end, it made no difference whether Reagan was acting on instinct or on analysis. The Cold War did not continue, at least in part because of the pressures the Reagan Administration had exerted on the Soviet system. By the end of Reagan's presidency, the East-West agenda had returned to the pattern of the detente period. Once again, arms control was the centerpiece of East-West negotiations, though with more emphasis on arms reduction and a greater willingness to eliminate entire categories of weapons. In the regional conflicts, the Soviet Union was now on the defensive and had lost much of its ability to instigate trouble. With security concerns declining, nationalism grew on both sides of the Atlantic even as allied unity continued to be proclaimed. America relied more and more on weapons stationed on its own territory or at sea, while Europe multiplied its political options toward the East. In the end, these negative trends were superseded by the collapse of communism.

What had changed most radically was the way East-West policy was being presented to the American public. Reagan had instinctively sandwiched tough Cold War geostrategic policies between an ideological crusade and a utopian evocation of peace that appealed simultaneously to the two major strands of American thought on international affairs—the missionary and the isolationist, the theological and the psychiatric.

In practice, Reagan was closer to classical patterns of American thinking than Nixon had been. Nixon would not have used the phrase "evil empire" to describe the Soviet Union, but he also would not have offered to give up all nuclear weapons, or expected to end the Cold War in one grand personal reconciliation with Soviet leaders at a single summit. Reagan's ideology shielded him whenever he made semi-pacifist pronouncements for which a liberal president would have been vilified. And his commitment to improving East-West relations, especially in his second term, together with his successes took the edge off his belligerent rhetoric. Whether Reagan could have sustained this tightrope act indefinitely had the Soviet Union remained a major competitor is doubtful. But Reagan's second term coincided with the beginning of the disintegration of the communist system—a process hastened by his Administration's policies.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the seventh in a direct line from Lenin, had been raised in a Soviet Union that enjoyed unprecedented power and prestige. Yet he was destined to preside over the demise of the empire built with so much blood and treasure. When Gorbachev assumed office in 1985, he was the leader of a nuclear superpower which was in a state of economic and social decay. When he was toppled from power in 1991, the Soviet army had thrown its support behind his rival, Boris Yeltsin, the Communist Party had been declared illegal, and the empire which had been so bloodily assembled by every Russian ruler since Peter the Great had disintegrated.

This collapse would have seemed fantastic in March 1985, when Gorbachev was anointed General Secretary. As had been the case with all of his predecessors, Gorbachev inspired both fear and hope. Fear, as the leader of a superpower all the more ominous for its enigmatic style of government; hope that the new General Secretary might usher in the long-awaited turn to peace. Gorbachev's every word was analyzed for a sign of an easing of the tension; emotionally, the democracies were amply ready to discover in Gorbachev the dawn of a new era, just as they had been with all of his predecessors after Stalin.

For once, the democracies' faith turned out not to be so much wishful thinking. Gorbachev was of a different generation than the Soviet leaders whose spirit had been broken by Stalin. He lacked the heavy-handedness of all previous products of the *nomenklatura*. Highly intelligent and suave, he was like the somewhat abstract figures from the nineteenth-century Russian novels—both cosmopolitan and provincial, intelligent

yet somehow unfocused; perceptive while missing his central dilemma.

The outside world heaved a nearly audible sigh of relief. Here at last seemed to be the long-awaited and heretofore utterly elusive moment of the Soviets' ideological transformation. Until well into 1991, Gorbachev was considered in Washington to be an indispensable partner in the building of a new world order—to such an extent that President Bush chose the Ukrainian Parliament as the unlikely venue for a forum in which to extol the Soviet leader's qualities and the importance of keeping the Soviet Union together. Keeping Gorbachev in office turned into a principal objective of Western policymakers, who were convinced that any other figure would be far more difficult to deal with. During the strange, apparently anti-Gorbachev coup of August 1991, all the democratic leaders rallied to the side of "legality" in supporting the communist constitution which had put Gorbachev into office.

But high politics makes no allowances for weakness—even if the victim is not the principal cause of it. Gorbachev's mystique was at its height when he appeared in the guise of the conciliatory leader of an ideologically hostile, nuclear-armed Soviet Union. As his policy began to reflect confusion rather than purpose, Gorbachev's standing began to decline. Five months after the failed communist coup, he was induced to resign and replaced by Yeltsin through procedures every bit as "illegal" as those which had evoked Western wrath only five months earlier. This time, the democracies quickly rallied to Yeltsin with many of the same arguments they had invoked a short time earlier on behalf of Gorbachev. Ignored by an outside world which had so recently celebrated him, Gorbachev wandered into the limbo reserved for statesmen shipwrecked by striving for goals beyond their capabilities.

Gorbachev had in fact wrought one of the most significant revolutions of his time. He destroyed the Communist Party, which had been organized for the specific purpose of seizing and holding power, and which had in fact controlled every aspect of Soviet life. In its wake, Gorbachev left the shattered remnants of an empire which had been painstakingly assembled over centuries. Organized as independent states yet fearful of Russia's nostalgia for the old empire, these have turned into new elements of instability, threatened simultaneously by their former imperial masters and by the residue of various outside ethnic groups—often Russian—deposited on their soil by centuries of Russian domination. None of these results was even remotely what Gorbachev had intended. He had wanted to bring about modernization, not freedom; he had tried to make the Communist Party relevant to the outside world; instead, he ushered in the collapse of the system which had shaped him and to which he owed his eminence.

