

National Security Strategy: Evil Empire, 1980-1991

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Overview We turn to the final years of the Cold War, the massive military buildup under Reagan, the last confrontation with the USSR, and the disintegration of the Soviet state. We take a brief look at the major questions about the Cold War.

My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.

Ronald Reagan, during a microphone test in 1984

1 Reagan's Foreign Policy

Reagan's foreign policy was straightforward—oppose the Soviets anytime, anywhere. If there was a name to it, it would be *peace through strength*. “The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren't engaged in the game of dominoes, there wouldn't be any hotspots in the world.” Then he declared the USSR an **evil empire**, refused Brezhnev's request to talk about arms reductions, and went on to lead the God's chosen People (as he called the U.S. public) into a great struggle according to a “divine plan.”

The “divine plan” turned out to be somewhat prosaic and consisted mostly in increasing Carter's \$1.2 trillion defense budget to \$1.6 trillion, a significant jump, but not radically different from what Carter had projected. The U.S. had not stood idly by during the 1970s despite the claims of the critics. The strategic doctrine didn't change much either. Reagan did not rewrite Carter's declaratory strategy (countervailing) but moved seriously to implement its war plans. The early years of his administration were spent trying to purchase the C3 system and forces necessary to implement the countervailing strategy. In addition, Reagan's National Security Decision Document (still classified) seems to have emphasized the decapitation mission even more. As a throwback to the 1950s, the U.S. was said to be able to “prevail” in protracted nuclear wars, and this was what DOD planned for in 1982 as testified by Weinberger.

1.1 Strategic Defense Initiative

By 1983 the President had decided to launch a R&D program to determine whether technology could make nuclear weapons obsolete. The program he announced on March 23, 1983 quickly became known as **Star Wars**, although its formal title was the **Strategic Defense Initiative** (SDI). The program caused great controversy mostly because many thought it infeasible (that is, with existing technology such a system could not be built) and destabilizing (that is, it gave the Soviets an incentive to try to destroy it in a crisis). Briefly, the SDI research program was about finding ways of intercepting incoming strategic missiles and warheads.

Recall from our discussion of thermonuclear war that there were two main issues that had to be decided: (i) when to destroy the ballistic missiles; and (ii) what to protect—population centers or military targets. Recall that there are four phases

in the trajectory of a ballistic missile that could be targeted: (i) boost phase, when the missile is launched through the atmosphere; (ii) post-boost, when rockets are no longer accelerating, warheads still on bus or flying along it; (iii) mid-course, when MIRVs and accompanying decoys are flying separately through space; (iv) terminal, when warheads descend through atmosphere on targets.

Most advantageous to intercept during the boost or post-boost phases because with a single blow all warheads are destroyed. However, this requires a computer to react since there is no time for a human to make a decision. The mid-course phase allows for longer decision time but this is most difficult to intercept in because of tens of thousands of decoys flying along with real warheads, making it easy to overwhelm the defenses. In the terminal phase, warheads are easier to tell from decoys (they are heavier so they fall through atmosphere faster because light decoys slow down as they encounter resistance) and can be destroyed by very fast defensive weapons. However, since they are now over the defender's territory, the explosions and accompanying debris will damage whatever happens to be on the surface below.

This means that the terminal phase could not be used to defend cities (for large-yield devices would easily wipe out entire cities even if detonated at very high altitudes). Generally, even supporters of SDI soon agreed that the system would be infeasible if it were meant to protect cities. Such a system would need to be completely foolproof for even if a tiny percent of incoming missiles survived, every major city in the U.S. would be wiped out anyway. The system to defend population centers also required space-based weapons because of the need to intercept the missiles during the first three phases.

Defending hardened silos, on the other hand, was feasible. The system did not have to be 100% accurate and fool-proof. Because of the large number of silos and the need to spend about 2 warheads per silo in order to secure its destruction, even if some number of warheads penetrated the defenses, a large number of ICBMs would still survive for a full retaliatory strike. When defending silos, weapons could be ground-based for the terminal phase could be used for intercepting the warheads. The problem, of course, was that the public did not want to spend a lot of money on this type of defense, it wanted the other.

The two criteria for judging any ballistic missile defense (BMD) system were proposed by Paul Nitze and were generally accepted by both skeptics and supporters: (i) lack of vulnerability—the system would not be easy to damage by Soviets who would definitely make serious attempts to do so—important both to ensure it would actually work but also for crisis stability for this would remove the incentive to destroy it preemptively; and (ii) favorable cost-exchange ratio—meaning simply it would not be cheaper for Soviets to find ways to penetrate the defense than it would be for U.S. to stop their moves—obviously stupid to spend more improving the defense than Soviets would spend on defeating it, but also dangerous for it would give Soviets incentives to actively pursue an arms race in order to spend the U.S. into oblivion.

