

Explaining the End of the Cold War

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Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?

❖ Jeremi Suri

Far-reaching historical change requires personal will and propitious circumstances. The end of the Cold War witnessed a remarkable confluence of this kind. Any persuasive explanation of how the international system changed in the late 1980s and early 1990s must give prominent place to leaders (particularly Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan) as well as the forces of economic and social change that transcended borders during this period. Scholars will forever debate the relative weight that different personal and circumstantial factors deserve in explaining the end of the Cold War, but they will always acknowledge some interplay between influential individuals and their times.

This review essay follows the approach used by James Joll to understand the twentieth century's Great War. In his book *The Origins of the First World War*, Joll proposes that instead of monocausal explanations on the one hand, or arguments that everything in the world is related to everything else on the other hand, the historian can organize information into a "pattern of concentric circles" that elucidates complex moments of major change.¹ Joll's framework provides a narrative structure for explaining how a series of narrow events (what I will call the "first circle") facilitated a broad set of changes (the "second circle") that ultimately transformed the international system (the "third circle.") Moving from the first small circle to the larger concentric circles, the issues confronting leaders become progressively more significant and dependent on previous choices ("path-dependent").

Following Joll's framework, a moment of "crisis" begins this historical reconstruction as the first circle of analysis. There were many periods of strain and uncertainty during the last decade of the Cold War, as there were during the years before the outbreak of World War I. Identifying one seminal moment of crisis does not diminish the importance of events in other periods. It does, however, highlight a particular turning point that appears, in retrospect,

1. James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1992), p. 6. I have revised and expanded Joll's framework for my purposes here.

to mark a significant fork in the road—a time that shook the old international order and set events on track for something unexpectedly new.

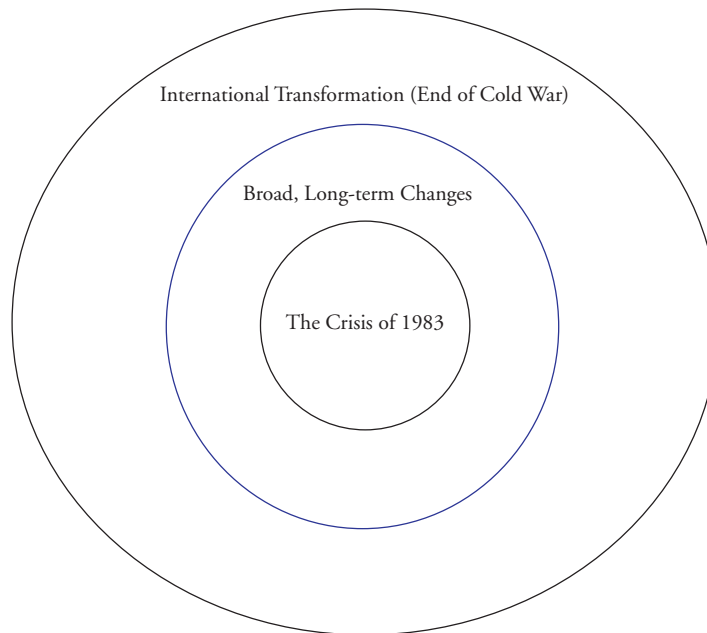
Previous choices—some ideological, some structural—surround the period in question, constituting the second circle of analysis. After the identified moment of crisis, deep social, economic, and cultural trends began to have a visible effect on decision making. Old orthodoxies suddenly became less powerful. Preexisting pressures for change finally gained some—though still limited—influence. In this sense the crisis of the first circle opened into the broad changes of the second circle.

Most policy makers did not fully understand the future implications of their decisions. The third circle of analysis examines the period when, to the surprise of many, the international system experienced a visible transformation. This was the point when the crisis of the first circle and the path-dependent choices of the second circle produced truly macrohistorical change. The entire environment for great-power politics shifted. The Cold War, as most contemporaries knew it, came to an end. Later, the Soviet Union collapsed as part of this same process. Previous periods of crisis and decision making contributed to the transformation, but developments in the third circle greatly magnified the effects of prior trends.

The Cold War did not have to end exactly the way it did, nor did the disintegration of the Soviet Union have to take the particular form it did. The decisions made by leaders had enormous impact, and the outcomes of those decisions remained uncertain until the last days of the Cold War. Political maneuvering, however, occurred in an environment of necessary transformation. Once events reached the third circle, leaders could not backtrack to the circumstances in either of the two previous circles.

This essay will categorize representative works from the vast literature on the end of the Cold War—historical studies, theoretical analyses, journalistic accounts, and memoirs—not by genre but by their placement in Joll's concentric circles of analysis. I will begin by discussing the texts focusing on the crisis of the early 1980s that affected both Soviet-American relations and circumstances within Moscow's empire. This is the inner first circle, where change became unavoidable. Next, I will analyze the accounts of long-term institutional and ideological trends that explain the policy choices made after the early 1980s. This is the second concentric circle—the “origins” of the end of the Cold War. Last, I will focus on the works that examine the consequences of decisions made in the middle and late 1980s. This is the third concentric circle—the narrative of how the Cold War ended the way it did.

Categorizing a large and often contentious body of literature in Joll's concentric circles tends to emphasize points of agreement rather than the many acute differences. Despite debates about the relative importance of particular



personalities, or ideological and material factors in general, the literature from the past decade helps us understand why and how the Cold War came to a sudden, mostly peaceful, conclusion. This interpretation surely will change over time as new sources become available and novel perspectives emerge. Many important questions about the end of the Cold War still await extensive analysis. Present shortcomings and future revisionism should not, however, distract us from the “lessons” of the past, no matter how tentative they may in fact be.

The literature on the end of the Cold War provides compelling evidence about the nature of international power in the twentieth century. Military strength and geographic largesse did not substitute for internal unity and economic development.² Some observers underestimated the magnitude and implications of Soviet internal decline during the 1980s. In retrospect, however, many agree that domestic weaknesses destabilized Moscow’s empire.³ The col-

2. Paul Kennedy has argued that military strength and geographic largesse (“imperial overstretch”) detract from internal unity and economic development. See Paul Kennedy, *Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870–1945: Eight Studies* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), pp. 13–39; and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), esp. p. 515.

3. For the strongest statement of this proposition, see John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 283–287. For one of the earliest and most prescient accounts of how internal weakness destabilized the Soviet empire, see Seweryn Bialer,

lapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War were not inevitable, but a conjunction of internal difficulties and external pressures made some kind of major alteration of great-power politics almost unavoidable. Accordingly, this essay begins with the crisis of the early 1980s—the first circle in our pattern of explanation.

The First Circle: The Crisis of 1983

The year 1983 was the second most dangerous time of the Cold War, surpassed only by 1962—the months surrounding the superpower confrontations in Berlin and Cuba. Historians have generally agreed that acute fears of nuclear Armageddon in the early 1960s pushed leaders in Washington and Moscow to seek cooperation in the most dangerous areas of conflict.⁴ The same appears to apply to the early 1980s. As war anxieties and related tensions reached a post-Cuban missile crisis peak in 1983, influential American and Soviet figures began to advocate peace overtures with newfound seriousness. The height of the so-called new Cold War was, in this sense, the beginning of what Don Oberdorfer calls “the turn” toward a world without Cold War.⁵

The escalation of superpower tensions in 1983 was explicit American policy. In a revealing memoir, Robert C. McFarlane—Ronald Reagan’s assistant for national security affairs—provides the text for National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 75, approved by the president on 17 January 1983. The policy document called for a three-pronged strategy: “external resistance to Soviet imperialism; internal pressure on the USSR to weaken the sources of Soviet imperialism; and negotiations to eliminate, on the basis of strict reciprocity, outstanding disagreements.” NSDD 75 recognized the value of negotiations, but only when Washington approached them from a position of unassailable strength: after a “steady, long-term growth in U.S. defense spending and capabilities—both nuclear and conventional.” The United States would also use “a major ideological/political offensive” to expose Soviet tyranny. Cooperation between the two superpowers could take shape, in this context,

The Soviet Paradox: External Expansion, Internal Decline (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), pp. 1–2, 40, 55–56.

4. See Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 322–398; Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 261–269; Anders Stephanson, “The United States,” in David Reynolds, ed., *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 24–25; and Gaddis, *We Now Know*, pp. 279–280.

5. Don Oberdorfer, *The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), esp. pp. 34–40.

only with concessions from Moscow. The Soviet Union, in the words of NSDD 75, had to “take the first step.”⁶

Following this logic, the president launched two direct challenges in March 1983. The first was ideological. Speaking on 8 March before the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, Reagan condemned the Soviet Union as “the focus of evil in the modern world.” He accused Communist leaders of perpetuating a “totalitarian darkness” that sought the “eventual domination of all peoples on the Earth.”⁷ This was strong rhetoric, even for the Cold War. Reagan, according to biographer Lou Cannon, really believed that the Communist leaders in the Soviet Union were evil. His staunch anti-Communism startled seasoned political observers accustomed to the careful language of diplomacy, not biblical passion. The president was serious about his earlier call for an international “crusade.”⁸

Two weeks later he addressed the country on television, explaining how he would protect the United States from the nuclear capabilities of its enemy. Instead of relying on U.S. forces to deter Soviet leaders from launching their weapons, Reagan proposed a space-based missile shield—called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in subsequent years. This vision offered “hope,” according to the president, in place of continued Cold War stalemate. It would allow Americans to rely on “the very strengths in technology that spawned our great industrial base and that have given us the quality of life we enjoy today.”⁹

Despite the massive strategic buildup and accumulation of national debt that Reagan oversaw during his first years in office, many observers believe

6. NSDD 75, 17 January 1983, reprinted in Robert C. McFarlane, *Special Trust* (New York: Cadell and Davies, 1994), pp. 372–380. Richard Pipes, serving as Reagan’s national security council assistant for Russian and East European affairs, wrote the first draft of NSDD 75 in 1982. Pipes expands on the logic behind NSDD 75 in his article “Can the Soviet Union Reform?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Fall 1984), pp. 47–61.

7. Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, 8 March 1983, *Public Papers of the Presidents: Ronald Reagan* (hereinafter PPP:RR), 1983, Vol. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1984) pp. 362–364.

8. See Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 85, 280–333. Cannon points to the influence of Jeane Kirkpatrick’s writings on Reagan. Kirkpatrick argued that Communist regimes are more aggressive and tyrannical than other authoritarian governments. See Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards,” *Commentary*, Vol. 68, No. 5 (November 1979), pp. 3–11. On Reagan’s call for an anti-Communist “crusade,” see his Address to Members of the British Parliament, 8 June 1982, PPP:RR, 1982, Vol. 1, pp. 742–748. On the prepresidential sources of Reagan’s anti-Communism, see Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America: Innocents Abroad* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 286–297; and Stephen Vaughn, *Ronald Reagan in Hollywood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 121–237.

9. Ronald Reagan, Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security, 23 March 1983, PPP:RR, 1983, Vol. 1, p. 442.

that he was a sincere nuclear abolitionist. Martin Anderson, a long-time adviser to the future president, remembers that during a 1979 visit to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Reagan was horrified to learn that the United States had no system for defense against even an accidental enemy nuclear launch. Anderson recalls how Reagan lamented that “we have spent all that money and have all that equipment and there is nothing we can do to prevent a nuclear missile from hitting us.”¹⁰ Memoir writers and historians have confirmed that the president frequently returned to this sentiment in the 1980s, most notably in his attempts to break out of a world characterized by mutually assured nuclear destruction.¹¹

Many American scientists believed that Reagan’s desired breakthrough in strategic defense was improbable, but his March 1983 speech worried the Soviet leadership nonetheless.¹² Anatolii Dobrynin, Moscow’s long-serving ambassador to the United States, recounts that “[o]ur leadership was convinced that the great technical potential of the United States had scored again.” The Soviet leadership, he argues “treated Reagan’s statement as a real threat.”¹³ Hannes Adomeit has found evidence that anxieties about SDI surfaced in discussions between Soviet leaders and their East German counterparts.¹⁴ Other memoirs and recollections confirm that policy makers in Moscow took Reagan’s vision of strategic defense more seriously than did many American citizens.¹⁵

10. Martin Anderson, *Revolution: The Reagan Legacy* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), p. 83.

11. See *Ibid.*, pp. 76–99; George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), pp. 246–264, 704; McFarlane, *Special Trust*, pp. 222–235; Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 26; Wills, *Reagan’s America*, p. 428; and John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 119–132. Frances Fitzgerald argues that Reagan and many American citizens were enthralled with the movie-like image of a space shield, despite its technical impracticality and its prohibitive cost. See Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 19–41, 114–264.

12. For a sample of the criticisms voiced by scientists and arms control experts see Herbert F. York, *Making Weapons, Talking Peace* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), pp. 243–245; Harold Brown, ed., *The Strategic Defense Initiative: Shield or Snare?* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); William J. Broad, *Teller’s War: The Top-Secret Story behind the Star Wars Deception* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); and Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, pp. 241–255. The Soviet Union had a large antimissile defense program of its own, but it was somewhat smaller than the program advocated by Reagan. The Soviet program failed to show much technical promise. See Steven Zaloga, “Red Star Wars,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (May 1997), pp. 205–208.

13. Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents, 1962–1986* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 528.

14. Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany and Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998), pp. 146–150, 226–227.

15. See the recollections of Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bessmertnykh in William C. Wohlforth, ed.,

This is an area of research that requires more attention. No one has written a detailed study of Soviet responses to SDI from 1983 to 1991. Dobrynin and Adomeit provide evidence that Moscow feared the implications of American work in this area, but their assessments are based on limited investigation.

In the absence of detailed evidence regarding Soviet responses to SDI, the existing literature indicates that an expensive race in antimissile weapons appeared unattractive to Soviet leaders, who were conscious of their society's economic difficulties in the early 1980s. Most writers now agree that the Soviet Union faced difficult economic choices at the very moment when Reagan promised to widen the strategic competition between the superpowers. Economic growth rates for the Communist societies began to decline in the 1970s. By March 1983 growth was significantly slower than it had been a decade earlier.¹⁶ Shortages of basic foodstuffs and other products were common in various parts of the Soviet Union.¹⁷ Health indicators declined for much of the population.¹⁸ Among the leadership, economic difficulties received frequent, sometimes obsessive, attention.¹⁹ Constructing a response to SDI would have required difficult domestic sacrifices at a time when Soviet society was already spread very thin.

The "Star Wars" imagery of SDI also highlighted the Soviet lag in computers, microelectronics, and other areas of high technology. During the early decades of the Cold War the Soviet Union had relied on a combination of "crash" programs and Western mimicry—often with the aid of espionage—to keep pace with foreign innovation. Marshall Goldman explains that by the 1980s the speed, complexity, and high fixed costs of technological development left Soviet central planners far behind their overseas competitors. The Communist societies continued to educate a disproportionately large cohort of scientists and engineers, but they lacked the resources and conditions to match the innovations that even an unsuccessful SDI program would produce.²⁰

Witnesses to the End of the Cold War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 47–48. See also the Soviet recollections summarized in Robert G. Patman, "Reagan, Gorbachev and the Emergence of 'New Political Thinking,'" *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (October 1999), pp. 596–597.

16. See Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 14–21.

17. See Jerry F. Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985–1991* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1997), pp. 111–114; and Patman, "Reagan, Gorbachev and the Emergence of 'New Political Thinking,'" p. 583.

18. See Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly Jr., *Ecocide in the USSR: Health and Nature under Siege* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), esp. pp. 1–14.

19. See Mark Kramer, "Ideology and the Cold War," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (October 1999), p. 566.

20. Marshall Goldman, *Gorbachev's Challenge: Economic Reform in the Age of High Technology* (New

In Afghanistan, Soviet military, economic, and technological shortcomings became evident during the months surrounding Reagan's March 1983 speeches. Raymond Garthoff and Odd Arne Westad have shown that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 25 December 1979—following a 12 December Politburo decision pushed by Andrei Gromyko, Yurii Andropov, and Dmitrii Ustinov—was a somewhat desperate attempt by the aging Soviet leaders to maintain a sphere of influence in the region. The Soviet Politburo had rejected many prior requests for intervention from the Communists in Kabul. As late as December 1979 Soviet leaders remained hesitant about sending armed forces into the mountainous region of Southwest Asia. Gromyko, Andropov, and Ustinov endorsed an invasion of Afghanistan only when they were convinced that they had no choice other than to protect Moscow's dominance in the area against growing Islamic influence.²¹

A number of authors have pointed to Andropov as an important sponsor of Soviet reforms, particularly in his promotion of energetic young thinkers like Mikhail Gorbachev.²² Andropov's vehement support for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—preceded by his prominent role in the 1956 invasion of Hungary, the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the persecution of dissidents like Andrei Sakharov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—raises doubts about this judgment. After more than three years of war, Andropov, who by then was General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU), admitted in 1983 that the Soviet army had failed to wipe out the bands of mujahideen fighters who—with American, Chinese, Pakistani, and Saudi assistance—resisted Moscow's invasion.²³ Andropov did not, however, make any arrange-

York: W. W. Norton, 1987), pp. 86–117. See also Paul R. Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited: Akademgorodok, the Siberian City of Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 128–162; Daniel L. Burghart, *Red Microchip: Technology Transfer, Export Control, and Economic Restructuring in the Soviet Union* (Aldershot, UK: Dartmouth, 1992), esp. pp. 59–64; Odd Arne Westad, "The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms," *Diplomatic History*, 24 (Fall 2000), pp. 556–561; Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War," pp. 34–42; Francis Fukuyama, "The Modernizing Imperative," *The National Interest*, No. 31 (Spring 1993), pp. 10–18; and Seweryn Bialer, "Gorbachev's Program of Change: Sources, Significance, Prospects," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 103, No. 3 (Fall 1988), p. 407.

21. See Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, rev. ed. (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1994), pp. 985–1046; and Odd Arne Westad, "Prelude to Invasion: The Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists, 1978–1979," *International History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (February 1994), pp. 49–69. See also the Soviet Central Committee summary of decision making regarding Afghanistan, "Toward the Developments in Afghanistan, 27–28 December 1979," reprinted in *Istochnik*, No. 3 (1995), pp. 153–156.

22. See Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1994), pp. 85–91, 111–118; and Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 172–186. For a contrary view, see Kramer, "Ideology and the Cold War," p. 568.