Blamed by his own people for the magnitude of the disaster which occurred during his incumbency, forgotten by the democracies, and embarrassed by his inability to sustain his power, Gorbachev has deserved neither the exaltation nor the ignominy which have alternatively been his lot. For he had inherited a truly difficult, perhaps insurmountable, set of problems. When Gorbachev assumed power, the scale of the Soviet debacle was just becoming apparent. Forty years of Cold War had forged a loose coalition of nearly all the industrial countries against the Soviet Union. Its erstwhile ally, China, had for all practical purposes joined the opposing camp. The Soviet Union's only remaining allies were the East European satellites, which were held together by the threat of Soviet force implicit in the Brezhnev Doctrine, and which represented a drain, not an augmentation, of Soviet resources. Soviet adventures in the Third World were turning out to be both expensive and inconclusive. In Afghanistan, the Soviet Union experienced many of the same trials America had undergone in Vietnam, the major difference being that these were occurring at the very borders of its own far-flung empire, not at some distant outpost. From Angola to Nicaragua, a resurgent America was turning Soviet expansionism into costly stalemates or discredited failures, while the American strategic buildup, especially SDI, posed a technological challenge which the stagnant and overburdened Soviet economy could not begin to meet. At a moment when the West was launching the supercomputer-microchip revolution, the new Soviet leader watched his country slip into technological underdevelopment.

Despite his ultimate debacle, Gorbachev deserves credit for being willing to face the Soviet Union's dilemmas. At first, he seems to have believed that he could revitalize his society by purging the Communist Party and by introducing some elements of market economics into central planning. Although Gorbachev had no idea of the magnitude of what he was taking on domestically, he understood quite clearly that he needed a period of international calm to pursue it. In this respect, Gorbachev's conclusions were not so different from those of all his post-Stalin predecessors. But whereas, in the 1950s, Khrushchev had still been convinced that the Soviet economy would soon overtake the capitalist system, Gorbachev, in the 1980s, had learned that it would take a long time for the Soviet Union to achieve any level of industrial output that could, even remotely, be considered competitive with the capitalist world.

To gain this breathing space, Gorbachev initiated a major reassessment of Soviet foreign policy. At the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in 1986, Marxist-Leninist ideology was nearly completely jettisoned. Previous periods of peaceful coexistence had been justified as temporary respites in which to rearrange the balance of forces while the class struggle contin-

ued. Gorbachev was the first Soviet leader to repudiate the class struggle altogether, and to proclaim coexistence as an end in itself. Though continuing to affirm the ideological differences between East and West, Gorbachev insisted that they were superseded by the need for international cooperation. Coexistence, moreover, was not conceived in the same way that it had been previously—as an interlude before an inevitable confrontation—but as a permanent component of the relationship between the communist and the capitalist worlds. It was justified not as a necessary stage on the road to an eventual communist victory, but as contributing to the well-being of all humanity.

In his book *Perestroika*—which means “reform”—Gorbachev described the new approach:

To be sure, distinctions will remain. But should we duel because of them? Would it not be more correct to step over the things that divide us for the sake of the interests of all mankind, for the sake of life on Earth? We have made our choice, asserting a new political outlook both by binding statements and by specific actions and deeds. People are tired of tension and confrontation. They prefer a search for a more secure and reliable world, a world in which everyone would preserve their own philosophic, political and ideological views and their way of life.<sup>35</sup>

Gorbachev had already hinted at these views two years earlier, during a press conference at the end of his first summit meeting with Reagan in 1985:

The international situation today is distinguished by a very important feature which we and the United States of America must take into account in our foreign policy. What I mean is this. In the present situation we are talking not only about confrontation between the two social systems, but about a choice between survival and mutual annihilation.<sup>36</sup>

Inevitably, veterans of the Cold War had difficulty recognizing just how much deeper Gorbachev's approach went than that of previous periods of coexistence. In early 1987, I had a meeting with Anatoly Dobrynin, who was then head of the International Department of the Central Committee (more or less the equivalent of the White House National Security Adviser) in the cavernous Central Committee building in Moscow. Dobrynin made so many disparaging comments about the Afghan government, which Moscow was supporting, that I asked him whether the

Brezhnev Doctrine was still in force. Dobrynin shot back: "What makes you think the Kabul government is communist?"

When I reported to Washington that this comment seemed to imply a Soviet readiness to jettison the Kremlin's Afghan puppets, the general reaction was that Dobrynin had been carried away by his desire to please an old friend—a quality I had failed to note in my nearly ten years of experience with the Soviet end of the "back channel." Nevertheless, the skepticism seemed justified because Gorbachev's doctrinal changes in foreign policy were not being immediately translated into recognizable policy changes. By rote, Soviet leaders described their new doctrine as a method by which to "deprive the West of an enemy image" and thereby to weaken Western cohesion. The self-proclaimed "new thinking," Gorbachev declared in November 1987, "has started to make its way in world affairs, destroying the stereotypes of anti-Sovietism and suspicion toward our initiatives and actions."<sup>37</sup> The Soviets' tactics in arms control talks seemed a replay of their tactics of the early Nixon years—of making an all-out attempt to undermine defensive systems while leaving the underlying offensive threat unchanged.

The government of a great power is like the supertankers that weigh hundreds of thousands of tons and have turning radiuses extending over dozens of miles. Its leaders must balance the impact they seek to make on the outside world against the morale of their bureaucracies. Heads of governments enjoy the formal prerogative of establishing the direction of policies; yet it falls to the governmental bureaucracies to interpret what their chiefs might have had in mind. And heads of government almost never have the time or the staff to supervise the daily implementation of their directives through every nuance of execution. Ironically, the larger and more complex the bureaucracy, the more this is the case. Even in governments less rigid than the Soviet system, policy changes frequently move at a glacial pace.