Eventually, the Bush administration scrapped SDI in favor of a much smaller system called GPALS (Global Protection Against Limited Strikes) which was meant to provide effective defense against a small number of missiles whatever their origin. This was an acknowledgement of the simple fact that the U.S. had no way of protecting itself against a massive nuclear attack by the USSR in which tens of thousands of flying objects would be hurtling over the North Pole toward the American mainland. Even the small system wasn't ready when suddenly and without warning the Cold War ended.

1.2 Spreading Freedom: Low-Intensity Conflicts

Two doctrinal statements outlined the essentials of Reagan's foreign policy and how he proposed to deal with the communist threat.

First, in the early 1980s, the hawkish U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Jeane Kirkpatrick sought to justify American support for right-wing third-world dictatorships (that tended to have abysmal human rights records) by arguing that these were the lesser of two evils when compared to communist governments. The **Kirkpatrick Doctrine** tried to distinguish between **totalitarian** and **authoritarian** regimes, the difference between the two being one in degree, not in kind. The totalitarian (communist) regimes were argued to be (i) more intrusive because of the pervasive propaganda that attempted to control what people thought and because of their attack on alternative modes of association not sanctioned by the state, like religion and marriage; (ii) more often backed by force, or at least by large scale repression complete with labor camps; and (iii) more stable than authoritarian ones, and hence likely to present a challenge over a long period of time. Hence, she argued, totalitarian regimes are more dangerous, and therefore the U.S. is justified in supporting authoritarian regimes if they resist groups with totalitarian tendencies. Of course, such nice distinctions and dubious extensions to the domino theory are appropriate for parlor games, not serious national security. There is no doubt that this doctrine was simply rationalizing opposition to the Soviets even under conditions that required cooperation with rather unsavory characters.

Reagan's policy, as you should recall, rested entirely on opposing the Soviet Union. To that end, he announced his own **Reagan Doctrine** in his 1985 State of the Union address where he stated that

Our mission is to nourish and defend freedom and democracy, and to communicate these ideals everywhere we can. [...] We cannot play innocents abroad in a world that's not innocent; nor can we be passive when freedom is under seige. Without resources, diplomacy cannot succeed. Our security assistance programs help friendly governments defend themselves and give them confidence to work for peace. [...] we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported

aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth. [...] Support for freedom fighters is self-defense.

This called for spending and support, perhaps even direct military support, for such fights, and maybe direct involvement in these conflicts. But the U.S. public was perceived by many to be in the grasp of the **Vietnam syndrome**, a rhetorical illusion according to which public opinion would be opposed to any wars that may look even remotely like the Vietnam War. (Whether there really was such a syndrome is a matter of debate, but in 1991 Bush declared it expunged by the Gulf War.) The administration was unwilling to test the public's mood for such adventures in faraway places, so it had to resort to supplying money, arms, and diplomatic support to groups fighting communist-supported enemies.

This was the time where the strategy of **low-intensity conflicts** (LIC) saw much development. The idea was that since massive military involvement was not feasible, the U.S.-supported forces would have to depend on guerilla tactics and turn the tables on the communist governments they resisted. In other words, small, specially-trained counterinsurgency forces (native or American) would wear down through guerilla struggle their opponents over a long period of time. This was an attempt to turn communist tactics against the communists in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Nicaragua, and Angola.

LICs had many critics, who pointed out that such involvement could easily escalate (as in Vietnam, where American involvement began with advising ARVN); that it was absurd to spend resources on faraway conflicts in areas where the U.S. interests were, at best, dim; and that the LIC tactics were too vague and open-ended (the military's criticism).

A more serious split occurred in the administration itself. While the Secretary of State **George Schultz** was an ardent believer in the threat to use force (and even actual use of force in emerging nations to make threat more credible), Secretary of Defense **Caspar Weinberger** thought otherwise. In November 1984, Weinberger made a remarkable speech that publicly stated the doctrine of American military involvement. This became the basis of the popular **Powell Doctrine** of the 1990s (named after Colin Powell) and was the official U.S. doctrine until September 2002. This envisioned the use of force only when specific conditions were met: (i) assurance of long-term public and congressional support; (ii) guarantee of "whole-hearted" commitment with full intention of winning; (iii) a clear definition of the objectives, and (iv) a clear exit strategy. Schultz blocked the list as unremarkable and asked why the military was asking for a \$300-million budget when it apparently did not intend to fight.

As we have discussed before, such a strategy would make a military intervention by the U.S. highly unlikely (it was not that easy to secure guarantees of long-term public support, and there will always be legitimate disagreements about objectives). This would tend to encourage challenges to American interests. However, once in-

volvement begins, it would be with overwhelming force, which means that challenges that do end up provoking the U.S. would be extremely unlikely to prevail. Such a strategy exposed the U.S. to regional adversaries who could pursue their goals and push hard as long as they did not go too far to present a clear danger to the U.S. As we shall see, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait may have been an instance of such behavior where Hussein went too far, triggering the overwhelming military response. On the balance, I would have to say that such a conservative policy is likely to permit many encroachments on U.S. interests.

