

"An Evil Empire": The Rhetorical Rearmament of Ronald Reagan

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Jon Richard Peterson

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This dissertation titled  
"An Evil Empire": The Rhetorical Rearmament of Ronald Reagan

by  
JON RICHARD PETERSON

has been approved for  
the Department of History  
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

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Chester J. Pach, Jr.  
Associate Professor of History

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Benjamin M. Ogles  
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

## ABSTRACT

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This project examines the origins, drafting, and effects of Ronald Reagan's Evil Empire speech. My dissertation introduces this important address by exploring Reagan's political ideology during his pre-presidential years. His ideological polemics coexisted with his pragmatic governing style. I subsequently explain how ending the foreign policy of détente with the Soviet Union led to the rise of the Nuclear Freeze movement, a broad-based, bipartisan, interfaith, international peace group. The dissertation centers on the reaction by peace activists, evangelical Christians, the Kremlin, and the mainstream news media to rhetorical rearmament, Reagan's Manichean and moralistic characterization of his foreign policy ideology. My project concludes by studying the political phenomenon of "evil empire" over the past quarter century

The importance of the study derives from the political mobilization of the White House against this incarnation of the peace movement among religious voters, in the news media, and from the bully pulpit. My dissertation examines the varying levels of support the Nuclear Freeze movement received from peace activists, the mainstream news media, and religious organizations. The president needed to counteract the movement's popularity by creating a favorable national discourse on behalf of his military rearmament. Instead, Reagan's oratory exacerbated the Cold War tensions by deeming the Soviet Union "an evil empire" and "the focus of evil in the modern world."

The president found himself caught between his desire for nuclear arms reductions and his unyielding belief in the inherent evil of Soviet Communism. Throughout his presidency, Reagan alternated between ideological and pragmatic approaches toward the Soviet Union. The Evil Empire speech was the height of ideology. Yet, soon after the address the president came to favor pragmatism than ideology. He embraced Mikhail Gorbachev and created the conditions necessary to end the Cold War. Rhetorical rearmament had the unintended consequences of galvanizing the Nuclear Freeze movement, hindering U.S.-Soviet diplomacy, and contributing to the end of the Cold War.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Chester J. Pach, Jr.

Associate Professor of History

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## INTRODUCTION

The American people elected Ronald Reagan in November 1980 because he represented something Jimmy Carter no longer did. Reagan presented himself as a leader who would restore national self-confidence, economic prosperity and international respect. Many Americans rejected the shades of gray and self-criticism in Carter's worldview. Instead they responded to Reagan's message that the United States was an unapologetic force for good in the world. Upon taking office in January 1981, the new president coupled muscular rhetoric with drastic defense spending increases to warn the Soviet Union that the new administration would challenge Soviet ideology and influence around the world.

Reagan's large defense spending hikes built upon the increased expenditures of Carter's last two budgets and put the nail in the coffin of détente, which had effectively ceased in 1979 after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Reagan viewed higher defense spending as sound foreign policy that could be economically tenable.<sup>2</sup> On an ideological level, he attempted to set the nation free from the perceived moral relativism of détente through rhetorical rearmament—a strident reassertion of American moral certitude and military power.

Despite Reagan's landslide election and the outpouring of goodwill following the assassination attempt in March 1981, a majority of Americans were discontent with his

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<sup>1</sup> Jimmy Carter did break with the policy of détente in 1979 after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He also sought and received significant increases in the fiscal 1980 defense budget. However, Carter's ambivalence toward diplomacy and condemnations of Moscow make it difficult to characterize his Soviet policy. See Lou Cannon, *President Reagan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 301- and Francis FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 147, 177.

<sup>2</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 62, 131.

strident rhetoric and actions by 1983. The president found himself besieged on the economic, political, and foreign policy fronts. The economic recession of 1981-1982 continued to plague the president. Americans were not feeling the effects of the recovery by early 1983, thus creating a difficult political climate for further defense spending increases. Reagan's military and rhetorical rearmament also fueled the growing Nuclear Freeze movement, a broad, bipartisan, interfaith, international peace group. The president had been ambivalent about mounting a bold political challenge to this peace movement until winter 1983.

On March 8, 1983, Reagan added to his political problems by attacking the Nuclear Freeze movement in an address to the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).<sup>3</sup> This signature piece of rhetorical rearmament, deemed the "Evil Empire" speech, was delivered for clear political reasons. Reagan spoke to his core evangelical constituency in an attempt to find support for his administration's foreign policy among pro-Nuclear Freeze evangelicals. The president hoped that their shared opposition to abortion and support for school prayer could encourage evangelicals to embrace his national security policy. He attempted to sell them on military rearmament as part of the same moralistic code that led evangelicals to conservative positions on social issues.

In an ironic twist, Reagan delivered the speech at a time when relations with the Kremlin were improving. In February 1983, the president had secretly met with Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin for the first time. With the help of Secretary of State George Shultz, the two men began a productive dialogue. "Evil

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<sup>3</sup> *The Gallup Poll Public Opinion, 1935-1997*. CD-ROM Edition. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 2000), 28.

Empire” was more of a characterization of Soviet-American relations during the first two years of the Reagan administration than an indication of the direction Reagan would take the relationship in the next two years. The president was starting to see the benefits of a pragmatic stance toward Moscow, but his ideological hatred for communism continued to guide his major public pronouncements. As a result, the Evil Empire speech was rooted in two incongruous impulses, Reagan’s ideological anticommunism and his desire to neutralize domestic political opponents of that same anticommunism.