23. See the excerpts from Andropov's statements to the Politburo about the Afghan situation, March 1983, reprinted in Wohlforth, ed., *Witnesses to the End of the Cold War*, pp. 292–293. See also the ac-

ments for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan; on the contrary, he rejected any thought of withdrawing. He may have recognized his country's weaknesses, but he did not depart from his predecessors' foreign policies.²⁴

Overextended in Afghanistan and suffering from stagnation at home, the leaders in Moscow felt deeply threatened by Reagan's concerted challenges in 1983.²⁵ When a Korean Airlines 747 jet accidentally strayed over the northeastern territory of the Soviet Union on 1 September 1983, nervous air defense forces shot it down, killing all 269 passengers and crew. Fearful of aggressive American incursions, Soviet commanders mistook the civilian aircraft for an intelligence plane. The former director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Robert Gates, reports that the United States had indeed positioned an RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft in the area as little as one hour before the shoot-down.²⁶ A number of writers, including Alexander Dallin and David Pearson, blamed the United States for the September 1983 incident and the ensuing crisis atmosphere.²⁷ In retrospect, however, it appears that the Soviet commanders were much too quick to fire upon the intruding plane.²⁸

The Reagan administration's condemnation of the accidental shoot-down alarmed Soviet leaders. In his memoirs, Dobrynin, who was on vacation in the Crimea at the time of the incident, recalls that

count of Andropov's thinking in S. M. Akhromeyev and G. M. Kornienko, *Glazami marshala i diplomata* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1992), p. 48. American covert aid to the mujahideen preceded the Soviet invasion by a number of months, and it escalated considerably in 1980. See Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp. 131–134, 143–149; and Charles G. Cogan, "Partners in Time: The CIA and Afghanistan since 1979," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer 1993), p. 76. See also Jacques Lévesque and Gilles Labelle, *L'URSS en Afghanistan: de l'invasion au retrait* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1990), pp. 173–200; Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 116–134; Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 147–164; and Sarah Mendelson, "Internal Battles and External Wars: Politics, Learning, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (April 1993), pp. 341, 346–377.

24. For a similar judgment of Andropov, see Kramer, "Ideology and the Cold War," p. 568; Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Sem' Vozhdei: Galeriya liderov SSSR v dvukh knigakh*, Vol. 2, (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), pp. 113–194; and Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 446–457.

25. For a sample of Soviet condemnations directed against Reagan's aggressive foreign policy, see Alexei Arbatov, *Lethal Frontiers: A Soviet View of Nuclear Strategy, Weapons, and Negotiations*, trans. Kent D. Lee (New York: Praeger, 1988), esp. pp. 115–148; and G. M. Kornienko, *Kholodnaya voina: Svidetel'svo uchastnika* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995), pp. 210–257.

26. Gates, *From the Shadows*, pp. 266–270.

27. Alexander Dallin, *Black Box: KAL 007 and the Superpowers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 26–56; and David E. Pearson, *KAL 007: The Cover-Up* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), pp. 345–361.

28. See Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 535–539; and Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 118–126.

Andropov urgently called me to Moscow. When I entered his office, he looked haggard and worried. He said my vacation had to be cut short and ordered: “Return immediately to Washington and try to do your utmost to dampen this needless conflict bit by bit. Our military made a gross blunder by shooting down the airliner and it probably will take us a long time to get out of this mess.”²⁹

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko reports in his memoirs that he shared Andropov’s worries about the Reagan administration’s strong reaction to the Korean Airlines incident.³⁰

Superpower tensions, on the rise since March, reached new heights in the last months of 1983. Oleg Gordievsky, the KGB station chief in London at the time, recounts that early in the year he had received orders to watch for the “immediate threat of a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union.”³¹ In early November, as the United States began to deploy a series of intermediate range nuclear missiles in Western Europe, Gordievsky reports that NATO military exercises convinced the KGB that “American forces had been placed on alert . . . and might have begun the countdown to nuclear war.”³²

The secret NATO “war games” referred to by Gordievsky—known as “Able Archer 83”—occurred in Europe from 2 to 11 November 1983. They were designed, in the words of Robert Gates, to “practice nuclear release procedures.”³³ Some Soviet observers apparently believed that this exercise might be the real thing. Gordievsky reveals that Moscow placed its interceptor aircraft in East Germany on heightened alert at the time.³⁴ Units of the Soviet Fourth Air Army—as well as Warsaw Pact forces in the Baltic republics, East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia—also went on heightened alert according to Gates.³⁵ “The world did not quite reach the edge of the nuclear abyss,” Gordievsky writes, “[b]ut during Able Archer 83 it had, with-

29. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 537.

30. Andrei Gromyko, *Memories: From Stalin to Gorbachev*, trans. Harold Shukman (London: Arrow Books, 1989), pp. 381–386. See also Kornienko, *Kholodnaya voina*, pp. 210–233.

31. For the reprinted text of this February 1983 order to Gordievsky from the KGB “center” in Moscow, see “The Problem of Discovering Preparation for a Nuclear Missile Attack on the USSR,” Reference Number 373/PR/52, in Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, eds., *Comrade Kryuchkov’s Instructions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 74. Gordievsky describes what he calls the “paranoia” of the Soviet leadership in 1983. See *Ibid.*, p. 67; and Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), pp. 583–605.

32. Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, pp. 599–600. On the American intermediate range nuclear missile deployments in Western Europe in late 1983, see Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 1969–87* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 58–105; and Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 958–974.

33. Gates, *From the Shadows*, p. 270.

34. Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, pp. 599–601.

35. Gates, *From the Shadows*, pp. 271–272.

out realizing it, come frighteningly close.”³⁶ Memoirists and historians have generally—though not unanimously—confirmed this troubling judgment.³⁷

Most significantly, Ronald Reagan—the man largely responsible for the crisis atmosphere of the time—perceived events in late 1983 along the same lines that Gordievsky did. He received a briefing from CIA Director William Casey indicating that Soviet leaders feared that the United States might launch a surprise nuclear strike. According to one account, the president reacted gravely: “Do you suppose they really believe that? . . . I don’t see how they could believe that—but it’s something to think about.”³⁸

The televised broadcast on 20 November 1983 of a graphic movie about the effects of nuclear war—*The Day After*—left Reagan, like many citizens around the world, scared for the future.³⁹ It was fine to talk tough when you did not really expect war. But after a yearlong crescendo of superpower tensions the president had developed cold feet. This fundamental change of attitude is evident in the most revealing passage from Reagan’s otherwise dull memoirs:

During my first years in Washington, I think many of us in the administration took it for granted that the Russians, like ourselves, considered it unthinkable that the United States would launch a first strike against them. But the more experience I had with Soviet leaders and other heads of state who knew them, the more I began to realize that many Soviet officials feared us not only as adversaries but as potential aggressors who might hurl nuclear weapons at them in a first strike. . . . Well, if that was the case, I was even more anxious to get a top Soviet leader in a room alone and try to convince him we had no designs on the Soviet Union and the Russians had nothing to fear from us.⁴⁰

Like Kennedy after the Cuban missile crisis, Reagan made a decisive turn toward improved Soviet-American relations following the dangers of 1983.

36. Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, p. 605.

37. See Gates, *From the Shadows*, pp. 270–273; Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 138–140; Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, pp. 66–67; Jay Winik, *On the Brink: The Dramatic Behind-the-Scenes Saga of the Reagan Era and the Men and Women Who Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp. 289–291. In his memoirs, former British Foreign Minister Geoffrey Howe discusses the “genuine Russian fear of real-life nuclear strike” during the “Able Archer” exercises, though Howe downplays the dangers. See Geoffrey Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 350.

38. Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 66–67.

39. Reagan watched an advance screening of *The Day After* on 10 October 1983. In his memoirs Reagan reprints the following diary entry from his reaction to the movie: “I ran the tape of the movie ABC is running November 20. It’s called ‘The Day After’ in which Lawrence, Kansas is wiped out in a nuclear war with Russia. It is powerfully done, all \$7 million worth. It’s very effective and left me greatly depressed . . . My own reaction: we have to do all we can to have a deterrent and to see there is never a nuclear war.” Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 585.

40. Reagan, *An American Life*, pp. 588–589.

Beth Fischer has called this the “Reagan Reversal.”⁴¹ The president’s peaceful inclinations received an additional push from American public opinion, Secretary of State George Shultz, and Suzanne Massie, a writer of popular books on Russian history who assured Reagan that the Russian people really desired peace.⁴²

Inspired by Massie, the president delivered a “peace speech” to the nation on 16 January 1984, similar to John F. Kennedy’s famous American University address of June 1963. Instead of condemning the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” bent on world “domination,” Reagan called for “constructive cooperation.” Echoing Kennedy’s observation that the superpowers had to find peace because “[w]e all cherish our children’s future,” Reagan explained that “Neither we nor the Soviet Union can wish away the differences between our two societies and our philosophies, but we should always remember that we do have common interests and the foremost among them is to avoid war and reduce the level of arms. . . . People want to raise their children in a world without fear and without war.”⁴³ Even Reagan’s harshest critics, such as Raymond Garthoff and Frances Fitzgerald, acknowledge this crucial shift in rhetoric after 1983.⁴⁴

Contrary to the exaggerated accounts offered by Peter Schweizer and Jay Winik, Reagan did not have a “plan” of any sort to end the Cold War.⁴⁵ Instead, he had grown apprehensive, like his Soviet counterparts, that superpower tensions were spiraling out of control. The president felt that he needed to sue for peace as a protection against the growing prospects of war. In this sense, a balance of fear took shape between Washington and Moscow.

41. See Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), esp. pp. 102–143. See also Thomas W. Simons Jr., *The End of the Cold War?* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), pp. 47–53.

42. Lou Cannon explains that a 9 February 1984 poll showed that 49 percent of the American public disapproved of the president’s handling of foreign policy. Richard Wirthlin and Ed Rollins, Reagan’s pollster and reelection campaign manager respectively, advised the president that he had to reduce public fears about an imminent outbreak of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. See Cannon, *President Reagan*, pp. 509–515. On Shultz’s call for more “pragmatic” overtures to the Soviet Union, see Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 486; Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, pp. 15–21, 34–47; and Gates, *From the Shadows*, pp. 278–292. On the influence of Suzanne Massie, see Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, pp. 142–143; and Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, n. 145.