With the public in no mood to support a military that was reluctant to engage without its commitment, the administration had to resort to sending money and arms to the groups that were on the American side. This they did in Nicaragua (Contras), Angola (UNITA), and Afghanistan (mujahideen). The Nicaraguan affair turned ugly.

1.3 The Iran/Contras Scandal

Recall now that in Nicaragua the Marxist Sandinistas had come to power (with the direct aid of the Cubans) in 1979, and brushed away Carter's attempts to bribe them. Within a year, however, conflicts emerged as the Sandinistas consolidated their grip on power, provoking fears that they were turning the country into a communist state. In November 1981, Reagan authorized \$19 million to train and equip Nicaraguan exiles, or "contras," to fight the new regime. The CIA trained these remnants of the Somoza National Guard in southern U.S., then shipped them through Honduras and Costa Rica to fight in Nicaragua. When the Sandinistas responded by building a 65,000 military with help from Soviets and the Western Europeans, they succeeded in inflicting heavy defeats upon the Contras. The CIA began assisting the guerillas by taking over operations that destroyed oil refineries, harbors, and aimed at assassinating Nicaraguan officials. The U.S. also imposed a full trade embargo in May 1985.

The Sandinistas fought viciously: their troops committed massacres, and there were widespread reports of torture in their prisons. But the Contras were not peachy: they indulged in rape, summary executions, and indiscriminate killings as well. In 1982, under pressure from Congress, the State Department finally labeled the Contras terrorists. In December, Congress (which had gotten wind of CIA's secret and illegal activities) forbade all aid to the Contras, as well as any action by CIA, Department of Defense, or any government agency. This cut off legal sources of funds for such aid. The Reagan administration, however, retained its support for the Contras, and the question became how to find some way to fund them without Congressional oversight.

The administration ended up secretly selling arms to Iran and diverting the proceeds to the Contras. Iran, deep in the war with Iraq, welcomed the idea of getting some weapons. The problem was that it was under U.N. sanctions and Congress

itself had prohibited selling arms to Iran. As it happened, Iranian sympathizers in Lebanon captured and held some Americans hostage, and so selling arms to Iran would provide dual benefit to the U.S.: the hostages would be released, and the money could be used for the Contras since the entire deal had to be done illegally on account of the various obstacles in supplying Iran. Initially, Israel (of all countries) sent some American missiles between August and November 1985, but the Iranians did not like their quality, and the U.S. started dealing with them directly. In the end, somewhere around 1,500 missiles were transferred to Iran, the hostages were released, and the proceeds from the sale were diverted to the Contras via Oliver North, an aide to National Security Advisor Poindexter.

This violated Congressional acts that had prohibited such things both in 1982 and 1984 (Boland Amendment). Further, in 1984 the Sandinistas had held national elections (which they won) that were certified by independent observers as having been free and fair, undermining the legitimacy of the Contras. However, Reagan's administration rejected the elections as fraudulent and initiated the trade embargo in May 1985.

The cover of the scheme blew in November 1986 when a Lebanese magazine published a report about the sale of American weapons to Iran in return for the hostages. The Contras link came to light when a plane carrying weapons for the Contras was shot down over Nicaragua. To everyone's amazement, Reagan came off clean by claiming he had no knowledge of the so-called Iran/Contra Affair, and the Tower Commission reported that it did not have enough evidence to implicate the President. This was not surprising: North had begun shredding documents as early as November 21. North took much of the blame along with Poindexter, but their convictions were overturned on appeal because some testimony had violated their Fifth Amendment rights.

On June 27, 1986 the International Court of Justice found in favor of Nicaragua, condemned the U.S. for supporting the Contras, and ordered the U.S. to pay restitution, which it refused. The U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution to force it to pay (after the U.S. vetoed a similar attempt in the Security Council), but nothing happened. No wonder the U.S. does not take kindly to either the ICJ or the UNGA. In the end, the Contras failed, but in 1990 the Sandinistas also lost power when a center-right coalition won the elections. The Contras were disarmed, disbanded, and integrated into Nicaraguan society.

As for the Iran-Iraq War, it ended in stalemate. Initially, Iraq chalked up significant victories and it managed to advance deep into Iranian territory. However in 1982, Iran recovered and then began dislodging Iraq from the conquered lands. With Iraq's fortunes reversed, the U.S. switched to open support for Saddam Hussein's regime and engaged in several naval battles with Iranian forces in the gulf. (On 7/3/88 the USS cruiser *Vincennes* accidentally downed a civilian Iranian airliner killing all 290 passengers on board.)