The president was part ideological conservative and part pragmatic conservative. Reagan could be ideologically rigid in his thinking about an issue such as Soviet policy. He could also demonstrate pragmatism, such as his unwillingness to track as far to the right on social issues as some Christian conservatives hoped he would go. He displayed both ideology and pragmatism in his Evil Empire speech. Reagan’s condemnations of Soviet communism were among the most ideological of his presidency. Meanwhile, he deleted the strident language about social issues drafted by his speechwriters. The address exemplifies how the president worked to strengthen his electoral coalition. He attempted to tell social conservatives why they should support his “peace through strength” foreign policy program of ever-increasing defense spending without alienating social moderates in the process.

This speech was unsuccessful in the short term. It hurt Reagan more than it helped him. NAE members, most of them social conservatives, continued to overwhelmingly support the Nuclear Freeze movement. A nuclear freeze resolution passed the House of Representatives in May 1983 despite the president’s attempt to stem

its momentum. Moreover, for the first time in his presidency, more Americans disapproved than approved of the president's Soviet policy. The Kremlin was privately confused by his secret diplomatic olive branch coupled with his public condemnations of Moscow. Meanwhile, the president's own approval numbers continued to languish.

The president worked to neutralize the negative repercussions of the address. Reagan's career as a muscular anticommunist and his "evil empire" polemics combined to increase Soviet fears of American belligerence. The president's rhetoric was filtered through the news media in a way that made him appear a zealous anticommunist crusader. With the economy recovering, foreign policy emerged as Reagan's Achilles heel in his reelection bid. His eventual move to defuse the nuclear fear exacerbated by rhetorical rearmament insured his reelection. He carried the political baggage of "evil empire" into his second term negotiations with reform-minded Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan shed it by rhetorically disarming during their 1988 Moscow Summit. By embracing a pragmatic foreign policy, the president helped end the Cold War.

This dissertation fits into a larger literature explaining some of the domestic and international forces that influenced the address. The Evil Empire speech has received many cursory scholarly examinations. Lou Cannon in *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* framed the drafting of the address as a struggle between administration hawks epitomized by Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger and pragmatists exemplified by Secretary of State George Shultz after his ascent to that office in June 1982. Cannon also touched upon the tension between hawkish speechwriter Anthony Dolan and the pragmatic David Gergen, who oversaw the speechwriters, during the drafting of the Evil

Empire speech. Donald Oberdorfer in *From the Cold War to a New Era* furthers Cannon's account of debates within the administration over the speech's content. He demonstrates pragmatists' horror at Reagan's rhetorical choices versus hawkish exuberance that he "called a spade a spade."

Frances FitzGerald's *Way Out There in the Blue* discusses the popular scorn heaped upon the address. She argues that the speech demonstrated Reagan's preoccupation with the battle of Armageddon between the forces of good and evil. Richard Reeves provides a detailed discussion of deliberations between the president and National Security Advisor William Clark on ways to toughen the speech in *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination*. In *Strategies of Containment*, John Lewis Gaddis conversely emphasizes Reagan's secret move toward engaging diplomatically with Moscow in February 1983 prior to the address. In *For the Soul of Mankind*, Melvyn Leffler characterizes the Evil Empire speech as vitriolic and the president as "inept" in thinking through his ideas about national security.<sup>4</sup> John Patrick Diggins in his intellectual biography, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* attempts to give equal weight to the president's words and deeds. He criticizes the methodology of Reagan hagiographers who explain the 40<sup>th</sup> president in a postmodernist context by emphasizing his words without regard for his deeds.

James Mann offers the most effective and complete discussion of the address up to this point in *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*. He nevertheless provides limited analysis of the address in part because his work focuses on the Berlin Wall speech more than Reagan's other oratory. He sees the Evil Empire speech as the culmination of an

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<sup>4</sup> Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 353-354.

“ideological offensive” and the coordination between the administration and the NAE to counter the Nuclear Freeze movement. Mann argues that the State Department and National Security Council viewed the address as more domestic politics than foreign policy. The author makes another sound observation by pointing out that years later the Soviets requested that Reagan abandon “evil empire” phraseology in order to strengthen Gorbachev domestically.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation differs with Mann, however, by arguing that the Evil Empire speech was more important than the Berlin Wall speech because it was delivered at a more politically and diplomatically sensitive time.

To that end, Henry Steele Commager judged the speech “the worst [speech] by any US president.”<sup>6</sup> The address provoked Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. to characterize Reagan as “the true believer to a *jihad*, a crusade of extermination against the infidel.”<sup>7</sup> Negative reaction to the speech in the polls also hurt the president politically in the weeks after the address. In the medium term, however, fusing his foreign policy agenda with the social issues increased support for his international initiatives among religious conservatives. In the long term, after the fall of the Soviet Union, some scholars began seeing the speech in a favorable light. By the late 1990s, Dinesh D’Souza argued that the address helped destroy the Iron Curtain. Paul Kengor contended that the speech was intentionally polarizing and provocative because Reagan believed he was doing God’s will. The address has been increasingly perceived as a prescient, brave oration that signaled the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union. This study challenges both the impressions of

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<sup>5</sup> James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Viking, 2009), 29, 31, 154, 304-306.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 1, Folder 1, “Inquiry.” *USA Today*, November 9, 1983, Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, Calif.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983 “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, “Pretension in the Presidential Pulpit.” *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 1983, Reagan Library.

the speech in 1983 as an unmitigated disaster and the triumphant post-Cold War narrative. This dissertation examines the address in the context of the time when it was delivered and over the duration of the Reagan administration.