As time went on, Gorbachev's doctrinal change could no longer be evaded, not even by a bureaucracy shaped by the nearly thirty years of Gromyko's tenure as Foreign Minister. For Gorbachev's "new thinking" went far beyond adapting established Soviet policy to new realities; it altogether destroyed the intellectual underpinnings of historic Soviet foreign policy. When Gorbachev replaced the concept of the class struggle with the Wilsonian theme of global interdependence, he was defining a world of compatible interests and underlying harmony—a complete reversal of established Leninist orthodoxy and historical Marxism.

The collapse of ideology not only deprived Soviet foreign policy of its historic rationale and conviction, but compounded the inherent difficulty

of the Soviets' situation. By the mid-1980s, Soviet policymakers faced an agenda on which any one item would have been difficult enough to overcome but which, in combination, proved insuperable. These were: relations with the Western democracies; relations with China; strains in the satellite orbit; the arms race; and the stagnation of the domestic economic and political system.

Gorbachev's initial moves did not vary from the standard Soviet pattern since the death of Stalin—to seek to relax tensions through atmospherics, or at least by what had in the past been largely atmospherics. On September 9, 1985, *Time* magazine published an interview with Gorbachev in which he put forward his notion of peaceful coexistence:

You asked me what is the primary thing that defines Soviet-American relations. I think it is the immutable fact that whether we like one another or not, we can either survive or perish only together. The principal question that we must answer is whether we are at last ready to recognize that there is no other way to live at peace with each other and whether we are prepared to switch our mentality and our mode of acting from a warlike to a peaceful track.<sup>38</sup>

Gorbachev's dilemma was that, on the one hand, his statements were viewed in the context of what Malenkov and Khrushchev had said thirty years earlier, and that, on the other, they were too vague to encourage a precise response. In the absence of a proposal for a political settlement, Gorbachev found himself enmeshed in the orthodoxy of two decades during which East-West diplomacy had been identified with arms control.

Arms control had become an abstruse subject involving esoteric fine points that, even with the best intentions, would take years to resolve. But what the Soviet Union needed was immediate relief, not simply from tensions but from economic pressures, especially from the arms race. There was no hope of bringing this about through the laborious procedures of establishing agreed force levels, comparing incommensurable systems, negotiating elusive verification procedures, and then spending several years implementing them. In this manner, arms control negotiations were becoming a device for applying pressure on the rickety Soviet system—all the more effective because they had not been designed for that purpose.

Gorbachev's last opportunity to bring about a rapid end to the arms race, or at least to magnify the strains on the Alliance, passed at Reykjavik in 1986. But Gorbachev seems to have felt trapped, as Khrushchev was over Berlin a quarter of a century earlier, between his hawks and his

doves. He may well have understood the vulnerability of the American negotiating position and he almost surely had by then grasped the imperatives of his own. But his military advisers probably told him that if he agreed to dismantle all missiles while SDI ran free, some future American administration might break the agreement and achieve a decisive advantage over a greatly reduced (or, in the extreme case, dismantled) Soviet missile force. This was technically true, but it was equally true that the Congress would almost certainly have refused to fund SDI if an arms control agreement based on the Reykjavik formula had brought about the elimination of all missiles. And it neglected the benefits to the Soviet Union of the nearly inevitable controversy which the Reykjavik plan would have generated between the United States and all the other nuclear powers.

Posterity is always more given to assigning the blame for failure to individuals than to circumstances. In fact, Gorbachev's foreign policy—especially on arms control—was a subtle updating of postwar Soviet strategy. And it was well on the way to denuclearizing Germany and establishing a premise for a more national German policy on two grounds: that America was less likely to risk nuclear war for a country which shrank from the risks of a nuclear strategy in its own defense, and that Germany might be increasingly tempted to buttress denuclearization with some kind of special status for itself.

Gorbachev offered a mechanism for the weakening of the Atlantic Alliance in a speech to the Council of Europe in 1989, when he put forward his idea of a Common European Home—a vague structure extending from Vancouver to Vladivostok in which everyone would be allied with everyone else, diluting the meaning of alliance to the point of irrelevance. What Gorbachev lacked, however, was time—the principal prerequisite in order for his policy to mature. Only some abrupt change would have enabled him to reallocate his priorities. But, after Reykjavik, he was forced to return to the time-consuming diplomatic process of 50 percent cuts in strategic forces and the zero option in intermediate-range missiles, which would take years to complete and were irrelevant to his basic problem—that the arms race was draining the Soviet Union of its substance.

By December 1988, Gorbachev had given up on the long-term gains almost within his grasp and retreated to making unilateral reductions in the Soviet armed forces. In a seminal speech at the United Nations on December 7, he announced unilateral cuts of 500,000 men and 10,000 tanks, including half of the tanks facing NATO. The rest of the forces stationed in Central Europe would be reorganized for purely defensive missions. Seeking to tranquilize China, Gorbachev also announced the



withdrawal of the "major portion" of Soviet forces in Mongolia. The cuts were explicitly stated to be "unilateral," although Gorbachev added somewhat plaintively: "We do hope that the United States and the Europeans will also take some steps."<sup>39</sup>

Gorbachev's spokesman, Gennadi Gerasimov, explained the rationale: "We are finally doing away with that endlessly repeated myth of the Soviet threat, the Warsaw Pact threat, of an attack on Europe."<sup>40</sup> But unilateral cuts of such magnitude signal either extraordinary self-confidence or exceptional weakness. At that point of its evolution, self-confidence was hardly a Soviet attribute. Such a gesture, inconceivable at any time in the previous fifty years, was also the ultimate vindication of the original version of Kennan's containment theory; America had built positions of strength and the Soviet Union was crumbling from within.

Statesmen need luck as much as they need good judgment. And fortune simply would not smile on Mikhail Gorbachev. On the very day of his dramatic U.N. speech, he had to break off his American visit and return to the Soviet Union. A devastating earthquake had struck Armenia, stealing the headlines from his dramatic abandonment of the arms race.