43. Ronald Reagan, Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States–Soviet Relations, 16 January 1984, PPP:RR, 1984, Vol. 1, pp. 41, 44. For the text of Kennedy’s June 1963 speech, see John F. Kennedy, Commencement Address at American University in Washington, 10 June 1963, *Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy, 1963* (Washington: GPO, 1964), pp. 459–464.

44. See Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 235–236; and Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, pp. 233–241.

45. See Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration’s Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994); and Winik, *On the Brink*, esp. pp. 293–295, 597–598, and 614–620.

The Soviet Union could not immediately respond to Reagan's overtures because of Andropov's prolonged illness and the subsequent appointment of an elderly party official, Konstantin Chernenko, as Andropov's successor on 13 February 1984. Dobrynin reports that the atmosphere surrounding Soviet-American relations improved quickly, especially in the area of arms control. However, little of substance could be accomplished while the new leader in the Kremlin barely managed to stay alive.⁴⁶ Reagan's continued support for SDI, the mujahideen in Afghanistan, and other anti-Soviet forces also undermined the credibility of the president's "peace" rhetoric after late 1983.

Robert English describes how prominent Soviet figures—intellectuals, diplomats, and Communist Party officials (including Mikhail Gorbachev)—anxiously waited for their opportunity to initiate significant changes in Soviet foreign policy. Pressures at home and abroad had reached a head in 1983. Intelligent and ambitious policymakers understood that they could strengthen the Soviet Union in the long run only by pursuing serious foreign and domestic reforms. Economic and military conditions did not make change inevitable at this moment, but Reagan's softer rhetoric gave the Communist "new thinkers" an opening to press for reforms once Chernenko died and the American president demonstrated that he really wanted peace.⁴⁷

Although authors disagree on many of the details from 1983, a substantial number treat the year as a turning point for the reasons outlined above. A crisis in superpower relations left citizens and leaders on *both* sides of the Iron Curtain profoundly uncomfortable. After 1983 the American and Soviet governments searched for policy alternatives with a seriousness almost unprecedented since 1945.

This was the beginning of the Cold War's end. How the end would take shape—through escalating violence or widespread cooperation—depended on which preexisting reform proposals policy makers chose to follow. This question brings us to the second circle of our analysis—the long-term ideological and institutional trends that conditioned the choices made during the period of uncertainty after 1983. Leaders with profound problems looked in new places for long-neglected solutions. This was particularly true, as many authors have shown, in the Soviet Union.

46. See Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 550–563; and Volkogonov, *Sem' vozhdiei*, Vol. 2, pp. 197–276.

47. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, pp. 159–192. See also Anatoly S. Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, trans. and ed. by Robert D. English and Elizabeth Tucker (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), pp. 3–22; and Stephen White, "Rethinking the Transition: 1991 and Beyond," in Michael Cox, ed., *Rethinking the Soviet Collapse* (London: Pinter, 1998), pp. 135–149. Sarah Mendelson argues that reform-minded figures in the Soviet Union prepared to initiate a series of important policy changes, especially in Afghanistan, during the early 1980s despite what they perceived as unfavorable American policies. See Sarah E. Mendelson, *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 82–91.

The Second Circle: Long-term Ideological and Institutional Change

The crisis of 1983 was the result, at least in part, of economic and military developments described in the preceding section of this essay. The responses to the crisis reflected less obvious trends. Many writers have devoted attention to the importance of ideological and institutional change hidden below the surface of nuclear threats and Soviet-American recriminations. These accounts trace the “origins” of the Cold War’s end back as early as the Khrushchev “thaw” of 1956.

Robert English’s recent book, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, does the best job of historicizing intellectual change in the Soviet Union, especially as it related to foreign policy. He describes how Nikita Khrushchev’s denunciation of Josif Stalin at the Twentieth Soviet Party Congress in February 1956 opened new avenues for creative thought among journalists, scientists, and intellectuals. Although Khrushchev and his successors soon restricted dissenting voices, many citizens managed to remain free thinkers, selectively expressing their opinions to colleagues and associates. Even during the worst moments of social stagnation under Leonid Brezhnev, Soviet society never returned to the terrorized conformity of the Stalin years.⁴⁸

The so-called “children of the twentieth party congress” found institutional homes in a variety of research centers and journals set up by the Soviet leadership after 1956 to strengthen the capabilities of the state. Greater access to literature and foreign information in various “oases” of learning served the Politburo’s ambition of competing against the more dynamic West without allowing similar freedoms to the population at large. In an extraordinary study of Akademgorodok—one of the Soviet Union’s flagship “science cities”—Paul Josephson describes how engineers, physicists, and sociologists carefully followed the broad outlines of Communist Party doctrine in the 1960s and 1970s while at the same time developing their own guarded criticisms of the regime and its policies. Scholars used their privileged access to information to produce what James Scott calls a “hidden transcript” that emphasized freedom and cooperation over domestic repression and continued Cold War.⁴⁹

48. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, esp. pp. 49–157. See also Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 182–188, 272–274; Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), esp. pp. 105–223; Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1990), esp. pp. 83–104; and Peter Hauslohner, “Politics Before Gorbachev: De-Stalinization and the Roots of Reform,” in Seweryn Bialer, ed., *Inside Gorbachev’s Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p. 44.

49. Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited*, esp. pp. 8–32, 77–79, 87–111, 163–203, 277–281; and James

During the 1960s the “hidden transcript” of citizen resistance burst to the surface. Andrei Sakharov’s and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s public condemnations of the Soviet regime are the most famous examples of rising dissent, especially after the first half of the decade. Although these dissidents never really threatened the ruling government, Michael Scammell has revealed that Soviet leaders worried deeply about declining domestic legitimacy in the face of both public and private dissent.⁵⁰

In this controlled but nonetheless diverse intellectual milieu, scholars at a number of policy institutes—particularly the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) and the Institute of the USA and Canada (ISKAN)—devised agendas for serious policy reform. Members of IMEMO drew upon the early postwar writings of Eugen Varga, as well as Western authors like Raymond Aron, Hans Morgenthau, and Ole Holsti, to argue that survival in a thermonuclear world required active superpower cooperation. According to Allen Lynch, IMEMO decoupled the study of international relations from strict Marxist assumptions in the 1960s, preparing the ground for more pragmatic Soviet positions in the fields of arms control, cultural exchange, and political negotiation.⁵¹

When Soviet officials, including General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, mused in public about the alleged possibility of “victory” in a war against the Western powers, some scholars from IMEMO privately criticized this position. They argued that the country’s interests would never be served by an assumption of international conflict in a nuclear world. Communist principles must find realization, they argued, through peaceful evolution. In the short run this vision required international cooperation and more openness in the East-bloc societies. Over the long run IMEMO scholars sought to further Communist goals mainly through persuasion, not force. This was a blueprint for world revolution by nonrevolutionary means. An emerging cohort of intellectuals, ensconced in Soviet research institutes, shared this vision.⁵²

C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), esp. pp. 1–16.

50. Michael Scammell, ed., *The Solzhenitsyn Files: Secret Soviet Documents Reveal One Man’s Fight against the Monolith*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (Chicago: Edition q, 1995), esp. pp. xvii–xxxv. See also Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 1–127.

51. Allen Lynch, *The Soviet Study of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 32–70. See also William Zimmerman, *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956–1967* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); and Stephen Shenfield, *The Nuclear Predicament*, Chatham House Paper 36 (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 9–10. On Eugen Varga’s influential post–World War II writings, see William Curtis Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 115–118.

52. See A. I. Krylov, “Oktyabr’ i strategiya mira,” *Voprosy filosofii* Vol. 3 (1968), pp. 3–13; Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, pp. 100–107; Robert G. Herman, “Identity, Norms, and National Security: The Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War,” in Peter J. Katzenstein,

Jeffrey Checkel has shown that privileged Soviet experts developed an organizational interest in pressing not only for international peace but also for increased social interaction with Western societies. As the range of issues on the agenda for East-West discussion broadened, scholars with language skills and access to restricted foreign sources became a more valued commodity in Soviet policy-making circles. Members of IMEMO and other institutes gained prestige, resources, and many personal perquisites—especially foreign travel—from a moderated Cold War environment.⁵³

The Soviet crackdown on the Prague Spring in August 1968 inspired broader criticisms of Communist Party leadership. A small number of citizens in Moscow and other cities had the courage to protest openly, but most did not.⁵⁴ Many intellectuals sought refuge in the research institutes where they could use what Robert English calls “quiet resistance” to lobby for a less aggressive Soviet foreign policy.⁵⁵ ISKAN, founded in 1967 under the direction of Georgii Arbatov, became an important home for these reform-minded figures. They hoped to preserve Soviet power without the same brutality exhibited in Czechoslovakia during the latter half of 1968.⁵⁶ Institute intellectuals (*institutchiki*) formed what Robert Herman calls “specialist networks” dedicated to more “conciliatory Realpolitik.”⁵⁷

Experts at ISKAN, IMEMO, and other institutes advocated superpower détente in the early 1970s. These foreign policy specialists were not dissidents, but they were not cowards either—despite Richard Pipes’s claims to the contrary.⁵⁸ Thinkers like Arbatov worked within the Soviet system to preserve Communist authority, but in a more tolerable form. They contributed to the

ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 271–316; and Mendelson, “Internal Battles and External Wars,” pp. 337–342.

53. Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behavior and the End of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). Earlier versions of this argument can be found in Jeffrey T. Checkel, “Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution,” *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (January 1993), pp. 271–300; and Jeffrey T. Checkel, “Organizational Behavior, Social Scientists and Soviet Foreign Policymaking,” Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, 1991.