This work seeks to examine some of the nuances, contradictions, and ironies Reagan faced while fighting the Cold War. It looks at the development of his anticommunism, the drafting of the Evil Empire speech, and the long term effects of his rhetoric. The first chapter deals with the evolution of Reagan's political philosophy from New Deal Democrat to Republican anticommunist. It surveys some of the experiences and ideas that informed his rhetorical armament against communism during his pre-presidential years. The second chapter focuses on the origins, composition, and goals of the Nuclear Freeze movement and the reaction by the Reagan administration to the organization. Along with protesting the nuclear arms buildup, this social movement opposed the president's foreign policy strategy. The third chapter analyzes mounting conservative concern that Reagan had lost his resolve in dealings with the Soviet Union. It also discusses the development of his rhetorical rearmament against international enemies and domestic adversaries.

The fourth chapter explains the drafting, editing, and delivery of the address. Reagan demonstrated his ideology by strengthening the anti-Soviet section of the speech and his pragmatism by tempering the moralistic language on social issues. The fifth chapter discusses popular reaction to the speech. NAE members were largely unmoved by Reagan's words, while, the news media reaction helped create the phenomenon of "evil empire." Those two words framed his Soviet policy in the news media for the



remainder of his presidency. The sixth chapter shows the conservative coalition that slowly coalesced around the foreign policy goals laid out in the speech. The NAE leadership proved willing over time to provide a systematic institutional embrace of administration foreign policy.

The seventh chapter deals with legacy of “evil empire” in domestic politics and the subsequent rhetorical freeze from 1983 to 1985. The president displayed his affability over his stridency, which aided his reelection effort and helped facilitate a first summit with new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The eighth chapter examines the legacy of “evil empire” in superpower diplomacy from 1985 to 1988. Reagan maintained his hatred of the Soviet system, but wanted to help encourage the Western-style reforms Gorbachev was implementing. His rhetorical disarmament in 1988 worked to this end. The final chapter discusses the historical memory of the speech as the phrase became a phenomenon in political culture. Reagan’s oratory showed future presidents the pitfalls and possibilities of using moralistic language to evangelize for America and achieve political ends in the age of Reagan.

This dissertation builds upon my M.A. thesis, *Words Will Never Hurt Me?: The Evil Empire Speech and Ronald Reagan*. Significant portions of chapters two through seven are closely based on my M.A. thesis. Most of the original archival research used in the dissertation was done for the thesis. I returned to the Reagan Library and visited other archives to research for the dissertation, but much of the information I found was peripheral or simply did not fit within the parameters of this project.

The dissertation, however, provides a broader grounding in how Reagan's conservative ideology developed in post-World War II America and ultimately influenced his rhetorical rearmament. Moreover, the dissertation takes the story of "evil empire" to its logical conclusion, Reagan's renunciation of the phrase in Red Square during the Moscow Summit of May 1988. The dissertation also demonstrates how the phenomenon of "evil empire" evolved and lived on in the increasingly favorable historical appraisals of the Reagan presidency. The core of the story remains quite similar, but the starting point and the ending point have changed to broaden the historical scope and better demonstrate the continued relevance of "evil empire" in political culture. My thinking about Ronald Reagan and this one episode of the Cold War has matured. Through the prism of this landmark address, my dissertation deals more fully with the competing ideological and pragmatic impulses that coexisted in Reagan's politics and diplomacy.

"Evil Empire" has become a pervasive part of political culture that is now used to describe people, groups, and ideas far beyond the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. In some ways the popularity of the phrase has obscured its original meaning. The political calculations of the speech, the subsequent lukewarm reaction to it, and its prominent place in the story of how the Cold War ended all inform this work. The address was delivered for clear political ends, which did not include signaling the beginning of the end of Soviet communism. This political liability for Reagan's reelection is more commonly viewed today as a signpost for the fall of the Soviet Union. While Ronald Reagan is remembered for his oratory, we should also recall the effects of his words in

order to help create a deeper understanding of American political culture during the late Cold War.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### DEVELOPING REAGAN'S ANTICOMMUNISM

Ronald Reagan's rhetorical anticommunism culminated with his March 8, 1983 address to the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, dubbed the "Evil Empire" speech. He called the Soviet Union "the focus of evil in the modern world" and "an evil empire." These polemics had clear biographical and intellectual origins. The seeds of Reagan's moralistic anticommunism were planted by his devoutly religious mother, germinated as an actor and union leader in Hollywood, and flowered during his time as a corporate spokesperson for General Electric. Reagan's thinking about communism was a direct result of his life experience. The ideas that later took form in the Evil Empire speech were on display in his pro-Goldwater "A Time for Choosing" speech in 1964 and as he wrote his own political radio scripts during the last half of the 1970s.

Ronald Reagan's pre-presidential years shaped his political philosophy. With an everyman narrative straight out of a Frank Capra movie, Reagan the union chief stood up to Hollywood's communist factions in the late 1940s when other performers did not. He staked his ideological ground as an opponent of bigger government, higher taxes, and communist threats in the 1950s as a corporate spokesperson for General Electric. Reagan's winning gubernatorial bid in 1966 harnessed the 1960s backlash against greater governmental intervention in the economy and the call for governmental action to fight campus radicals and antiwar demonstrators. Challenging a sitting president for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976 made him an idealistic crusader for a

conservative foreign policy. The radio scripts he wrote in the mid to late 1970s refined and summarized his worldview, which challenged communist ideas and liberal policies. Reagan's biography and ideology combined to make him appealing to the electorate at a time when people had lost faith in their government.<sup>8</sup>

Reagan demonstrated a level of adaptability characteristics of a good actor. He possessed a pragmatic understanding of what his audience wanted. As a politician, he had an innate ability to speak to the pressing concerns of his constituents from national security to social issues. His radio broadcasts emphasized his anticommunism and tax cutting ideology. Developing tactics to shore up all three legs of the Republican Party's electoral coalition—anticommunism, lower taxes, social conservatism—demonstrated the refinement of Reagan's political skills during his pre-presidential years.<sup>9</sup>

Reagan's political coalition building strategy revolved around uniting conservative opposition by lumping adversaries into one broad leftist ideology, just as he would do in the Evil Empire speech. His radio broadcasts demonstrated the deftness with which he tied the political center-left in the United States to communist forces. For example in one script, he implicitly tied atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair's attempt to take "In God We Trust" off U.S. currency to Soviet attempts at silencing Pope John Paul II in his native Poland.<sup>10</sup> Striking a balance on divisive social issues between mobilizing

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Edwards, *Early Reagan* (New York: Morrow, 1987); Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 19-191; Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003) 87-102, 121-125; Lou Cannon, *Reagan* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), 72-87, 98-103; Edmund Morris, *Dutch* (New York: Random House, 1999), 435-436.