On the Chinese front, no arms control negotiations took place, nor did Beijing have any interest in them. The Chinese conducted old-fashioned diplomacy and identified a relaxation of tensions with some kind of political settlement. Gorbachev began his overture to Beijing by offering negotiations about improving relations. "I would like to affirm," he said in a speech in Vladivostok in June 1986, "that the Soviet Union is prepared—any time, at any level—to discuss with China questions of additional measures for creating an atmosphere of good-neighborliness. We hope that the border dividing—I would prefer to say, linking—us will soon become a line of peace and friendship."<sup>41</sup>

But there was no "psychiatric" school of diplomacy in Beijing prepared to settle for a change in tone. The Chinese leaders put forward three conditions for an improvement in relations: an end to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia; Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan; and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the Sino-Soviet border. These demands could not be met quickly. They required first acceptance by the Soviet leadership and then a prolonged period of negotiations before they could be implemented. It took Gorbachev the better part of three years to make enough progress on each of the Chinese conditions to induce the tough bargainers in Beijing to invite him there to discuss an overall improvement of relations.

Once again, Gorbachev was dogged by bad fortune. When he arrived in Beijing in May 1989, the student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square

were in full swing; his welcoming ceremony was interrupted by protests against his hosts. Protesters' shouts could be overheard later in the negotiating room of the Great Hall of the People. The world's attention was focused not on Beijing's relations with Moscow, but on the drama of the Chinese leadership struggling to hold on to power. The pace of events had once again outstripped Gorbachev's scope for accommodation.

Whatever problem he tackled, Gorbachev faced the same dilemma. He had come into office confronted by a restive Poland in which, since 1980, Solidarity had become an ever more potent factor. Suppressed by General Jaruzelski in 1981, Solidarity had re-emerged as a political force, which Jaruzelski could not ignore. In Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and East Germany, the Communist Parties' predominance was challenged by groups demanding more freedom and invoking Basket III of the Helsinki Accords on human rights. And periodic review meetings of the European Security Conference kept the issue alive.

The communist rulers of Eastern Europe found themselves in an ultimately insoluble quandary. To stanch their domestic pressures, they needed to pursue a more national policy, which in turn forced them to assert their independence from Moscow. But since they were perceived by their populations as tools of the Kremlin, a nationalist foreign policy was not enough to placate their publics. The communist leaders found themselves obliged to compensate for their lack of credibility by democratizing their internal structures. It quickly became obvious that the Communist Party—even where it still controlled the media—was not designed for democratic contests, being an instrument for seizing power and holding on to it on behalf of a minority. The communists knew how to rule with the help of the secret police, but not with the secret ballot. The communist rulers of Eastern Europe were thus caught in a vicious circle. The more nationalist their foreign policies, the greater became the demands for democratization; the more they democratized, the more intense would be the pressures to replace them.

The Soviet quandary was even more intractable. According to the Brezhnev Doctrine, the Kremlin should have quelled the incipient revolution that was gnawing at the satellite orbit. But Gorbachev was not only unsuited by temperament for such a role, it also would have undermined his entire foreign policy. For suppression of Eastern Europe would have solidified NATO and the Sino-American *de facto* coalition, and intensified the arms race. Gorbachev was increasingly facing a choice between political suicide and the slow erosion of his political power.

Gorbachev's remedy was to intensify liberalization. Ten years earlier, that might have worked; by the late 1980s, Gorbachev could not catch up

with the power curve. His rule therefore marked a gradual retreat from the Brezhnev Doctrine. Liberal communists took power in Hungary; Jaruzelski was permitted to deal with Solidarity in Poland. In July 1989, in a speech to the Council of Europe, Gorbachev seemed to abandon not only the Brezhnev Doctrine, stipulating the right of Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe, but the satellite orbit itself, by renouncing "spheres of influence":

Social and political orders in one country or another changed in the past and may change in the future. But this change is the exclusive affair of the people of that country and is their choice. . . . Any interference in domestic affairs and any attempts to restrict the sovereignty of states—friends, allies or any others—are inadmissible. . . . It is time to deposit in the archives the postulates of the cold war period, when Europe was regarded as an arena of confrontation, divided into "spheres of influence."<sup>42</sup>

The cost of maintaining the satellite orbit had become prohibitive. Even the Council of Europe speech sounded too oblique—though by historic Soviet standards it was clear enough. In October 1989, Gorbachev, on a visit to Finland, abandoned the Brezhnev Doctrine unambiguously. His spokesman, Gerasimov, joked to the press that Moscow had adopted the "Sinatra Doctrine" in Eastern Europe. "You know the Frank Sinatra song, 'I Did It My Way'? Hungary and Poland are doing it their way."<sup>43</sup>

It was too late to save the communists in Eastern Europe, or, for that matter, in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's gamble on liberalization was bound to fail. To the degree that the Communist Party had lost its monolithic character, it became demoralized. Liberalization proved incompatible with communist rule—the communists could not turn themselves into democrats without ceasing to be communists, an equation Gorbachev never understood, although Yeltsin did.

Also in October of 1989, Gorbachev visited Berlin to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the German Democratic Republic and, in the process, to urge its Stalinist leader, Erich Honecker, to pursue a more reform-minded policy. Clearly, he would not have come to such a celebration had he suspected that there would never be another one, as was reflected in his speech on that occasion:

We are constantly called on to liquidate this or that division. We often have to hear, "Let the U.S.S.R. get rid of the Berlin wall, then we'll believe in its peaceful intentions."