When it became clear that they could not win, the Iraqis offered to end the war,

but the Iranians refused. What followed then were six years of extreme brutality, including the use of chemical weapons by Iraq, and costly human-wave attacks by Iran (which also used children to clear mine-fields). There was little superpower involvement until Iran made significant gains. The USSR began supplying Iraq, along with Britain and Germany, and, as we have seen, the U.S. sold arms to Iran despite its preference for Hussein (as the lesser of the two evils). By 1984 the so-called tanker war was causing extreme disruption in the world supply of oil, leading both the USSR and the U.S. to send tankers and forces to the gulf.

Iraq developed and used chemical weapons during the war. It also began developing a nuclear program centered at the Osirak reactor. The Iranians tried to destroy it without success in September 1980, but Israel finished the job on 7/7/81, ending (at least for the time being) the potential nuclear threat from Iraq. In 1988 the war was again reversed and the Iraqis gained the upper hand, prompting the Iranians to finally agree to end hostilities.

The war ended on August 20, 1988, leaving both countries devastated and in debt. The human toll is estimated to about million dead, many more wounded, and millions refugees. Despite its military victory, Iraq failed to secure any of its objectives: the Iranian Islamic revolution was not stifled, leaving the Sunni minority in Iraq (from which Saddam and most of his Baath Party socialists came) vulnerable to the Shia majority presumably friendly to Shiite Iran; and, of course, Iraq did not conquer Khuzistan and its oil. Even though Arab Iraq was supported by most Arab states against non-Arab (Persian) Iran, the war left it in great economic distress, including a major debt (\$14 billion) owed to Kuwait, which may have been among the reasons for the 1990 invasion.

1.4 Lebanon and Grenada

The administration did deploy American forces, the two most famous instances are sending the Marines to Lebanon, and the invasion of Grenada.

In mid-1982 Israel invaded Lebanon to destroy the Syrian missiles stationed there. The Israelis drove into Beirut, seizing the opportunity to dislodge Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that was headquartered there. Israel soon found itself bogged down in Lebanese politics and the IDF was hampered by dissent at home and Soviet-supplied Syrian weapons. Finally, through U.S. pressure the Israelis agreed to withdraw when the PLO left Beirut to go into exile. The U.S. forces were part of an international peacekeeping force, and were moved into Beirut to separate the fighting Christian and Muslim factions in the city (Lebanese Christians had massacred Palestinians).

On October 23, 1983, a terrorist suicide bomber (likely linked to Hezbollah), killed 241 Americans, mostly Marines, in their barracks. Almost simultaneously another one blew up the French Paratrooper barracks, killing 58. Although initially Reagan pledged to stay in Lebanon, but when it came time to respond militarily to

the attack, Weinberger halted the plans to target barracks of Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRG) that were training Hezbollah fighters (because he thought the political fallout in the region would harm the U.S.). At least the French launched air strikes against IRG positions, a rare instance of France acting with more assertiveness than America! The Marines were moved off-shore to safety, and then withdrawn in February 1984 along with the rest of the peacekeeping force. Lebanon descended into a bloody civil war until the Soviet-backed Syria finally gained the upper hand, occupied it, and turned it into a client state. It would be incorrect to chalk up the withdrawal to loss of nerve or the putative Vietnam syndrome as it was not caused by public opposition, and there never really was much more that could have been done. Still, this withdrawal is frequently, if erroneously, cited as evidence that the U.S. could be forced to back out if it suffers “enough” casualties.

Grenada, on the other hand, was unlike Lebanon because when Reagan sent the military there, it was not to sit tight and present a convenient target, but to achieve a particular goal. Why would the U.S. want to depose the government of this island nation? In 1979, Maurice Bishop came to power after a bloodless coup, and led his leftist government into closer relations with Cuba and the USSR. Once he started building an airport, Reagan accused him of facilitating a Cuban military buildup in the Caribbean. This was such an obvious preparation of the ground for invasion that Bishop came to Washington to quiet the rumors and deflect the danger. However, on October 19, 1983 Bishop was overthrown and executed by an extremist Marxist group in the army. This was now an overt seizure of power through violence by communist sympathizers, right in America’s backyard. On October 25, 1983, the U.S. invaded Grenada (Operation Urgent Fury), supposedly to save 600 U.S. students but really to remove the regime. There was some resistance and sporadic fighting for several days but the 1,200 Grenadians (assisted by about 800 Cubans) could not present much of an obstacle to the 7,000-strong American forces. The government collapsed after six days of fighting, and when a new anti-communist one was appointed by the governor-general, the American forces withdrew (mid-December). The casualties were 19 dead Americans, 49 Grenadians, and 20 Cubans, along with 45 civilians.