54. See Natalia Gorbanevskaya, *Red Square at Noon*, trans. Alexander Lieven (London: André Deutsch, 1972), esp. pp. 27–41.

55. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, pp. 114.

56. See *Ibid.*, pp. 111–115. For confirmation of this point in a series of recent memoirs, see Anatolii S. Chernyaev, *Moya zhizn’ i moe vremya* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995), pp. 257–280; Oleg Kalugin with Fen Montaigne, *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage against the West* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), pp. 108–110; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, p. 488; and Georgii Arbatov and Fen Montaigne, *The System: An Insider’s Life in Soviet Politics* (New York: Random House, 1992), pp. 137–189.

57. Herman, “Identity, Norms, and National Security,” pp. 274, 284–285.

58. See Richard Pipes’s critical review of Arbatov’s memoirs, “The Toady,” *The New Republic*, 19 October 1992, pp. 40–43.

Soviet-American Agreement on Basic Principles in 1972, the Prevention of Nuclear War Agreement in 1973, and, most important, the Helsinki Accords of 1975. They believed that these treaties would ensure a more stable international system. Superpower cooperation promised “to make the world safe for historical change.”⁵⁹ Robert Herman has argued that these efforts had normative implications, establishing guidelines for acceptable behavior and promising the Soviet Union foreign recognition as a “civilized” society. By pressing for new international norms, the *institutchiki* hoped to reform and strengthen the Soviet Union at the same time.⁶⁰

Efforts to build Communist states and reduce capitalist influence throughout the world continued—and even escalated—according to this conceptualization of détente. Raymond Garthoff explains that Arbatov and other intellectuals helped Soviet leaders to expand their influence in a way that was less prone to international confrontation with the more powerful Western alliance.⁶¹ Experts at IMEMO and ISKAN were Communists, but they were also “Westernizers” committed to increasing Soviet power while preserving the basic continuity of European society.⁶²

Westernizing intellectuals in the Soviet Union received support from scientists, scholars, and journalists in Europe and the United States. Matthew Evangelista has documented how meetings like the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs forged international bonds that transcended Cold War divisions. Physicists, doctors, and social scientists cooperated—especially in the 1960s and 1970s—to place various arms control measures on the superpower political agenda.⁶³ Thomas Risse-Kappen has also pointed to the important role played by West European liberal internationalist and social democratic groups—the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, the foreign policy wing of the West German Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Swedish-sponsored Palme

59. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, p. 53.

60. Herman, “Identity, Norms, and National Security,” pp. 288–298. See also Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War,” in Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 195–202.

61. See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 40–73, 326–338.

62. See English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, p. 80. See, in particular, Georgii Shakhnazarov’s influential call for technological and cultural cooperation in Europe. G. Shakhnazarov, “Effective Factors of International Relations,” *International Affairs* (Moscow), No. 2 (February 1977), pp. 79–87.

63. Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 147–164. The Pugwash conferences took their name from the location of Cyrus Eaton’s estate—in Pugwash, Nova Scotia—where twenty-two scientists from ten countries, including the Soviet Union, first met from 7 to 10 July 1957. Pugwash meetings occurred once or twice a year after 1957, in different venues. See *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

Commission, among others—in building East-West consensus around ideas of “common security” rather than Cold War.⁶⁴

Transnational meetings of experts gave demands for superpower cooperation greater legitimacy. Men like Arbatov were able to exploit their international standing to influence policy at home. Curiously, the intellectuals who participated in transnational activities while working within the Soviet system managed to accomplish more than their American counterparts did in the United States. Evangelista attributes this to the presence of fewer competing interest groups in the closed Communist system. Empowered by their domestic institutional base and their international connections, Soviet intellectuals operated as surprisingly effective “policy entrepreneurs” for détente, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s.⁶⁵

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 25 December 1979 revealed that the advocates of détente had achieved only partial success. The leaders of the Communist Party would not renounce the use of force, and they resisted wider openings for economic and cultural integration with the more prosperous West European states.⁶⁶ Replacing Cold War assumptions with a new mind-set required more than informal advisory channels to the Kremlin. “New thinking” needed an advocate at the top of the Communist Party.

Mikhail Gorbachev filled this role from March 1985 on. In his memoirs he claims that he was deeply influenced by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Prague Spring “stood on the threshold of important developments,” according to Gorbachev’s retrospective account. Moscow’s repressive action “placed a stake in all later searches to transform the system.” Cold War competition with the United States in Europe and elsewhere, he writes, enforced Soviet “stagnation.”⁶⁷ According to Archie Brown, Gorbachev began after 1968 to draw on the advice of reformist thinkers affiliated with various Soviet institutes. Brown maintains that as Gorbachev ascended the party ladder in Stavropol and later Moscow, he continued to associate with the people who after 1985 became identified with the startling shift in Soviet foreign policy.⁶⁸

64. Risse-Kappen, “Ideas Do Not Float Freely,” pp. 195–205. See also Herman, “Identity, Norms, and National Security,” pp. 288–298.

65. See Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, pp. 7–8, 162–164, 168–173, 184–192, 223–232; and Risse-Kappen, “Ideas Do Not Float Freely,” pp. 199–202, 205–211.

66. See English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, pp. 147–157, 161–180.

67. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn’ i reformy*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), pp. 119–120.

68. See Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 43–52, 59–61; Allen Lynch, *Gorbachev’s International Outlook: Intellectual Origins and Political Consequences* (New York: Institute for East-West Security Studies, 1989); and Robert G. Kaiser, *Why Gorbachev Happened* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), pp. 21–72.

By background and party position Gorbachev was primarily interested in reforming Soviet agriculture and the domestic economy. He eventually concluded, however, that these goals required serious foreign policy change. Cold War competition with the West drained resources from domestic needs and justified excessive repression. The Soviet Union could build socialism only if it lived at peace with its neighbors and the constituent elements of its empire.

Gorbachev mobilized intellectuals and reformers in the Soviet Union to support what Archie Brown describes as a radical redefinition of socialism. In place of the monopolistic Communist Party, the new General Secretary pursued something akin to what Brown regards as the West European model of “social democracy.” The Communist Party would continue to buffer citizens against unfettered capitalist markets, but it would also encourage personal creativity and private competition. Brown asserts that Gorbachev was consistently intrigued by Soviet intellectuals and West European politicians—especially Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González—who reportedly thought in similar ways about a convergence between Communism and capitalism. Despite Gorbachev’s busy schedule, he found time to reread the works of Vladimir Lenin, especially as they related to the New Economic Policy of 1921.⁶⁹

Although Gorbachev began his period of leadership with a series of apparent hard-line measures—military escalation in Afghanistan, calls for discipline and economic “acceleration” at home—he quickly moved to improve Soviet relations with Western Europe and the United States.⁷⁰ From his personal travels he surmised that foreign leaders shared his desire for reduced tensions after the war scares of the early 1980s.⁷¹ More important, Gorbachev understood that his hopes for improving the Soviet economy and the quality of domestic life in general required a peaceful international context. Continued Cold War competition would perpetuate the social stagnation he wanted to eliminate. Only extensive and unprecedented East-West cooperation could permit the allocation of resources necessary for domestic restructuring (perestroika).⁷²

Archie Brown and a number of other scholars claim that Soviet “new thinking” combined this pragmatic concern with a broader philosophical out-

69. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, esp. pp. 98, 117–121. See also Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, pp. 23–95.

70. See Mendelson, “Internal Battles and External Wars,” p. 348; and Geoffrey Hosking, *The Awakening of the Soviet Union*, Enlarged Ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 139–140.

71. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, pp. 242–243.

72. See David Holloway, “Learning to Live and Let Live,” in Abraham Brumberg, ed., *Chronicle of a Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), p. 151; and Brooks and Wohlforth, “Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War,” p. 37–42.

look. Brown writes that in place of the “class approach” that dominated the Kremlin’s view of the world during the Cold War, Gorbachev implemented a vision of “humanistic universalism.” Growing out of the ideas shared by many intellectuals in both East and West, this new conception of foreign policy emphasized the shared values of Western “civilization,” social interdependence, and “all-human” interests. Instead of striving for military superiority, economic predominance, or ideological hegemony, Gorbachev drew on an international community of opinion committed to overcoming Cold War divisions.⁷³ The crisis atmosphere of the early 1980s attracted diverse scholars and policy makers to the “humanistic” approach espoused by Gorbachev.⁷⁴

The Soviet Union faced strong pressures for reform, but it did not have to move in this “humanistic” direction. Some of Gorbachev’s contemporaries within the Communist Party, particularly Egor Ligachev, argued for much less radical policy change.⁷⁵ The Soviet Union’s attempt to end the Cold War after 1985 reflected the personal determination of the new Soviet leader, supported by a large cohort of committed “new thinkers.” Gorbachev used his preeminence as General Secretary to cajole party stalwarts such as Ligachev into accepting ever more radical policies.⁷⁶ Although he was never willing to stand for election himself, he partially democratized the selection of lower-level Soviet officials (through the holding of local elections and the creation of the Congress of People’s Deputies) and allowed members of ISKAN, IMEMO, and other institutes unprecedented leeway to express their views. Gorbachev made the ideas of the “new thinkers” relevant for Soviet politics. This is an area of research—the mobilization of the “new thinkers” and the political maneuvering to make them influential—that still has not received sufficient scholarly attention.

In a very short time party figures supporting the “new thinkers” began to exert pressure on their chief sponsor. When Gorbachev temporized about reform—as he did during the Chernobyl crisis of 1986⁷⁷—men like Foreign

73. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 220–225; Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, pp. 269–285, 305–317; Robert Legvold, “Soviet Learning in the 1980s,” in George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock, eds., *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 694–720.