We don't idealize the order that has settled on Europe. But the fact is that until now the recognition of the postwar reality has insured peace on the continent. Every time the West has tried to reshape the postwar map of Europe, it has meant a worsening of the international situation.<sup>44</sup>

Yet only four weeks later, the Berlin Wall came down, and within ten months Gorbachev had agreed to the unification of Germany as part of NATO. By then, every communist government in the former satellite orbit had been overthrown, and the Warsaw Pact had collapsed. Yalta had been reversed. History had exposed as nonsense Khrushchev's boasts that communism would bury capitalism. The Soviet Union, which had exhausted itself for forty years by seeking to undermine Western cohesion by threats and pressures, was reduced to soliciting Western goodwill because it needed Western aid more than it needed the satellite orbit. On July 14, 1989, Gorbachev appealed to the G-7 summit of the heads of government of the industrial democracies:

Our perestroika is inseparable from a policy aiming at our full participation in the world economy. The world can only gain from the opening up of a market as big as the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup>

Gorbachev had staked everything on two propositions: that liberalization would modernize the Soviet Union, and that the Soviet Union would then be able to hold its own internationally as a great power. Neither expectation was fulfilled and Gorbachev's domestic base collapsed as ignominiously as the satellite orbit had.

The Greek philosopher and mathematician Archimedes said: "Give me a place to stand and I will move the world." Revolutions consume their children because revolutionaries rarely understand that, after a certain point of social disintegration, there are no longer any fixed Archimedean points from which to exert leverage. Gorbachev started with the conviction that a reformed Communist Party could propel Soviet society into the modern world. But he could not bring himself to accept that communism was the problem, not the solution. For two generations, the Communist Party had suppressed independent thought and destroyed individual initiative. By 1990, central planning had ossified, and the various organizations designed to keep a check on every aspect of life were instead concluding nonaggression treaties with the very groups they were supposedly supervising. Discipline had turned into routine, and Gorbachev's attempt to liberate initiative unleashed chaos.

Gorbachev's difficulties began at the simplest level of attempting to

improve productivity and introducing some elements of market economics. Almost immediately, it became apparent that there is no accountability in a planned system and therefore the most essential prerequisite for an efficient economy is lacking. Stalinist theory postulated the dominance of a central plan, but the reality was quite different. What was called "the plan" was in fact such widespread collusion among the huge bureaucracies that it amounted to a massive confidence game to mislead the central authorities. The managers responsible for production, the ministries charged with distribution, and the planners supposedly issuing directives were all flying blind, since they had no idea what the demand might be and no way of adjusting their programs once these had been established. As a result, each unit of the system selected only minimal targets, covering up any shortfalls by making private deals with the other units behind the back of the formal central machinery. All incentives worked against innovation and this state of affairs could not be corrected because the supposed leaders found it nearly impossible to discern the true state of affairs in their society. The Soviet Union had reverted to the early history of the Russian state; it had turned itself into a gigantic Potemkin village.

Attempts at reform collapsed beneath the weight of the entrenched *status quo*, as had already happened to Khrushchev and later to Kosygin. Since at least 25 percent of the national budget went to subsidizing prices, no objective yardstick existed either for efficiency or for gauging economic demand. With goods allocated rather than purchased, corruption became the only expression of the market.

Gorbachev recognized the pervasive stagnation but lacked the imagination or skill to break through its built-in rigidities. And the various supervisory bodies of the system had, with the passage of time, turned into part of the problem. The Communist Party, once the instrument of revolution, had no function in an elaborated communist system other than to supervise what it did not understand—a problem it solved by colluding with what it was allegedly controlling. The communist elite had become a mandarin class of the privileged; theoretically in charge of the national orthodoxy, it concentrated on preserving its perquisites.

Gorbachev had based his reform program on two elements: *perestroika*—restructuring—to gain the support of the new technocrats, and *glasnost*—political liberalization—in order to enlist the long-tormented intelligentsia. But since there were no institutions for channeling free expression and generating genuine public debate, *glasnost* turned on itself. And since there were no free resources except those reserved for the military, living conditions did not improve. Thus Gorbachev gradually cut himself off from his institutional support without gaining broader

public backing. *Glasnost* increasingly clashed with *perestroika*. Even the attacks on previous leaders had their downside. In 1989, a young member of Gorbachev's staff who had been detailed to accompany me to the Kremlin remarked to me: "What all this means is that every Soviet citizen older than twenty-five has wasted his life."

The only groups which understood the need for reform—without, however, being prepared to embrace the remedy—were the security services. The KGB knew from its intelligence apparatus just how far the Soviet Union had fallen behind in the technological competition with the West. The armed forces had a professional stake in determining the capabilities of their principal adversary. Understanding the problem did not, however, lead to solutions. The security services shared much of Gorbachev's ambivalence. The KGB would support *glasnost*—political liberalization—only as long as this did not undermine civil discipline; and the military establishment felt at ease with *perestroika*—economic restructuring—only as long as Gorbachev did not attempt to squeeze new resources for his modernization program out of a reduction of the armed forces.

Gorbachev's first instinct, to turn the Communist Party into an instrument of reform, foundered on the rock of vested interests; his next move—to weaken, but still preserve, the communist structure—destroyed the fundamental instrument of Soviet rule. Two steps were involved: to move the locus of Gorbachev's power out of the Party and into the parallel structure of government, and to encourage a move toward regional and local autonomy.

Gorbachev miscalculated on both counts. Since Lenin, the Communist Party had been the sole policymaking body. The government was the executive organ implementing, but not designing, policy. The key Soviet position was always that of the general secretary of the Communist Party; from Lenin through Brezhnev, the communist leader rarely held a governmental office. The result was that the ambitious and enterprising gravitated to the communist hierarchy while the governmental structure attracted administrators without policy flair or even interest in designing policy. By shifting his base from the Communist Party to the governmental side of the Soviet system, Gorbachev had entrusted his revolution to an army of clerks.