<sup>9</sup> Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, Eds. *Reagan, In His Own Hand* (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-177.

social conservatives and not alienating moderates proved problematic, however, as Reagan found in the wake of his Evil Empire speech.

### **From Dutch to Governor Reagan**

Ronald Reagan's life was a dynamic journey from a small town Illinois to the White House. Reagan was born in tiny Tampico, Illinois on February 6, 1911 and spent most of his youth in Dixon, Illinois as the son of a devoutly Christian mother, Nelle, and an alcoholic father, Jack. Young "Dutch," so dubbed by his father, followed his mother's example by attending her church and developing a 1920s conservative Christian worldview that would serve as the baseline for his thinking. Meanwhile, Dutch tended to see the better parts of Jack's nature rather than objectively ponder his flaws. This trait led Reagan as an adult to be guided more by his experience than abstract evidence. The ideas he adopted conformed to his experiences rather than ideas changing how he viewed events in his life. Reagan dreamed of movie stardom. He realized that goal, starring in numerous films over his long career. As acting roles dried up, Reagan became more interested in politics. He evolved from film star to union head to corporate spokesman to politician. The overarching theme of Reagan's early years from Tampico to Tinsel Town was change.

Reagan admired the strong political leadership of his political hero, President Franklin Roosevelt. He demonstrated similar charisma, charm, and diligence in presiding over the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). Reagan had been a fan of the New Deal before immersing himself in the union. His political affiliations, however, began to shift in the wake of World War II. Reagan believed Hollywood was moving left, while he turned

right. With anticommunism emerging as his overriding concern, he became uncomfortable in his liberal Hollywood milieu.

Reagan moved in step with his times during the conservative 1950s, casting his votes for Republican candidates at the ballot box. He never espoused the dogmatic liberalism he later claimed when dramatizing his political conversion. Since the late 1930s, he had taken a hard line against communism.<sup>11</sup> He retained Nelle's conservative Christian values, but without an evangelical streak. Reagan's economic metamorphosis was most dramatic. He evolved from a New Dealer to a proponent of smaller government and lower taxes.<sup>12</sup>

### **Evangelical Americanism**

Reagan's rise from humble roots to Hollywood stardom reinforced his undying faith in his idealized America. For Reagan, that idea revolved around his country acting as a beneficent force in the world. He believed the words of Lincoln that the United States served as "the last best hope of mankind." Reagan drew inspiration from the good works Americans did individually and collectively. He supported the notion that Americans were made, not born. Reagan asserted that anyone with the gumption to emigrate to the United States and the skill to forge a new life should be considered every bit as American as native-born citizens. He proved evangelical not in his Christianity, but in his Americanism. Part of evangelical Americanism, promoting the benefits and

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<sup>11</sup> Anne Edwards, *Early Reagan* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987), 171.

<sup>12</sup> For a thorough discussion of Reagan's youth and early adulthood see Edwards, *Early Reagan*; Lou Cannon, *Reagan* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982); Cannon, *Governor Reagan* (New York: Public Affairs, 1983); Gary Wills, *Reagan's America* (New York: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1987); and for Reagan's own take on his upbringing see Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

virtues of the United States, involved contrasting it with Soviet totalitarianism. This quasi-religious idea of America later endeared Reagan to evangelical Christian audiences in the 1980s.<sup>13</sup>

Reagan was the perfect evangelist of America's benevolence. His political ideology brimmed with optimism. Reagan connected with voters through his optimistic reading of history. As his political career developed, he hoped to share the good news of America with the world. Reagan's political inspiration, Franklin Roosevelt, had also evangelized for his own form of Americanism. Reagan agreed with Roosevelt that Americanism "was so very sensible, logical, and practical, that societies would adopt those values and systems if only given the chance." Roosevelt and Reagan both preferred the "city-on-a-hill/an-example-for-all-the-world-to-follow approach" rather than coercion.<sup>14</sup>

Reagan's absolute faith in the goodness of America demonstrated the coherence in his ideology. By the time he had completed his transformation into a conservative Republican, his political ideas stopped evolving. Clear ideological continuity exists between his 1964 televised speech for Goldwater, his 1970s post-gubernatorial radio scripts and the oratory of Reagan's first term. His pre-presidential life tells a tale of change followed by continuity. Reagan's life exhibited constant change from his youth through his early forties. Then in middle age he settled on a conservative philosophy that endured for the remainder of his life.

### **Joining the Political Fray**

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<sup>13</sup> Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 118-122.

<sup>14</sup> Warren Kimball, *The Juggler* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 186.



Reagan came from culturally conservative and economically liberal working class ethnic stock. His parents raised Dutch in a Democratic household. Reagan reached adulthood as the most popular and successful Democratic president of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, FDR, came into office. Roosevelt proposed a New Deal for all Americans. He hoped this plan would lead the nation out of the Great Depression by creating economic stability through government intervention.<sup>15</sup> Reagan the aspiring actor revered Roosevelt's communication style, exemplified by his periodic radio Fireside Chats with the nation. Dutch also admired Roosevelt's leadership through the Depression and World War II, including his ability to build political coalitions that fostered FDR's version of evangelical Americanism.<sup>16</sup> Reagan's support for Roosevelt coupled with Dutch's subsequent move to the Right exemplified the political changes in a group known during the realignment of the 1980s as Reagan Democrats.