The “Iron Lady” Margaret Thatcher (British PM), a close friend of the President, criticized the invasion. It was not because she was squeamish: in 1982 Britain had rescued a pile of rocks from Argentina in the Falklands War. Rather, the British were miffed because the U.S. apparently had failed to ask for their permission: Queen Elizabeth II was still the nominal head of state of Grenada!¹

¹Amusingly, Reagan claimed that the U.S. had invaded to secure Grenada’s nutmeg because “You can’t make eggnog without nutmeg” (Grenada happens to be one of the world’s largest exporters of nutmeg).

2 The Fall of the Soviet Union

Finally, Reagan agreed to meet the Soviets. He told Dobrynin (Soviet ambassador to Washington) that “there are some problems that can and should be tackled now. Probably, people in the Soviet Union regard me as a crazy warmonger, but I don’t want war. . . . We should make a fresh start.” The opportunity for a fresh start arrived in March 1985, when **Mikhail Gorbachev** became the party leader. Brezhnev had died in 1982 and two old ailing communists (Andropov, a long-time KGB chief and then Chernenko) came to power only to die in office quickly. Both were fond of using old Stalinist tactics of jailing, exiling, or confining dissenters to insane asylums. Their unimaginative leadership did nothing to help the stumbling economy. “Gorby”, on the other hand, represented a new breed of communist—highly educated, aware that the Soviet Union had to revamp its economy as quickly as possible, and realizing that to do that, it had to end the Cold War on almost any terms. Gorbachev then almost single-handedly ended the Cold War without realizing that he was bringing down the Soviet empire with it.

2.1 Mikhail Gorbachev and Reagan

Gorby was one of a group of reform-minded communists who pushed through “new thinking.” This was not because they were afraid of Reagan’s military buildup but because they understood well that the strict command economic system of the USSR could not keep up with the West, and had to adjust to the technological changes.

Gorby proposed a “radical reform” at the 27th Communist Party Congress in February, 1986. The reform would relax state ownership a bit and even allow some profit-making for managers; it would even allow previously unthinkable private co-operatives and family-owned businesses. There were two lines to this policy: (i) **perestroika** (restructuring of the economy); and (ii) **glasnost** (publicity and political openness to encourage individual initiative). By 1989, the world’s largest McDonald’s was selling “bol’shi” Macs in Moscow!

But the initial steps in 1985-6 were slow and uncertain. From the U.S. side, it wasn’t at all clear that the Russians were sincere—maybe this was another propaganda ploy of the type they were fond of devising. In Afghanistan, for example, Gorby initially escalated the war, hoping perhaps for a clear military victory. Only after this last bid to defeat the guerrillas failed did he reverse course and decide to withdraw. The withdrawal decision was announced in February 1988 and the Red Army took roughly a year to leave.

The war in Afghanistan had cost the Russians about 22,000 military dead but it had killed 10% of the Afghanistan’s male population and a grand total of about 1.5 million, most of them non-combatants. The weak Soviet-supported regime wobbled for a while and was then overthrown, with the country descending into a vicious

civil war between various warlords with private armies. Only when the **Taliban** emerged and were able to subdue most, but not all, of them was the country pacified under one of the scariest fundamentalist regimes.

Anyway, in 1985 it was still unclear that the Russians were serious. As late as 1982 the NSDD 75 envisioned “long haul” containment and only hoped that the USSR would somehow (miraculously) become more pluralistic. But Gorbys reversed the priorities. Instead of making security required for political cooperation, as the Russians traditionally had done, he stated that “security can only be resolved through political means,” and that global problems could not be resolved through confrontation. The Soviets were asking for a new *détente*.

Gorbys met with a cautious Reagan in Geneva during November 1985, the first summit in 6 years. They only agreed in principle on a 50% cut in strategic forces. A year later (October 11, 1986), they shocked the entire world (and probably were also surprised themselves) when after only a 14-hour meeting in Iceland’s capital Reykjavik, they discovered that in principle they were ready to eliminate all intermediate-range missiles in Europe and drastically reduce the ICBMs, with the USSR ready to make significant compromises. Although the meeting concluded without an explicit agreement, it paved the way for the treaty signed the following year, when Gorbys came to Washington for the first time.

On December 8, 1987, the U.S. and USSR signed a truly historical pact, the INF Treaty (the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles). These missiles (ranges up to 3,000 miles) were not covered by the SALT agreements. For the first time, the nuclear powers did not just limit the numbers or reduced, but entirely eliminated a whole class of weapons.

In mid-1988 Reagan strolled arm-in-arm with Gorbys in the Red Square. And in December 1988, Gorbys arrived again in Washington where, in a speech at the U.N., he announced that the Soviet Union will unilaterally reduce its conventional forces in Europe by 500,000 men and 10,000 tanks in two years. The USSR was also rewriting its laws to prohibit persecution for political or religious beliefs. The withdrawal was precisely the type of costly signal that could have prevented the Cold War in 1945: the Soviet Union was taking a huge risk and exposing itself to the West thereby revealing its own lack of expansionist plans in Europe. Instead of demanding security before political engagement, the Russians had decided to use politics to gain their security.