74. See David Holloway, “Gorbachev’s New Thinking,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Winter 1988/9), pp. 66.

75. See Yegor Ligachev, *Inside Gorbachev’s Kremlin*, trans. Catherine Fitzpatrick, Michele A. Berdy, and Dobrochna Dyrz-Freeman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), esp. pp. 312–351. See also Valery Boldin, *Ten Years That Shook the World*, trans. Evelyn Rossiter (New York: Basic Books, 1994), esp. pp. 149, 291–300.

76. See Matthew Evangelista, “Norms, Heresthetics, and the End of the Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 5–35.

77. See Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: The Free Press, 1991), pp. 171–177.

Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Aleksandr Yakovlev, and Georgii Shakhnazarov pushed the Soviet system to favor openness and cooperation over secrecy and conflict. Arms control, expanded trade, and a freer exchange of ideas promised, in Shakhnazarov's words, to "de-ideologize" East-West relations.⁷⁸ In his memoirs Shevardnadze confirms the powerful influence of ideological and institutional pressures for policy change: "Everything that we were to achieve—the new quality of Soviet-American relations; dialog displacing confrontation; a shift of emphasis from forceful confrontation to political means for solving international problems—was the consequence of practical implementation of these ideas."⁷⁹

A long-term change in Soviet outlook was necessary to end the Cold War. Without "new thinking" and Gorbachev's determination to sponsor these ideas, one can hardly imagine such a quick improvement in East-West relations during the second half of the 1980s. In this sense, internal developments in the Soviet Union were critical for the replacement of Cold War crisis in 1983 with unprecedented superpower cooperation.

Observers of American policy have indicated that the Reagan administration sincerely, if inconsistently, encouraged these long-term changes in Soviet thinking from 1984 to 1986. Lou Cannon has emphasized that the president himself sincerely believed his softer "peace" rhetoric of 1984. Reagan was no longer comfortable with hard-line threats in a dangerous world. His calls for Soviet-American cooperation now made him "feel good."⁸⁰

After the massive American strategic buildup early in the decade, the president felt confident about pursuing negotiations with the adversary. Reagan, in this sense, really believed in "peace through strength."⁸¹ Secretary of State George Shultz confirms this point in his memoirs: "If the first Reagan term could be characterized by a building of strength, in the second term we could use that strength for determined and patient diplomatic efforts to produce greater peace and stability in the world."⁸²

Accordingly, Reagan was very receptive to Gorbachev months before the introduction of perestroika and glasnost'. Following the successive deaths of Leonid Brezhnev in November 1982 and Yuri Andropov in February 1984,

78. See Georgii Shakhnazarov, "East-West: The Problem of De-Ideologizing Relations," in Alexander Dallin, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1990* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), pp. 497–519.

79. Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, p. 53.

80. Cannon, *President Reagan*, pp. 509–515. See also Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, pp. 69–74.

81. Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War*, 131. For a criticism of pursuing "peace through strength," see Coral Bell, *Negotiation from Strength* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), esp. p. 240.

82. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 486.

the president had not pursued any opening to the new Soviet leadership. But after Konstantin Chernenko's death in March 1985, Reagan announced that he was anxious to meet the new General Secretary.⁸³ He sent Vice President George Bush to Moscow with a written invitation for a superpower summit. Even though Gorbachev remained a largely unknown quantity in the West at this early date, Reagan wrote with optimism and empathy:

You can be assured of my personal commitment to working with you and the rest of the Soviet leadership in serious negotiations. In that spirit, I would like you to visit me in Washington at your earliest convenient opportunity. I recognize that arriving at an early answer may not be possible. But I want you to know that I look forward to a meeting that could yield results of benefit to both our countries and to the international community as a whole.⁸⁴

Reagan had been influenced by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's comment, three months earlier, that Gorbachev—still a subordinate to the ailing Chernenko—was “a man with whom I could do business.”⁸⁵ The president followed up on this optimistic appraisal as soon as Gorbachev took the reins of power. Reagan's early overtures encouraged Soviet “new thinkers” and allowed Gorbachev to pursue a rapid improvement in superpower relations at the Geneva summit of November 1985—only eight months after Chernenko's death.

To the horror of many hard-liners who had supported the American strategic buildup, Reagan and Gorbachev—meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, in October 1986—opened an unprecedented discussion about complete nuclear disarmament. The Soviet “new thinkers” drew on more than two decades of slow internal change to push this startling position. The American president responded with equal enthusiasm. Processes of ideological and institutional transformation in both societies brought the Cold War to an end sometime around the groundbreaking Reykjavik summit.⁸⁶ Superpower confrontation and mutually assured nuclear destruction remained realities of the international system, but they no longer appeared permanent. Change now seemed inevitable. Events after 1986 reflected particular choices not about *whether* to end the Cold War, but about *how* to end it.

83. Remarks at a Question-and-Answer Session with Regional Editors and Broadcasters, 11 March 1985, PPP:RR, 1985, Vol. 1, p. 270.

84. Reprinted in Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 612.

85. See Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 459–463.

86. For an excellent account of the Reykjavik Summit and its aftermath, see Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 252–299.

The Third Circle: International Transformation and the End the Cold War

Soviet-American relations after 1986 focused on two issues: arms control, and the future of the divided Germans. In the case of arms control the two superpowers shared a desire for nuclear reductions that would lessen the dangers of war and build trust in place of Cold War conflict. With regard to the two Germans, however, Soviet and American perspectives were decidedly asymmetrical. Gorbachev and the “new thinkers” disapproved of many of the autarkic policies pursued by the East German government. They did not, however, seek to dismantle the state, even after the Communist regime collapsed in late 1989. According to Hannes Adomeit, the Soviet leader wanted a stable East German regime.⁸⁷ Reagan, his successor, George Bush, and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl consistently pushed for German reunification on Western terms—including the dissolution of the Soviet-supported government. Gorbachev reluctantly accepted the American and West German position on this issue. East-West cooperation on arms control and German reunification allowed the Cold War to end through largely nonviolent means.

The emergence of “new thinking” in the Soviet Union and the influence of Gorbachev’s leadership help to explain Moscow’s *general* motivations, but the details of Soviet policy making during this period remain murky at best. Gorbachev’s decision to cede authority peacefully in Eastern Europe played a decisive role in ending the Cold War. We know very little about how he arrived at this decision—which he surely did not anticipate before the late 1980s—and how he convinced other powerful Communist figures to abide by it. This is a critical issue that demands more serious historical research using documentary sources from the United States, Germany, and the states of Eastern Europe, in addition to Russia. The next several paragraphs sketch a tentative outline of how scholars have described the transformational events of the late 1980s, based on limited evidence.

Despite the failure of the two sides to reach a final agreement at the Reykjavik summit in October 1986, Reagan and Gorbachev moved quickly to reduce their nuclear arsenals and lessen the war fears that had dominated the early part of the decade. On 8 December 1987 the two leaders signed the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at the White House. The treaty eliminated the medium-range missiles in Europe that had contributed so much to East-West tension since the late 1970s. Washington and Moscow authorized unprecedented mutual inspections of launch sites and production

87. Hannes Adomeit, “Gorbachev, German Unification and the Collapse of Empire,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July–September 1994), pp. 199–202.

facilities. In the words of Raymond Garthoff, the INF Treaty “served to relegate arms control,” embodying both leaders’ devotion to reduced dangers and increased openness.⁸⁸

Less than six months later Reagan traveled to Moscow where he strolled through Red Square and addressed a group of students at Moscow State University. When asked whether he still believed that the Soviet Union was an “evil empire,” Reagan responded with a firm “No.” His harsh rhetoric from 1983 was, he explained, from “another time, another era.”⁸⁹ Through their frequent summits and arms control discussions, the leaders of the two superpowers had, by this time, developed a level of unprecedented trust and goodwill.⁹⁰

Don Oberdorfer notes that the images of Soviet-American friendship did not alleviate differences over Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative or the future course of the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START).⁹¹ Trust and goodwill, however, took on a momentum of their own. Frustrated by his inability to build a consensus on arms reductions within his own government and between the two superpowers, Gorbachev appealed directly to “world opinion.”⁹² Speaking on 7 December 1988 at the United Nations, he pledged to cut 500,000 soldiers from the Soviet army. This would include a reduction of 50,000 men and 5,000 tanks from the Soviet forces in Eastern Europe. “Look at how our relations have changed,” Gorbachev exclaimed. Mutual trust allowed the Soviet Union to sidestep the technical limits and bureaucratic obstacles inherent in arms control negotiations. Gorbachev relied on what he called “norms reflecting a balance of interests [among] states.”⁹³

Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott have described how, after a brief period of hesitant policy reconsideration, the Bush administration pursued deep arms reductions and close personal relations with the Soviet “new thinkers”—especially Gorbachev and Shevardnadze.⁹⁴ Meeting in the rough Medi-

88. Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 325–329, quotation on p. 328.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 352.

90. Deborah Welch Larson credits Gorbachev with making concessions to build superpower trust. See her *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations during the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 212–234.

91. Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, pp. 292–295.

92. On the concept of “world opinion,” see Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. xiv, 41, 56–66; and Mark Haefele, “John F. Kennedy, USIA, and World Public Opinion,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 63–84.