Gorbachev's encouragement of regional autonomy led to similar deadlock. He found it impossible to reconcile his desire to create a popular alternative to communism with his Leninist distrust of the popular will. He therefore devised a system of essentially local elections in which national parties—other than the Communist Party—were proscribed. But

when, for the first time in Russian history, local and regional governments could be popularly elected, the sins of Russian history came home to roost. For 300 years, Russia had been incorporating nationalities in Europe, Asia, and in the Middle East but had failed to reconcile them to the ruling center. Not surprisingly, most of the newly elected non-Russian governments, which made up nearly half of the Soviet population, began to challenge their historical masters.

Gorbachev lacked reliable constituencies. He antagonized the vast network of vested interests characteristic of the Leninist state, but failed to attract new supporters because he could not bring himself to advance a viable alternative, either to communism or to the concept of the centralized state. Gorbachev had correctly identified the problems of his society, albeit through the blinkers of his inhuman system, thus keeping the solutions ever beyond his grasp. Like a man trapped in a room with perfectly translucent, unbreakable windows, Gorbachev could observe the outside world clearly enough, but was doomed by conditions within the room not to be able to comprehend exactly what he was seeing.

The longer *perestroika* and *glasnost* lasted, the more isolated and less confident Gorbachev became. The first time I met him, in early 1987, he was jaunty and exuded every confidence that the tinkering he was undertaking would make his country fit to resume its march toward supremacy. A year later, he had become less certain. "At any rate," he said, "the Soviet Union will never be the same again"—an oddly ambivalent statement about so Herculean an effort. When we met in early 1989, he told me how he and Shevardnadze had concluded sometime in the 1970s that the communist system needed to be changed from top to bottom. I asked how, as a communist, he had reached this conclusion. "Knowing what was wrong was easy," Gorbachev remarked. "Knowing what was right was the hard part."

Gorbachev never found the answer. During his last year in power, he was as a man caught in a nightmare, who sees a catastrophe bearing down on him but is unable to turn it or himself away from the encounter. Usually the purpose of concessions is to create a firebreak to preserve something that is considered essential. Gorbachev achieved the opposite. Each fitful new reform amounted to a half-measure and thereby accelerated the Soviet decline. Each concession created the threshold for the next. By 1990, the Baltic States seceded and the Soviet Union began to disintegrate. In what was surely the ultimate irony, Gorbachev's chief rival used the process by which the Russian Empire—acquired over three centuries—fell apart to overthrow Gorbachev himself. Acting in his capacity as the President of Russia, Yeltsin affirmed the independence of

Russia (and therefore, by implication, of the other Soviet republics), in effect abolishing the Soviet Union and, with it, Gorbachev's position as President of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev knew what his problems were but he acted both too fast and too slowly: too fast for the tolerance of his system, and too slowly to arrest the accelerating collapse.

In the 1980s, both superpowers needed time to restore themselves. Reagan's policies freed the energies of his society; Gorbachev's brought into the open the dysfunctions of his. America's problems were susceptible to changes of policy; in the Soviet Union, reform brought on an accelerating crisis of the system.

By 1991, the democracies had won the Cold War. But no sooner had they achieved far more than they had ever imagined possible than the original debate about the Cold War broke out all over again. Had the Soviet Union ever really been a threat? Would it not have gone into meltdown even without all the exertions of the Cold War? Had the Cold War been the invention of overwrought policymakers who were interrupting the underlying harmony of the international order?

In January 1990, *Time* magazine made Gorbachev "Man of the Decade," using the occasion to publish an article putting forth the essence of that thesis. "The doves in the Great Debate of the past 40 years were right all along," asserted the author.<sup>46</sup> The Soviet Empire had never been an actual threat. American policy either had been irrelevant or had delayed the Soviet upheaval. The democracies' policy over four decades deserved no significant credit, not even for changes in Soviet *foreign* policy. And if nothing had really been accomplished and events had just happened of their own accord, no lessons could be drawn from the collapse of the Soviet Empire—in particular, none that implied the need for American engagement in the creation of a new world order, which the end of the Cold War was making necessary. The American debate had come full circle. It was the old siren song of American isolationism—that America had not really won the Cold War but that the Soviet Union had lost it, and that four decades of effort had therefore been unnecessary because things would have worked out equally well—or perhaps better—had America left them alone.

Another version of the same reasoning held that there had indeed been a Cold War and that it had really been won, but the victory belonged to the *idea* of democracy, which would have prevailed regardless of the geostrategic measures surrounding the East-West conflict. That too was a version of escapism. Political democracy and the idea of liberty no doubt provided a rallying point for the disaffected—especially in Eastern Europe. Repression of the believers became increasingly difficult as the



morale of the governing groups weakened. But the demoralization was in the first instance caused by the stagnation of the system and the growing realization on the part of the communist elite—the higher their rank, the more likely they were to know the facts—that their system was in fact losing the struggle which it had proclaimed as its ultimate purpose throughout a long and brutal history. It was at best a chicken-and-egg proposition. The democratic idea rallied opposition to communism but could not by itself have carried the day so quickly without the collapse of communist foreign policy and, in the end, of communist society.

That was certainly the view of Marxist interpreters of international affairs, who were used to analyzing the “correlation of forces” and found it much easier to discover the causes of the Soviet collapse than American observers. In 1989, Fred Halliday, a Marxist professor at the London School of Economics, concluded that the balance of power had shifted in America’s favor.<sup>47</sup> Halliday considered this a tragedy but, unlike those self-tormenting Americans who were reluctant to credit their own country or its leaders, he acknowledged that a major shift in international politics had taken place during the Reagan years. America had succeeded in so raising the cost of Soviet involvement in the Third World that, in a chapter aptly titled “Socialism on the Defensive,” Halliday interpreted Gorbachev’s “new thinking” as an attempt to appease American pressures.