Everything was happening too fast—nobody realized just how intent on changing the Soviets were. Brzezinski blasted the administration for “going bananas over Gorbachev simply because he happens to wear a clean shirt. . . and his wife doesn’t look like a beast.” The poor unimaginative Cold Warrior simply couldn’t grasp what was going on. But Reagan, who had only a few years ago labeled the USSR an “evil empire,” did, and took the olive branch offered by the Soviets.

In January 1989, **George H. W. Bush** became the 41 President of the United States. On November 19, 1990, the two countries signed the CFE (Conventional

Armed Forces in Europe) Treaty reducing Soviet presence there drastically and for the first time allowing NATO to match the Red Army in numbers, a principle long promoted by the West but always brushed aside by the Russians. No state or group of states was now able to launch a surprise attack on Europe—the Soviets were withdrawing, the Europeans could breathe again.

2.2 The Liberation of Eastern Europe

3/85	Mikhail Gorbachev becomes party leader
2/86	27th Communist Party Congress, Gorby's "radical reform"
10/86	Reykjavik, US/SU agree to eliminate all IRBMs in Europe
12/8/87	INF Treaty eliminates SR/IRBMs
12/88	Gorby announces to UN reduction of Soviet force in Europe
3/89	Gorbachev holds free elections in USSR
4/89	Poland legalizes non-communist movement Solidarity
6/4/89	Massacre in Beijing halts liberalization reforms in China
6/16/89	Hungary allows formation of independent political parties
7/89	Sinatra Doctrine; USSR will not intervene in Eastern Europe
8/24/89	Solidarity wins every contested seat for Polish parliament
9/89	Hungary opens border with Austria
11/9/89	East German government opens up the Berlin Wall
11/10/89	Communist government of Bulgaria falls
11/24/89	Communist government of Czechoslovakia falls
12/25/89	Communist government of Rumania falls after bloodshed
2/90	some noncommunists, inc. Boris Yeltsin, come to power in USSR
10/3/90	Unification of Germany
1/91	Interior Ministry troops kill several people in Lithuania
7/91	Gorbachev agrees with 9 republics to create a loose federation
8/1/91	Bush tells Ukrainian legislature not to seek independence
8/19/91	The Hardliners' Coup (fails)
12/91	Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus declare independence
12/25/91	Gorbachev resigns; Soviet Union dissolves
2/92	Bush welcomes Yeltsin as leader of new Russia

However, once the Red Army began leaving, the Eastern Europeans, who had long nourished hope for freedom, began stirring again. Was there going to be a repeat of the disasters of 1956 and 1968? In March 1989, two months after Bush took office, Gorby held the first free elections in the USSR. These brought humiliating defeats for the Communists. Discontent spread as the economic reforms failed to energize the economy. The multi-ethnic Soviet empire, where religious hatreds had been kept dormant by the totalitarian rule, now seethed with potential for violence.

Hardliners advised Gorby to call on the Red Army—only brutal Stalinist methods could prevent these old antagonisms from awakening.

The Eastern Europeans decided to give it a cautious try. In April 1989, Poland legalized the noncommunist movement Solidarity which had been outlawed since 1981. The eyes now turned to Moscow—would Gorby allow this? After all, the 1956 and 1968 invasions had been provoked by similar challenges. But in July 1989, Gorby destroyed the Brezhnev Doctrine and announced that it was “inadmissible” for one nation to forcibly “restrain the sovereignty” of another. A Moscow official dubbed the new policy the **Sinatra Doctrine**, referring to the popular song “My Way.” In other words, the Eastern Europeans could do things “their way.”

Solidarity tested the waters by demanding a dominant voice in the Polish government. The Polish communists asked Moscow for help and advice—nothing, they were on their own. The communists allowed limited elections and opened some seats in the parliament for contestation. It was expected that Solidarity would not win many of those because it had no access to state-controlled media, and fielded virtually unknown candidates. However, in August the communists suffered an embarrassing defeat when Solidarity won all of the contested seats! The Russian tanks did not roll in. The dam wall had been broken.

Reformers drove out the communists in Hungary. In September 1989, Hungary opened its border with Austria. Huge trains loaded with East Germans went to Hungary and from there, through the breach in the Iron Curtain, the Germans escaped to the West. Chaos reigned. The communist regime of Czechoslovakia collapsed. Then, on November 9, the East German government gave up and opened the Berlin Wall, which was attacked with bare hands and small hammers by jubilant citizens frenzied by the emotions pent up for over 40 years. The hateful symbol of division was no more.