93. Quotations from Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 365–366.

94. Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), pp. 43–100. See also Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 375–377.

terranean waters around the island of Malta in early December 1989, the leaders of the two superpowers pledged to cooperate and insure peaceful development, particularly on the European continent. Joint affirmations of the need for “new thinking” and policy making “beyond containment” laid the foundation for a significant cut in the conventional forces stationed by the superpowers, particularly the Soviet Union, in Europe. Garthoff writes that the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, signed in November 1990, eliminated many of the military structures that had long divided East and West.⁹⁵ The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START 1), signed in mid-1991, reduced the American nuclear arsenal by approximately 25 percent and cut Soviet nuclear forces by about one-third.⁹⁶

Garthoff explains that the Malta Summit did much more than prepare the ground for these arms control agreements. Symbolically, it marked the unmistakable end of the Cold War. Malta was, Garthoff writes, “the first meeting to look ahead to a new relationship between East and West, a new Europe, and in some respects a new world.” Gorbachev told Bush at the summit that “[w]e don’t consider you an enemy any more.” The American president reciprocated with calls for a “cooperative, forward-leaning relationship” between Washington and Moscow.⁹⁷

Not to be outdone by Gorbachev, Bush initiated a series of remarkable unilateral disarmament measures of his own. In a nationally televised address on 27 September 1991 he announced that the United States would eliminate its ground-based tactical nuclear weapons and remove tactical nuclear warheads from all ships and submarines. Bush also took U.S. strategic bombers off alert. Within a week Gorbachev followed suit, calling for even deeper cuts in the arsenals of both superpowers. If the arms race was a central element of the Cold War, the race to disarm dominated the end of the Cold War.⁹⁸

Soviet-American cooperation on arms control was not, as mentioned earlier, matched by easy agreement on the future of East Germany and the rest of Eastern Europe. As Bush and Gorbachev worked to reduce their respective nuclear arsenals, the people in one country after another rose up against Soviet domination. Timothy Garton Ash and Gale Stokes, among others, have described how long-repressed groups in Eastern Europe used the limited freedoms of Soviet-style *glasnost* to mobilize dissent. In 1989 citizens in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and East Germany exploited new opportu-

95. Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 434.

96. Beschloss and Talbot, *At the Highest Levels*, pp. 362–373, 415.

97. See Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 406; and Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 381.

98. See Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 491.

nities for public expression to rebuild “civil society.” On city streets, in newspapers, and through theater, the populations demanded an end to Communist repression.⁹⁹ Citizens in many of the Soviet republics, especially in the Baltic states and the Caucasus, began to mobilize around nationalist and separatist agendas.¹⁰⁰ Activists created what Charles Maier calls a “vision of an alternative public sphere.”¹⁰¹ Stokes explains that “the entire picture of Europe constructed in the mind of almost all of its citizens for forty years underwent an irreversible phase shift.”¹⁰² This was what Garton Ash identifies as a return to diverse regional histories, after years of Moscow-centered hegemony.¹⁰³

Gorbachev and the “new thinkers” in the Soviet Union refrained from using force against the East European revolutions of 1989. Seared by their earlier discomfort when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, they accepted full independence for the states in the area. During a visit to Finland on 25 October 1989, Gorbachev proclaimed that his government had “no right, moral or political, to interfere in the events of Eastern Europe.” Following up on this statement, Gennadii Gerasimov, the Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, explained that the “Brezhnev Doctrine,” articulated after Moscow crushed the Prague Spring two decades earlier, “is dead.” Gerasimov announced that the Soviet Union would paraphrase a line from the American singer Frank Sinatra, who crooned about “doing it my way.”

Gorbachev allowed Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania to go their own way.¹⁰⁴ He continued to assume, however, that the constituent republics of the Soviet Union would remain under Moscow’s tutelage. As noted above, further investigation is needed to explain his willingness to accept East European independence while seeking to maintain hegemony in Soviet lands.

99. Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Random House, 1990), pp. 25–130; and Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 131–167.

100. See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 127–160; and Hosking, *The First Socialist Society*, pp. 470–486.

101. Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 166.

102. Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, p. 141.

103. Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern*, esp. pp. 138–156.

104. See Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, p. 134; and Jacques Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe*, trans. Keith Martin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), esp. pp. 9–36, 163–164; Kramer, “Ideology and the Cold War,” pp. 563–573; and Mark Kramer, “Realism, Ideology, and the End of the Cold War,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (January 2001), pp. 119–130, esp. 123–129.

Soviet tolerance of East European independence did not immediately extend to German reunification after citizens began to dismantle the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989.¹⁰⁵ Beschloss and Talbott describe Gorbachev's worries about the pace of events. Citizens from East Germany were moving west in huge numbers, making reunification almost a fait accompli. On 9 February 1990 the Soviet leader warned U.S. Secretary of State James Baker that a new German state, dominated by Bonn, would destabilize the continent. Gorbachev wanted to play an active role in the future of the two Germans, and he sought to protect a de facto Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁶

Drawing on their own experiences working for President Bush's National Security Council and their privileged access to classified U.S. documents, Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice persuasively argue that the United States pushed Gorbachev to accept German reunification on Western terms. The East German regime collapsed, and less than a year later the government in Bonn established its authority over all of the former Communist-dominated German areas. The newly unified Germany became a member of NATO, extending the border of the alliance deep into the Warsaw Pact's former backyard.¹⁰⁷

Zelikow and Rice show that Bush was out front on this issue. He refused to accept compromises that would leave Europe divided.¹⁰⁸ In 1990 he worked with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to cajole Gorbachev and buy him off with extensive loans and trade concessions (including a DM 15 billion assistance package from Bonn).¹⁰⁹ The turning point apparently came in late May and early June 1990, when Bush and Gorbachev met at the White House and Camp David. To the dismay of the Soviet entourage, the American president nudged his counterpart into agreeing that a reunited Germany should decide for itself "in which alliance she would like to participate." In return for this concession Bush signed an agreement eliminating most of the Cold War restrictions on Soviet trade. Zelikow and Rice explain that the pres-

105. For an excellent analysis of the events in East Germany, particularly Leipzig, in late 1989, see Maier, *Dissolution*, pp. 108–167.

106. Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, pp. 183, 219–221. On the waves of East German migration to the West after 9 November 1989, see Alexandra Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998), pp. 836–838.

107. Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 364–367.

108. Zelikow and Rice describe how President Bush and Secretary of State Baker rejected Henry Kissinger's proposal for a negotiated Soviet-American agreement to exercise mutual restraint and recognize spheres of influence in Europe. See Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, p. 27. Beschloss and Talbott argue that President Bush initially showed some interest in Kissinger's plan. See Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, pp. 13–17.

109. Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, pp. 256–260, 347–352.

ident was careful not to gloat over Gorbachev's reversal on Germany. Bush relied on friendship, trust, and careful pressure in his dealings with the Soviet leader.¹¹⁰

Gorbachev accommodated Bush and Kohl on the future of Germany, but he did not, as mentioned earlier, respond with the same openness to change inside the Soviet Union. His reactions to internal separatist movements remain murky and require more detailed scholarly analysis. Based on very limited documentary sources, observers generally agree that Gorbachev authorized, or at least tacitly allowed, military crackdowns in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, and the Baltic republics from 1989 through early 1991. In the case of Tbilisi, the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union at the time, Jack Matlock, recounts how military forces charged a crowd of demonstrators with little provocation on 9 April 1989.¹¹¹ In Baku the army took control of the city on 19 January 1990 to curtail ethnic rioting against Armenian residents and suppress the separatist Azerbaijani National Front.¹¹² Less than a year later, on 13 January 1991, Soviet state security (KGB) and army troops seized key points in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, killing fifteen civilians and injuring hundreds of others.¹¹³

Gorbachev tried to distance himself from this Brezhnev-like violence, but he could not. He had already lost the support of many "new thinkers," including former Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, who dramatically resigned his office in December 1990, warning that "dictatorship is coming." By the end of 1990 Gorbachev's reform coalition had fragmented.¹¹⁴

Matlock describes how the military crackdowns increased nationalist fervor in the Soviet republics.¹¹⁵ Separatist forces became more radical and popular within Georgia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, and many other areas. John Dunlop also shows that Russians grew tired of supporting a troublesome Soviet empire. By the early part of 1991 Boris Yeltsin had captured popular hopes for a strong, democratic Russian state freed from many of the burdens that accompanied a large multinational empire.¹¹⁶

110. *Ibid.*, pp. 271–285, quotation on p. 278.

111. Jack F. Matlock Jr., *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 238–240.

112. *Ibid.*, pp. 300–304.

113. *Ibid.*, pp. 451–463; and Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, p. 305.

114. Quotation from Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, pp. 295–296. See also Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, pp. 192–199.

115. Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, pp. 241–246, 466–468, 492–494. See also Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*, pp. 127–160.

116. John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 54–66, 75–185; and Leon Aron, *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 354–436. Even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Russian Federation

A former member of the Communist Party *nomenklatura* with an instinct for populist politics and a sincere commitment to democratic reform, Yeltsin pushed “new thinking” beyond its intended limits. He resigned from the Communist Party in mid-1990, campaigned for direct election as the president of Russia (in contrast to Gorbachev, who refused to face elections for his position), and publicly sympathized with the citizens of the various Soviet republics living under Moscow’s hegemony. Yeltsin, more than any other figure, delegitimized the authority of the Communist Party and the entire governing edifice of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷

Dunlop argues that Gorbachev considered embarking on full-scale repression against Yeltsin and his supporters at the beginning of 1991. The Soviet leader deployed as many as 50,000 internal security, army, and KGB troops against demonstrators in March. As popular protests grew, however, Gorbachev backed down. If only reluctantly, he displayed the same restraint that he had during the East European revolutions of 1989. Gorbachev attempted to hold the state together by returning with renewed energy to his reform agenda—a shift that marked the “turning point” for Gorbachev and the demise of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁸ Dunlop’s work makes an important contribution to our understanding of this period, but his book offers only a skeletal outline of events in early 1991—one that requires additional research and historical reconstruction.