The strongest testimony to that effect came from Soviet sources. Starting in 1988, Soviet scholars began to acknowledge the Soviet responsibility for the breakdown of detente. Showing a greater understanding of the premises of detente than many American critics, the Soviet commentators pointed out that detente had been Washington’s way of keeping Moscow from challenging the existing military and political *status quo*. By violating this tacit understanding and seeking unilateral gains, the Brezhnev leadership had evoked the reaction of the Reagan years that proved to be more than the Soviet Union could handle.

One of the earliest and most interesting of such Soviet “revisionist” commentaries came from Vyacheslav Dashichev, a professor at the Institute for the Economy of the World Socialist System. In an article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on May 18, 1988,<sup>48</sup> Dashichev pointed out that the historic “miscalculations and incompetent approach of the Brezhnev leadership” had united all of the world’s other major powers into a coalition against the Soviet Union, and had provoked an arms race which the Soviet Union had not been able to afford. The traditional Soviet policy of standing apart from the world community while seeking to undermine it needed, therefore, to be abandoned. Dashichev wrote:

...as the West saw it, the Soviet leadership was actively exploiting detente to build up its own military forces, seeking military parity with the United States and in general with all the opposing powers—a fact without historical precedent. The United States, paralyzed by the Vietnam catastrophe, reacted sensitively to the expansion of Soviet influence in Africa, the Near East and other regions.

... The operation of the “feedback” effect placed the Soviet Union in an extremely difficult position in the foreign policy and economic respects. It was opposed by the major world powers—the United States, Britain, France, the FRG, Italy, Japan, Canada, and China. Opposition to their vastly superior potential was dangerously far beyond the USSR’s abilities.<sup>49</sup>

The same point was made by Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in a speech on July 25, 1988, to a meeting at the Soviet Foreign Ministry.<sup>50</sup> He enumerated such Soviet mistakes as the Afghan debacle, the feud with China, the long-standing underestimation of the European Community, the costly arms race, the 1983–84 walkout from the Geneva arms control talks, the Soviet decision to deploy the SS-20s in the first place, and the Soviet defense doctrine according to which the U.S.S.R. had to be as strong as any potential coalition of states against it. In other words, Shevardnadze challenged almost everything the Soviet Union had done for twenty-five years. It was an implicit recognition that Western policies had had a major impact on the Soviet Union, for had the democracies imposed no penalty for adventurism, Soviet policy could have been described as successful and not in need of reassessment.

The ending of the Cold War, sought by American policy through eight administrations of both political parties, was much as George Kennan had foreseen in 1947. Regardless of how accommodating a policy the West might have conducted, the Soviet system had needed the specter of a permanent outside enemy to justify the suffering it was imposing on its people and to maintain the armed forces and security apparatus essential to its rule. When, under the pressure of the cumulative Western response that culminated in the Reagan years, the Twenty-seventh Party Congress changed the official doctrine from coexistence to interdependence, the moral basis for domestic repression disappeared. Then it became evident, as Kennan had predicted, that the Soviet Union, whose citizens had been reared on discipline and could not readily switch to compromise and accommodation, would turn overnight from one of the strongest to “one of the weakest and most pitiable of national societies.”<sup>51</sup>

As noted earlier, Kennan eventually came to believe that his containment policy had been overmilitarized. A more accurate assessment would

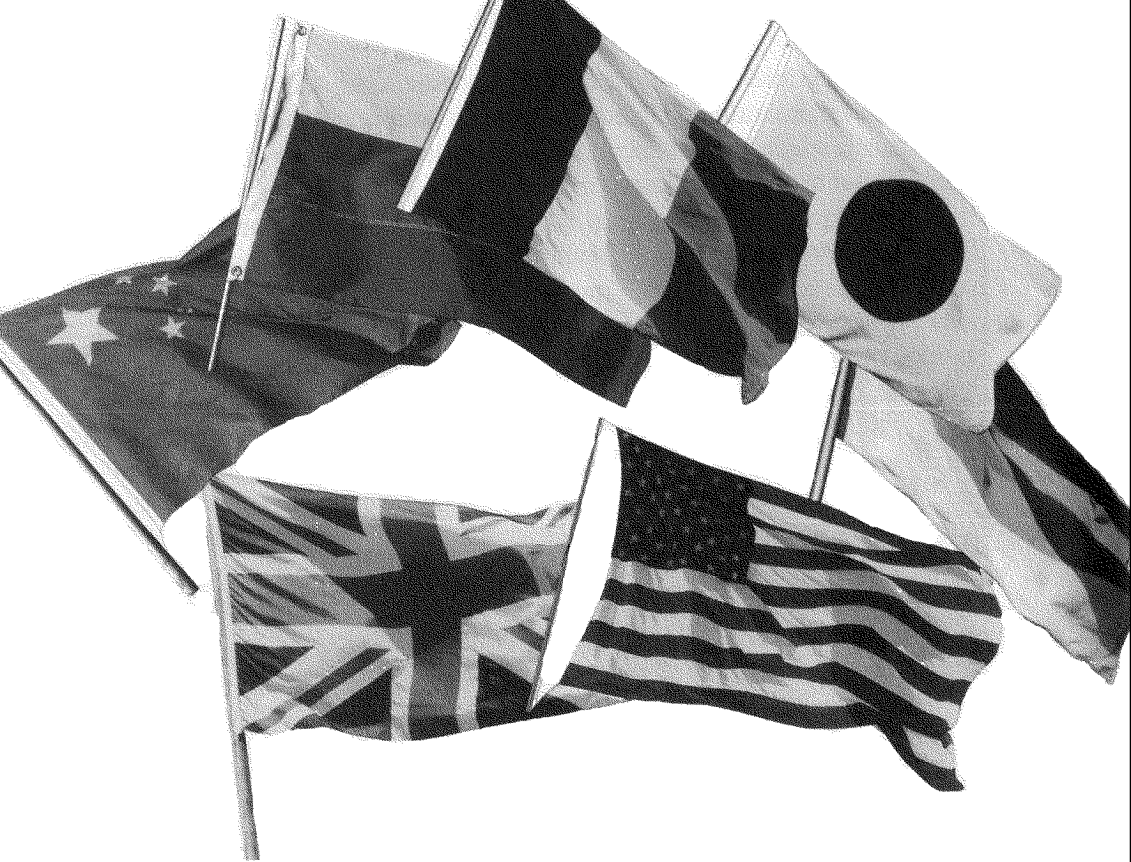
be that, as always, America had oscillated between overreliance on military strategy and emotional overdependence on the conversion of the adversary. I too had been critical of many of the individual policies which went under the name of containment. Yet the overall direction of American policy was remarkably farsighted and remained remarkably consistent throughout changes in administration and an astonishingly varied array of personalities.