The next day the communist government of Bulgaria fell. Everywhere except in Romania the changes were taking place with no blood (in Romania the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife were tried by a tribunal and summarily executed). In Eastern Europe, as if by a stroke of a magic pen, communism was no more. What the West could not accomplish with its entire nuclear, conventional, and economic might, the Europeans did with demonstrations and sheer force of will. Once the Red Army was gone, so was Soviet control, and so was communism.

Bush’s reactions were confused and contradictory. He stressed support for reforms but failed to deliver the massive economic aid the Soviets needed. Even Secretary of State Baker admitted that the Soviet leaders were panicked and in a hurry to solve their problems before the chaos in Eastern Europe engulfed them as well. This was ominous—a sudden breakup of the command structure of the Soviet Union would mean over 30,000 nuclear warheads being “orphaned” with the distinct possibility that they might be “adopted” by the wrong parents.

But the U.S. refused to grant MFN trading status to Russia. Instead, the U.S. gave it to China, which had just demonstrated conclusively its anti-democratic mind set

by crushing the nascent pro-democracy movement with tanks in June. The Soviets had to deliver more reforms to get there... and they did. For some time Bush & Gorby could not agree on what to do about Germany which was rushing headfirst toward unification amid the rubble of the Berlin Wall. The Soviets insisted that should Germany unify, it could not be a member of NATO. Ironically, the position in the West was complicated—Britain and France, who had supported unification throughout the Cold War, now secretly asked the Russians not to allow it, even Bush asked the East Germans to go about it slower. It turned out that despite their polemic and strong public stand on the issue, the West only wanted unification because it thought it would never happen.

But the movement was beyond anybody's control. The Germans, long disunited by the victors of World War II, persisted. Gorby gave up—he made a deal with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl whereby USSR agreed on unification in exchange for some pledges (e.g. limit of army to 370,000 troops, continue to be non-nuclear, agree to German-Polish border). Gorby now begged Bush to retain U.S. power in Europe to keep an eye on Germany. Unification could not be stopped and once the winning powers (Britain/France/Soviet Union/United States) formally consented, it became a fact on October 3, 1990. The process that people thought would take at least a decade to accomplish was done in months.

2.3 Internal Reforms and the 1991 Coup Attempt

In February 1990, Gorby broke the Communist power monopoly on power in the USSR and elections brought noncommunists to power, including **Boris Yeltsin**, who became the president of the Russian federation, the largest of the USSR's 15 republics. The reformers began pushing for more reforms and additional autonomy of the Russian Federation. The Baltic republics stirred as well but in January 1991, Interior Ministry troops killed several people in Lithuania—the USSR seemed to revert to its old ways of using force to keep it all together. Gorby tried to placate the hardliners with appointments and by slowing the pace of reforms. Yeltsin nevertheless forged ahead.

In July 1991, Gorby agreed with 9 republics to create a new loose union, where they would no longer be “socialist” but “sovereign.” Hours before the treaty was signed, on August 19, the hard-liners, fed up with the anti-Soviet reforms, struck. They seized Gorby, placed him under house arrest, proclaimed martial law, and attempted to clamp down on the press in Stalinist style. Yeltsin defied them. He held out and, because he was elected unlike his opponents (and even unlike Gorby), he retained the popular support and, more importantly, the support of the army. When the hardliners ordered the army to take control of Yeltsin's building and disperse the demonstrators who had gathered to support him and Gorby, the army refused.

The White House, amid all the confusion, nearly recognized the right-wing plotters because Bush was afraid that the refusal to do so might freeze the reforms. He

was saved by Gorby, who declined to join the plotters. Without him and the army, the coup failed, and Gorby assumed his command again... well, almost. His position was now seriously weakened for it was obvious that the only thing that had saved him was Yeltsin's support during the critical first hours of the coup.

The U.S. still didn't get it. The White House issued stories designed to make Yeltsin appear a boorish alcoholic. Bush threw the Ukrainian legislature in desperation on August 1, 1991 by telling it that Ukraine should stay part of the USSR when it had gathered to declare independence. But neither Bush nor Gorby could reign in the forces of nationalism and ethnicity, and these were pushing the Soviet constituent parts from the center.

In December 1991, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus agreed to form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) along loose lines and declared independence. By the end of the month, 11 of the 15 former Soviet republics joined them (without the Baltic states, which wanted complete separation, and Georgia, which had a reactionary government). On December 25, 1991, Gorby went on national TV and resigned—there was no longer a country to rule. The Soviet Red Flag which had flown above the Kremlin for over 70 years was pulled down and in its place the traditional white-blue-red Russian flag was raised. The Soviet Union, one of the world's greatest empires, the only other global superpower, was no more. In February 1992, Bush welcomed Yeltsin in Washington as the leader of new Russia. The Cold War was over.

3 Post Mortem on the Cold War

On December 25, 1991 the Cold War ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The huge unresolved questions are (a) was the USSR deterred from violent expansion by U.S. containment strategies, or was it not interested in expansion to begin with but only cared about security; and (b) did the USSR collapse because of strains imposed by American strategy or because of fundamental internal weaknesses?