After these crises abated and his political hero died, Reagan the actor and union leader began to question his inherited liberalism. The wasteful governmental bureaucracy he experienced while working on Army propaganda films during World War II initiated his political evolution. Reagan's ideology moved rightward from the end of World War II through his national political emergence in 1964, but he never forgot the lessons learned from Roosevelt. Even as Reagan's liberalism wavered, he continued focusing on the most bipartisan parts of FDR's legacy. He spoke glowingly of Roosevelt's reduction of government waste. Dutch also emulated his predecessor's communication style as he developed his own vision of evangelical Americanism.

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<sup>15</sup> Edmund Morris, *Dutch* (New York: Random House, 1999), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Edwards, *Early Reagan* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1987), 177, 197, 229, 231-232; Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 40-41, 118; Kimball, *The Juggler*, 186-200.

Reagan remained on the Left immediately after the war. Despite newly planted seeds of doubt, the actor became a member of the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions (HICCASP) in 1945. The group consisted of moderate liberals and even some communists. Reagan almost led a HICCASP protest against atomic weapons. The organization was arguing for international control of nuclear weapons, a liberal idea reminiscent of the ill-fated Baruch Plan to internationalize atomic energy. He planned to appear at a HICCASP rally in December 1945 for “Atomic Power and Foreign Policy,” which promoted an idealized vision of shared international control of atomic energy. The actor’s employer, the conservative film studio Warner Brothers, forced him to cancel. Reagan’s genuine opposition to nuclear weapons endured even as his political ideology shifted.<sup>17</sup>

Reagan joined another liberal organization after his stateside service in World War II, the American’s Veterans Committee (AVC). Soon after becoming a member in 1946, Reagan’s ideas about AVC began to shift owing to its vocal communist minority. Reagan’s denunciation of communism at their California state convention was met with silence. HICCASP concurrently began developing strong pro-communist sympathies. Reagan worked with James Roosevelt, son of the recently deceased president, to pass an anticommunist resolution in HICCASP, but hostility toward the move led the actor to leave the organization.<sup>18</sup> These clashes within AVC and HICCASP undermined

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 227-237.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid..

Reagan's liberal idealism. He gravitated toward President Truman's realism and away from the U.S.-Soviet cooperation favored by Former Vice President Henry Wallace.<sup>19</sup>

Reagan remained a loyal Democrat for the rest of the 1940s. He identified with party founder Thomas Jefferson's assertion that people represented "the safest depository of power."<sup>20</sup> Reagan also admired Roosevelt for rescuing nations in need during the war by supporting their sovereignty and punishing those who threatened them.<sup>21</sup> The idea of America as a saving grace was never more prominent than during this period. Despite veneration of these formidable Democratic presidents, the postwar spread of international communism altered Reagan's politics after his selection in 1947 as President of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). Reagan found the Republican Party's brand of ardent anticommunism more in line with his worldview than that of the Democratic Party.

As president of SAG, Reagan faced off against fellow travelers. The guild struggled to choose which union of studio and craft workers to recognize. The established International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) fought encroachments from the leftist Conference of Studio Unions (CSU). Reagan suspected the CSU was a communist front. He ordered SAG to cross CSU picket lines, thereby keeping the motion picture industry going. After months of turmoil the upstart CSU collapsed, but not before Reagan faced career-ending threats of disfigurement. He demonstrated a combination of pragmatism and vigilant anticommunism by recognizing the established union and undermining a potential nest of communist activity.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Alonzo Hamby, *Man of the People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 355-357.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 119.

<sup>21</sup> Garry Wills, *Reagan's America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1987), 222.

<sup>22</sup> Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 86-90; Cannon, *Reagan*, 73-75; Reagan, *An American Life*, 106-110.

Reagan's stand against union radicalism encouraged the Federal Bureau of Investigation to use him an informant in 1946-1947. Reagan cooperated to keep communist content out of films. His brushes with communism, real and imagined, strengthened the anticommunist resolve that would last for the rest of Reagan's life.<sup>23</sup> The experiences of these years led Reagan to assert that "Communists used lies, deceit, violence, or any other tactic that suited them to advance the cause of Soviet expansionism. I knew from the experience of hand-to-hand combat that America faced no more insidious or evil threat than that of communism."<sup>24</sup> Reagan came to see himself as a crusader against communism. He fought against communist attempts to take over Hollywood. During that time, Reagan maintained that they used front organizations like CSU and filled existing organizations such as HICCASP with closet communists. Reagan was at the vanguard of anticommunist sentiment by sensing a growing threat of domestic communist infiltration.

While testifying in 1947 before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in Los Angeles, Reagan asserted that communists sought to control the film industry. As Screen Actors Guild president, he cited trade unionism as an effective weapon against a communist takeover of Hollywood. Reagan argued that civil liberties would not be sacrificed in the face of this threat. He refused to accept that a blacklist challenged civil liberties.<sup>25</sup> Reagan believed in helping the federal government root out

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Lettow. *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House), 3-12.

<sup>24</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 114-115.

<sup>25</sup> Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 98-102.

communistic activity. Although he did not support the blacklist at first, concern about communist infiltration of Hollywood became his primary focus.