Had America not organized resistance when a self-confident communist empire was acting as if it represented the wave of the future and was causing the peoples and leaders of the world to believe that this might be so, the Communist Parties, which were then already the largest single parties in postwar Europe, might well have prevailed. The series of crises over Berlin could not have been sustained, and there would have been more of them. Exploiting America's post-Vietnam trauma, the Kremlin sent proxy forces to Africa and its own troops into Afghanistan. It would have become far more assertive had America not protected the global balance of power and helped to rebuild democratic societies. That America did not perceive its role in terms of the balance of power compounded its pain and complicated the process, but it also served to bring about unprecedented dedication and creativity. Nor did it change the reality that it was America which had preserved the global equilibrium and therefore the peace of the world.

Victory in the Cold War was not, of course, the achievement of any single administration. It came about as a result of the confluence of forty years of American bipartisan effort and seventy years of communist ossification. The phenomenon of Reagan sprang from a fortuitous convergence of personality and opportunity: a decade earlier, he would have seemed too militant; a decade later, too one-track. The combination of ideological militancy to rally the American public and diplomatic flexibility, which conservatives would never have forgiven in another president, was exactly what was needed in the period of Soviet weakness and emerging self-doubt.

Yet the Reagan foreign policy was more in the nature of a brilliant sunset than of the dawn of a new era. The Cold War had been almost made to order to American preconceptions. There had been a dominant ideological challenge rendering universal maxims, however oversimplified, applicable to most of the world's problems. And there had been a clear and present military threat, and its source had been unambiguous. Even then, America's travails—from Suez to Vietnam—resulted from its application of universal principles to specific cases which proved inhospitable to them.

In the post–Cold War world, there is no overriding ideological challenge or, at this writing, single geostrategic confrontation. Almost every situation is a special case. Exceptionalism inspired America's foreign policy and gave the United States the fortitude to prevail in the Cold War. But it will require far more subtle applications in the multipolar world of the twenty-first century. America will finally have to face the challenge it has been able to avoid through most of its history: whether its traditional perception of itself as either strictly beacon or crusader still defines its choices or limits them; whether, in short, it must at last develop some definition of its national interest.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

# The New World Order Reconsidered

By the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, Wilsonianism seemed triumphant. The communist ideological and the Soviet geopolitical challenges had been overcome simultaneously. The objective of moral opposition to communism had merged with the geopolitical task of resisting Soviet expansionism. No wonder that President Bush proclaimed his hope for a new world order in classically Wilsonian terms:

We have a vision of a new partnership of nations that transcends the Cold War. A partnership based on consultation, cooperation, and collective action, especially through international and regional organizations. A partnership united by principle and the rule of law and supported by

an equitable sharing of both cost and commitment. A partnership whose goals are to increase democracy, increase prosperity, increase the peace, and reduce arms.<sup>1</sup>

Bush's Democratic successor, President Bill Clinton, expressed America's goals in very similar terms, expounding on the theme of "enlarging democracy":

In a new era of peril and opportunity, our overriding purpose must be to expand and strengthen the world's community of market-based democracies. During the Cold War, we sought to contain a threat to survival of free institutions. Now we seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those free institutions, for our dream is of a day when the opinions and energies of every person in the world will be given full expression in a world of thriving democracies that cooperate with each other and live in peace.<sup>2</sup>

For the third time in this century, America thus proclaimed its intention to build a new world order by applying its domestic values to the world at large. And, for the third time, America seemed to tower over the international stage. In 1918, Wilson had overshadowed a Paris Peace Conference at which America's allies were too dependent on it to insist on voicing their misgivings. Toward the end of the Second World War, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Truman seemed to be in a position to recast the entire globe on the American model.

The end of the Cold War produced an even greater temptation to recast the international environment in America's image. Wilson had been constrained by isolationism at home, and Truman had come up against Stalinist expansionism. In the post-Cold War world, the United States is the only remaining superpower with the capacity to intervene in every part of the globe. Yet power has become more diffuse and the issues to which military force is relevant have diminished. Victory in the Cold War has propelled America into a world which bears many similarities to the European state system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to practices which American statesmen and thinkers have consistently questioned. The absence of both an overriding ideological or strategic threat frees nations to pursue foreign policies based increasingly on their immediate national interest. In an international system characterized by perhaps five or six major powers and a multiplicity of smaller states, order will have to emerge much as it did in past centuries from a reconciliation and balancing of competing national interests.