These questions will be debated for a long time. The problem is that the absence of expansion may be attributed either to successful deterrence or lack of desire to do it. The evidence we have today suggests that right after the Second World War, the Soviets were too exhausted to confront the U.S. militarily in any direct serious manner, not to mention the American nuclear superiority. This would not have necessarily stopped them from using proxies, although it is by no means obvious that the conflicts that the U.S. got involved in were directed by the USSR. When the Soviets suffered several humiliating setbacks, they resolved to match American military power. After reaching parity in the late 1970s, they did embark on foreign adventures (e.g. Afghanistan). This suggests that while at the outset of the Cold War, the USSR might not have harbored expansionist tendencies, the consequent

dynamics of the rivalry with the U.S. ended up producing them.

As for the second question, we will not have an answer any time soon either. The non-violent collapse of the Soviet empire caught everyone by surprise. It is perhaps the only such dissolution in history. The evidence seems to show that the economic system was fundamentally flawed and the country was falling behind in development of technology and basic innovation. The suppression of information flows was not conducive to communication, dissemination of ideas, and improvements at any level of production. The desire to stifle possible dissent prevented the Soviets from adopting new communication technologies wholesale, further undermining productivity. To top it off, the system of state ownership removed incentives for innovation because people could not directly profit from their efforts. When effort is not tied to private gain, there is no incentive to engage in it. Without the threat of repression, and after Stalin there was little of that left, nobody would really want to work hard, ensuring further falling behind of the system. Hence, the communist system carries the seeds of its own destruction.

On the other hand, it is by no means clear that the Soviets would not have been able to continue for decades in their backward ways had they been able to divert more resources from military spending imposed by the American strategy. The satellites were costing them an arm and a leg, and supporting all those friendly movements and governments around the globe did not come cheap either. It appears then that the Soviet economy was strained to the breaking point by the global rivalry with the Americans, and hence the U.S. strategy hastened the inevitable collapse.

Was it worth it? The Cold War was expensive. It cost the U.S. around \$8 trillion in defense expenditures and the lives of around 100,000 people in various conflicts, with three times this number if we count the wounded. Although not near the magnitude of human losses of World War II, this was a significant price to pay for containing communism. And in the end, the communist system proved its own worst enemy.

This ignores the basic question: was it moral to allow the Soviet system to continue for one second longer than absolutely necessary. That is, should the U.S. have allowed it to live for decades until its eventual collapse or not? It seems to me that whatever the benefits of communist (socialist) rule, the moral superiority of the values championed by America was demonstrated unequivocally by the peoples of Eastern Europe: the moment the Soviet tanks were gone, they chose to go democratic politically and market economically. Both political freedom and economic liberalization went hand in hand. One does not need abstract theoretical debates to see that.

The worst legacy of the Cold War, however, is not its cost, for that can somehow be rationalized by exonerating some (not all!) leaders for having acted in good faith but on the basis of suspect information. The worst legacy is the world the war bequeathed to us that we now have to deal with.

Some of the most frequent arguments you hear today tend to deplore the ending

of the Cold War in one respect—the stability it had provided has now vanished. The claim is that the USSR, as dangerous an adversary as it was, possessed several characteristics that made deterrence likely to succeed and thereby made the international system relatively stable. Presumably, the new emergent adversaries do not have some (or all) of these characteristics, and so are much harder to deter, making the situation increasingly unstable, unpredictable, and dangerous.

For example, the Soviets could be counted on to (i) understand the “dangers and capabilities of modern weapons,” (ii) value the lives and well-being of the Soviet population and (iii) be reluctant to challenge the status quo once it was sufficiently palatable, which it had become in 1945. In contrast, the new adversaries, either lacking a state to support them, or resting their shaky rule on precarious enforcement, may (i) not understand weapons technology well, and so fail to appreciate the dangers; (ii) not care much about their populations, even if they had any—and many of them don’t, and (iii) be willing to challenge the status quo because they perceive it as unfavorable and degrading at an increasing rate. Therefore, they are less deterrable. And so, the Cold War was at least preferable from this perspective.

This is debatable. This comparison rests on a factually dubious historical interpretation. While it is true that there was no direct armed conflict with the Soviets, the Cold War period was neither stable, nor predictable, nor less dangerous than the one we’re in right now. Over 21 million people perished from 1945 to 1990 in various wars around the globe. The U.S. itself experienced both victory and defeat. To ignore the lessons of these “lesser wars” just because we didn’t die in a nuclear holocaust is not only stupid, it is irresponsible and immoral. The world we live in now was shaped to a large extent by the global rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and now we have to deal with the consequences simply because the U.S. won the Cold War and, as the sole remaining major participant, presents a readily identifiable target.