Reagan's experience in post-World War II Hollywood reinforced his belief that domestic allies participated in a Moscow-led worldwide conspiracy to subvert democratic governments. Reagan did not view the communists he encountered in Hollywood as possessing a sense of misplaced altruism. Rather, he saw domestic communists aligning with the Kremlin to foster Soviet attempts at world dominance. Reagan did not personally accuse anyone of communist sympathies, but remained vigilant.<sup>26</sup> He reflected the era's feverish alarm about communist conspiracies. Americans watched China fall to communism in 1949 and communist North Koreans attack pro-Western South Korea in 1950. Coupled with the Soviet domination of Eastern and Central Europe by 1945, this ideology seemed on the march.

In 1950, Ronald Reagan joined the Crusade for Freedom, a newly-formed CIA front organization led by the brash General Lucius Clay, which attempted to counter communists in Hollywood. The group called for the rollback of communism both abroad and at home and popularized the conservative challenge to the consensus liberal policy of containment. Reagan honed his anticommunist rhetoric at Crusade for Freedom rallies. Reagan's personal battles against communists led him to use words like "victory" and "fight" in his anticommunist rhetoric, which became hallmarks of his speaking style.<sup>27</sup>

Reagan warned of possible communist expansion in the January 22, 1951 issue of *Fortnight* magazine: "Suppose we quit using the words Communist and Communism.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 97-102.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Schweizer, *Reagan's War* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 25-27. Paul Kengor, *The Crusader* (New York: Regan, 2006), 18-20.

They are a hoax perpetrated by the Russian Government, to aid in securing fifth columnists in other countries and to mask Russian aggression aimed at world conquest.” His vigilance awakened, he asserted, “Every time we make the issue one of Communism as a political philosophy, we help in this hoax.” Reagan continued, “Substitute ‘Pro-Russian’ for the word Communist and watch the confusion disappear. Then you can say to any American, ‘You are free to believe any political theory (including Communism) you want.’” Then making the Cold War connection he asserted, “But the so-called ‘Communist Party’ is nothing less than a ‘Russian-American Bund’ owing allegiance to Russia and supporting Russia in its plan to conquer the world.” Reagan concluded, “The very constitution behind which these cynical agents hide becomes a weapon to be used against them. They are traitors practicing treason.”<sup>28</sup> These remarks revealed the concerns the actor had developed in his struggle with communists, while warning that communist infiltration could spread.

Believing by 1952 that much of the procommunist sentiment in the motion picture industry had been subdued by efforts to root out the red menace, Reagan deemed Hollywood “the world enemy” of communism.<sup>29</sup> His anticommunism grew even more strident after General Electric (GE) hired him in 1954 as a traveling spokesperson. The veteran actor’s thinking and anti-Soviet rhetoric drew inspiration from his lawyer and friend Laurence Beilenson. Reagan believed the United States and the USSR were destined to clash rather than peacefully coexist. Beilenson wrote a number of books on foreign policy including, *The Treaty Trap*. His thesis amounted to: “the Soviet Union

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<sup>28</sup> Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 102.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas W. Evans, *The Education of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Columbia University, 2006), 16.

retreats when faced with strength.”<sup>30</sup> Beilenson advocated giving rhetorical encouragement and material aid to Soviet dissidents and regime opponents, ideas that guided Reagan’s thinking for the rest of his life.

### **Rhetorical Armament**

Communist-turned-conservative Whittaker Chambers served as the primary intellectual inspiration for Reagan’s anticommunism in the 1950s. During HUAC hearings in 1948, Chambers gained fame by testifying that former Roosevelt administration diplomat Alger Hiss had been a communist spy while serving in the federal government. Chambers’ 1951 confessional autobiography *Witness* reinforced Reagan’s anticommunism with unequivocal condemnations of the system in language that Reagan would later use nearly verbatim in his Evil Empire speech: “I see in Communism the focus of the concentrated evil in our time.” Chambers continued, discussing “the crimes and horrors” inherent to communism. The Christian warrior subtext of Chambers’ anticommunism resonated with Reagan. He was intrigued by Chambers’ explanation of the communist conception of human-divine relations as “the vision of Man without God.”<sup>31</sup>

Chambers argued that anyone who thought communism could fight evil in the world would eventually leave the party. A free-thinker would realize “that Communism is a greater evil.”<sup>32</sup> Chambers asserted that the ideology justified both Stalin’s bloody purge of the Soviet communist party in the 1930s and the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. These examples added to the evidence that the ideology was “absolutely evil.” Chambers

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>31</sup> Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952), 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 64.

viewed communism as not only an instrument of evil, but also an inspiration for evil:

“The more truly a man acted in its spirit and interest, the more certainly he perpetuated evil.”<sup>33</sup> He believed communism could not conquer Christianity without help:

“Communism is never stronger than the failure of other faiths.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite his strong condemnation, Chambers approached the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century rise of communism from a pessimistic viewpoint. He thought choosing anticommunism had relegated him to the losing side of history. Regardless, his stark characterization of communism as “evil against God and man” inspired Reagan’s framework for conceptualizing the ideology. Reagan also drew insight from Chambers’ belief in the aberration of communism: “Communism may never make truce with the spirit of man. If it does, sooner or later, it is the spirit of man that will always triumph, for it draws its strength from a deeper fountain.”<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps Reagan’s internalization of Chambers words—he quoted sections of *Witness* from memory—led him to exaggerate his leftward position on the political spectrum. He was a liberal, but not a radical. Chambers advocated informing on communists and fellow travelers, a role Reagan played within SAG. Chambers felt morally justified as an informant: “The choice for the ex-communist is between shielding a small number of people who still actively further what he now sees to be evil, or of helping to shield millions from that evil which threatens even their souls. Those who do

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 264.



not inform are still conniving at that evil.” Believing these words might have helped assuage any guilt Reagan may have felt as an FBI informant.<sup>36</sup>