The same can be said about the aborted August 1991 coup in the Soviet Union. The crumbling of Moscow’s authority by this time made a hard-line reaction, of some sort, highly likely. Dunlop explains that the vested interests in the KGB, the army, the Communist Party, and the military-industrial complex that had tolerated—and even encouraged—perestroika in hopes of strengthening the Soviet Union, now feared that the country would come apart.¹¹⁹ On 19–21 August 1991 a group of high-ranking conspirators, organized by KGB Chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov, attempted to turn back the clock. According to Matlock and Dunlop, the coup failed because of popular opposition on the streets as well as within the military. The plotters lacked the personal will and charisma of a populist figure like Yeltsin. Instead, they ap-

still had a large multinational empire of its own. Yitzhak Brudny argues that while Yeltsin’s brand of democratic capitalism was popular in 1990–1991, a large coalition of Russian nationalists attempted to halt reforms and prevent the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. See Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 226–258.

117. See Aron, *Yeltsin*, pp. 440–493.

118. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, p. 34. Amy Knight also argues that in 1990–1991 Gorbachev prepared, with the help of the KGB, for the imposition of martial law. See Knight, *Spies Without Cloaks: The KGB’s Successors* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 16–19.

119. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, pp. 34, 194–196.

peared on television to be pale, shaken, and presumably drunken cronies from the period of Brezhnev's "stagnation."¹²⁰

The end of the Cold War and the prior years of domestic reform had undermined the authority of the Communist Party to such an extent that only a civil war could restore the *status quo ante*. The coup plotters attempted to initiate violent repression—including alleged orders to penetrate the "White House" in Moscow where pro-Yeltsin forces gathered. Confronted by the determined resistance of Yeltsin and tens of thousands of others—especially on the streets of Moscow—the hard-liners gave in, unwilling to order large-scale bloodshed. Following the model of the violent Chinese crackdown in Tiananmen Square two years earlier, members of the Communist Party might have retained power through a massive and brutal use of force. But, unlike the Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, the coup plotters did not have the will or self-confidence to commit themselves to such a course. Personal determination was now on the side of Yeltsin and his supporters.¹²¹

Gorbachev's role in the attempted coup remains murky. Amy Knight points to a number of problems with his account as a victim. Gorbachev offered little resistance to the coup plotters—his thirty-two armed bodyguards allowed five men with Kalashnikov rifles to "imprison" the Soviet leader in his vacation home. He also failed to use available communication links with democratic forces during his captivity. The collapse of the coup placed the last nail in the coffin for hard-line Communist forces, but Gorbachev's own actions require further investigation.¹²²

After August 1991 the Soviet Union rapidly dissolved into its constituent parts. Yeltsin led this process, organizing an agreement with the leaders of the various Soviet republics that replaced the Soviet Union with a "Commonwealth of Independent States." Gorbachev was faced with a *fait accompli*. By December 1991 the Russian republic under Yeltsin's leadership had become the dominant state. The Soviet Union and Gorbachev's position as "president" ceased to exist.

The end of the Cold War did not alone cause the collapse of Soviet power, but it contributed to the domestic transformation that led to the downfall of Communist authority. Without a reduction in nuclear tensions and superpower agreement on German reunification one can imagine that

120. *Ibid.*, pp. 253–255; Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, pp. 598–600; and Aron, *Yeltsin*, pp. 440–466.

121. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, pp. 253–255. See also Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, pp. 598–600. For a documentary account of the Chinese government's violent repression of democracy activists on 4 June 1989, see Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

122. Knight, *Spies without Cloaks*, pp. 12–28.

hard-line forces might have made a convincing case for preserving Soviet power against external threats. The cooperative overtures of Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush in the second half of the 1980s did not make the collapse of Communism inevitable—Dunlop makes this clear¹²³—but they surely contributed to far-reaching political and social changes. The Soviet empire was particularly susceptible to internal transformation during this period because its authority commanded little popular legitimacy and its power rested on weak economic foundations.¹²⁴

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was not synonymous with the end of the Cold War, but it ensured that a new period in international relations had indeed arrived. Communist ideology no longer threatened American liberal capitalism. Russia inherited most of the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons, but it lacked the huge empire of its predecessor in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and other parts of the world. Yeltsin's Russia wanted to build capitalist and liberal institutions. Instead of threatening American and West European interests, it embraced them as its own.¹²⁵

This was a complete reversal of the Cold War's ideological and strategic competition. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Yeltsin's Russia promised unprecedented East-West partnership on a broad range of issues—including security in Europe and Asia, global economic management, technological innovation, environmental issues, space exploration, and scholarly research. Negotiating the contours of this new relationship, as former Communist societies struggled to rebuild themselves, became the difficult task of the post-Cold War, post-Soviet period.

“Lessons” and Future Research

The end of the Cold War presents a rich research agenda for historians, political scientists, sociologists, and scholars in many other disciplines. It allows writers to adopt a truly “international” perspective, blending Western-centered analyses with new access to formerly closed societies. Although many archival sources remain off-limits on both sides of the former Berlin Wall, the authors cited in this review gained great insight from selective access to pri-

123. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, pp. 253–255.

124. David Remnick's book, while impressionistic, speaks eloquently to this point. See David B. Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Random House, 1993), esp. 101–119.

125. On the critical change in Soviet political identity, and its effect on the international system, see Rey Koslowski and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, “Understanding Change in International Politics: The Soviet Empire's Demise and the International System,” in Lebow and Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, pp. 127–159.

mary documents, interviews, firsthand impressions, and, of course, published materials. In the future we should not expect “smoking guns” so much as a continual accumulation of new evidence from a plurality of sources. This is how “normal” scholarship progresses after a period of frenzy inspired by dramatic events.

Our understanding of how, why, and when the Cold War ended surely remains incomplete. I have pointed to particular areas—especially during the third “transformational” period—where more research is needed. The shortcomings in the present literature partly reflect the fact that we are still so close to the events and their key actors. We have impressions but we lack the wisdom and breadth derived from distance. More significant, we do not have the accumulated evidence to understand the many complex social, political, and military interactions that produced such rapid international and domestic change. This requires much more than knowledge about particular crises and decisions—though more of this would surely add a lot. The primary difficulty at present comes in bringing all the pieces together and penetrating the assumptions and attitudes that are not always obvious in the documents or the stream of events. The culture or *mentalité* of the period emerges only from a careful reconstruction of both crises and more “ordinary” events from multiple perspectives. In this sense, we need more wide-ranging analyses, informed by a deep immersion in the documents and the larger historical context.

This review has attempted to provide a provisional narrative for the end of the Cold War by drawing on some of the most important published materials. I have followed James Joll’s “pattern of concentric circles.” This model does not discount differences in interpretation. It emphasizes the immediate crisis that triggered the end of the Cold War, long-term ideological and institutional trends, and transformational choices made from 1985 to 1991. No single decision or variable brought the Cold War to an end. Personalities, trends, and institutions interacted to create an outcome that few predicted, even as late as 1988.

At present we know the most about the international sources of crisis in 1983 and the long-term ideological and institutional trends operating during the last two decades of the Cold War. In addition to continued work in these areas, we need much more serious examination of how leaders—especially Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Reagan—formulated and implemented their policies. Work on domestic opinion and public activism, particularly in the Soviet Union, has only just begun.¹²⁶

126. On these general points, see Richard K. Herrmann, “Conclusions: The End of the Cold War—What Have We Learned?” in Lebow and Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, pp. 259–279.

This narrative review of the literature, while necessarily selective, points to three general “lessons” that future research will test and surely refine. First, domestic politics and international politics were deeply interdependent during the period. Popular American fears of nuclear war in the early 1980s motivated a turn in Reagan administration policy. Soviet internal weaknesses inspired reform efforts and contributed to imperial dissolution. Traditional analyses of realpolitik do not help very much in explaining the end of the Cold War.¹²⁷

Second, Gorbachev and Reagan *both* played an important role in ending the Cold War. Most of the literature to date has chosen to emphasize the virtues of one leader and the vices of the other. This narrative review has cited authors—such as Archie Brown, Raymond Garthoff, and Robert Gates—who adopt this one-or-the-other approach. The point should be obvious: Both Gorbachev and Reagan made decisions that transformed the international system. The two leaders reinforced their respective reform inclinations after 1985. They also drew, as Robert English and Matthew Evangelista have shown, on institutions and individuals long committed to peace and cooperation. Future research on these leaders should place more emphasis on their personal and policy interactions.

Third, and perhaps most important, the end of the Cold War was *not* inevitable. International relations were bound to change after 1983, but not necessarily in the way they did. One can certainly imagine many more violent scenarios. Writers like Philip Zelikow, Condoleezza Rice, Raymond Garthoff, Don Oberdorfer, and John Dunlop have done an excellent job of showing that particular decisions—under conditions of extreme stress and uncertainty—determined outcomes. Remove Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Reagan, Bush, or Kohl for even one month and we might not have deep nuclear reductions or rapid German unification. The end of the Cold War appears necessary in retrospect, but at almost every turn the course of events seemed to hang on a thread. Integrating multiple perspectives into a single narrative highlights this final sobering point. It also reminds us that change arises—often unpredictably—from the interplay of personal will and propitious circumstances.

127. For further elaboration on this point, see John Lewis Gaddis, “International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Winter 1992/3), pp. 5–58; and Richard Ned Lebow, “The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism,” in Lebow and Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, pp. 23–56.