Chambers furthermore warned that liberals acted as naïve defenders of communism through their argument that conservatives engaged in witch hunts against opponents.<sup>37</sup> Reagan favored a more subtle approach toward his attacks on the left, but maintained his ardent viewpoint. Their divergent attitudes made one a martyr and the other the messiah of the conservative anticommunist movement. Chambers believed he was “leaving the winning world for the losing world,” and that “men must act on what they believe right, not on what they believe probable... But it is better to die on the losing side than to live under Communism.” Reagan admittedly was “too optimistic to agree” with Chambers. As president, he predicted communism’s consignment to the “ash-heap of history.” Reagan’s reference amounted to a rhetorical twist on the words of Soviet revolutionary Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky, who wrote that the rival Mensheviks would inhabit this terrain after their vacillating role in the 1917 Russian Revolution.<sup>38</sup>

Reagan felt comfortable throwing communistic rhetoric back at Marxist-Leninists in asserting the dominance of the Western political system. Chambers, writing three decades earlier during a more vibrant period of international communism, agreed with communists that history was moving in a Marxist direction. Communism would supplant capitalism in his opinion. Chambers found that notion easy to accept owing to his

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<sup>36</sup> Edward, *Early Reagan*, 304.

<sup>37</sup> Chambers, *Witness*, 473.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 25; Reagan asserted his optimism in *Where’s the Rest of Me?* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1965), 268; Reagan predicted that the Soviets would end up on the ash-heap of history in his “Address to Members of the British Parliament.” John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42614>. (accessed April 4, 2010). Trotsky used the phrase “rubbish-bin of history,” the inspiration for Reagan’s phraseology in *The History of the Russian Revolution* (Trans.by Max Eastman) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932), 311.

formative years as a communist. Reagan the evangelical American could not entertain the notion that communism would triumph.

### **A Time for Choosing**

Reagan's ideology moved ever rightward from the end of World War II until the 1964 Goldwater campaign. He believed he faced a powerful communist threat as a union leader, along with recoiling at his high tax bracket. Loyal Davis, stepfather of his second wife, Nancy Davis, encouraged his nascent conservatism.<sup>39</sup> He refined his conservative positions throughout the 1950s as a corporate spokesman for GE. Reagan became involved in the corporation's political program, an effort to promote pro-business conservatism among members of Congress.<sup>40</sup> By the dawning of the 1960s, the former New Deal Democrat was a Republican in everything but name.

During the decade, Reagan moved farther right as the foreign policy of consensus anti-communism dissolved in the muck of Vietnam. Reagan emerged in the dying days of Barry Goldwater's insurgent conservative presidential campaign as the most appealing Republican surrogate for the Sunbelt Conservatism of lower taxes, ardent anticommunism, and local control. Reagan and Goldwater shared the same core beliefs. The difference between the two revolved around Reagan's ability make conservatism appealing to the masses. Putting a smiling face on Goldwater's conservative ideas helped people accept Reagan's judgment that conservative ideas represented the nation's founding principles rather than a miserly elitism.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Evans, *The Education of Ronald Reagan*, 57-58.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>41</sup> Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 115-161. Edwards, *Early Reagan*, 481-486; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 195-197.

Reagan's most famous peroration of Sunbelt Conservatism occurred before a nationally televised audience on October 27, 1964. The Goldwater campaign purchased a half hour from NBC for Ronald Reagan to speak on the candidate's behalf. The easily recognizable television host of General Electric Theatre from 1954-1962 served as co-chair of California Citizens for Goldwater-Miller.<sup>42</sup> In the years before making his national political debut, Reagan honed his ideas on "the mashed potato circuit," a nickname for the audiences of GE employees and conservatives across the country who heard his stock speech. The actor's wealthy backers eagerly put Reagan on television to raise money for the party's standard bearer.

His "A Time for Choosing" speech was a polished version of the address he had been delivering to GE branches and local chambers of commerce since 1954 on the mashed potato circuit. Reagan focused on the core principles he shared with Goldwater: anticommunism, smaller government, and lower taxes. He emphasized the later two ideas, but he also did link anticommunism and smaller government as allied ideologies against communism and bigger government as he would years later in the Evil Empire speech.

Reagan excoriated communism, grouped liberalism and socialism together as dangerous ideologies, and argued for a "peace through strength" foreign policy of increased military spending to insure victory in the Cold War. Those three tenets of the address were easily recognizable nineteen years later in the Evil Empire speech. Attacking Leninism at every turn, linking liberalism and communism, and pointing out the naïveté of peace activists became hallmarks of his oratorical style. Reagan sharpened

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<sup>42</sup> Frances FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 59.

these ideas in speeches given throughout the decades leading up to the presidency.<sup>43</sup>

Journalist David Broder called the pro-Goldwater broadcast the “most successful national political debut since Williams Jennings Bryan electrified the 1896 convention with the ‘Cross of Gold’ speech.”<sup>44</sup>

Reagan infused the address with Manichean language that continued to characterize his thinking after becoming president. “We’re at war with the most dangerous enemy that has ever faced mankind in his long climb from the swamp to the stars.” The former corporate spokesman made the connection between military security and economic security, and then pivoted to drive his knife into liberalism: “Those who would trade our freedom for the soup kitchen of the welfare state have told us they have a utopian solution of peace without victory. They call their policy ‘accommodation.’ And they say if we’ll only avoid any direct confrontation with the enemy, he’ll forget his evil ways and learn to love us.”<sup>45</sup> Linkages between domestic and foreign opponents as well as liberals and communists emerged as two of his most successful and provocative rhetorical devices. Those tactics were also reused in the Evil Empire speech.

Reagan believed Washington would lose rather than gain from diplomacy: “We are retreating under the pressure of the Cold War, and someday when the time comes to deliver the ultimatum, our surrender will be voluntary because by that time we will have weakened from within spiritually, morally, and economically.” He argued that

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<sup>43</sup> One can watch, listen, and read the address <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3405> (accessed Jan. 14, 2009). One must see the speech rather than simply read it to understand the power of Reagan’s words and the sensation he caused.

<sup>44</sup> Wills, *Reagan’s America*, 291.

<sup>45</sup> Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” October 27, 1964 <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3405> (accessed Jan. 14, 2009).

Americans lost their nerve to stand up to communists because Democratic leaders remained too willing to negotiate with the Soviet Union. Reagan warned that mainstream liberals undermined American resolve to fight the Cold War. He worried about an American lack of will “because from our side he has heard voices pleading for ‘peace at any price’ or ‘better Red than dead.’”<sup>46</sup> The ideological fight against the notion of peace at any price and the use of a parable warning against the idea of “better Red than dead” reemerged in the Evil Empire speech.

Reagan urged that an accommodationist attitude not take hold: “You and I have the courage to say to our enemies, ‘There is a price we will not pay.’ There is a point beyond which they must not advance. And this is the meaning in the phrase of Barry Goldwater’s ‘peace through strength.’” The ending of Reagan’s address reflects his natural hopefulness contrasted with elements of Chambers’ pessimism. “You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We’ll preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on Earth, or we’ll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness.” He used the Manichean imagery of the hopefulness of his ideas versus the shadowy alternatives as a means of concurrently scaring and inspiring viewers to choose peace through strength.<sup>47</sup>

### **Reagan on the Radio**

Reagan’s radio commentaries ran counter to the establishment foreign policy of détente, the increased diplomatic and cultural understanding between the United States and Soviet Union during the 1970s. He worried that communism amounted to a mental

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

illness that undermined benevolent human impulses. For example, Reagan told the story of a five year-old West Berlin boy who fell from a boat in the Spree River at a point just before it flowed into East Berlin. As West Berlin fire fighters attempted a rescue that would have taken them out of their jurisdiction, an East German patrol boat barred them from entering communist-controlled waters. The boy drowned. This story captivated Reagan, who saved dozens of swimmers as a teenage lifeguard in Illinois. The tale provided an opening to assert his implicit thesis: “Communism is neither an economic or a political system—it is a form of insanity—a temporary aberration which will one day disappear from the earth because it is contrary to human nature.”<sup>48</sup> Reagan cast himself as the new evangelist of Americanism, which he believed to be the cure for those prone to catching the mental illness of communism.<sup>49</sup>

Reagan also concerned himself with the possibility that communist aggression could make the United States a second-rate power. In doing so, he placed communism at the center of these radio addresses, including his personal theological belief that the Soviet Union could trigger the End of Days. Superpowers’ nuclear arsenals created a situation “poised to bring Armageddon to the world.”<sup>50</sup> Even if Americans survived the military threat of communism, overcoming the “disease” of communism might prove more difficult. Worrying that many Americans had a low immunity to the communist

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<sup>48</sup> “Radio Address of May 1975,” Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, Eds. *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 10-12.

<sup>49</sup> Haynes Johnson calls Reagan “Dr. Feelgood” in his work on the Reagan years *Sleepwalking Through History* (New York: 1991).

<sup>50</sup> “Radio Address of Sept. 1, 1976.” Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, Eds. *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 10.

contagion, he concluded that a strong dose of anticommunist rhetoric could boost the nation's defenses.

Reagan found affirmation of his hard line in the words of Soviet dissident Alexandr Solzhenitsyn who, like himself, found hope for neutralizing communism in religion rather than détente: “I myself see Christianity today as the only living spiritual force capable of undertaking the spiritual healing of Russia.”<sup>51</sup> The Nobel Prize winning author deemed the USSR “the concentration of World Evil and the tremendous force of hatred.” He lamented that using terms like “good” and “evil” in the Western world amounted to a “joke.” Yet these “old fashioned concepts... are very real and genuine concepts... from a sphere which is higher than us.” The author called on the West to “stand up to” this evil force lest it take “everything it wants to swallow.”<sup>52</sup> Communism “rejects all absolute concepts of morality.” Communists “scoffed” at “good” and “evil” as indisputable categories. He argued that communists believe morality to be a class matter. Reagan believed the United States possessed a strong moral compass. He also agreed with Solzhenitsyn that the Soviet Union represented “the concentration of World Evil,” and said so in the Evil Empire speech.

Solzhenitsyn continued, “a handful of people determine what is good and what is bad,” but this notion spread to the Western world in the form of moral relativism. Educated Westerners shied away from seriously using the words “good” and “evil.” Without concepts of good and evil, he argued that “we will decline to the status of animals.” Solzhenitsyn argued that the moral relativism of communism makes the

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<sup>51</sup> Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 57.

<sup>52</sup> Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, *Détente: Prospects for Democracy and Dictatorship* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976), 34-35.

ideology inhuman. He dismissed the term “anticommunist” as a “stupid, badly put together” word for making communism appear as an original, basic, fundamental principle rather than as “anti-humanity.” Rejecting communism “is simply to be a human being.” He considered opposition to communism as “a protest of our souls against those who tell us to forget the concepts of good and evil.”<sup>53</sup> Reagan agreed with Solzhenitsyn that people should feel free to judge ideas and people both good and evil. He echoed many of Solzhenitsyn’s moral arguments against communism. His words reinforced and inspired Reagan.

Reagan’s discussion of the Republican National Committee’s party platform in a September 1976 praised both the dissident and the platform for taking “a strong stand for basing our policy on moral standards.” He commended “that great beacon of human courage & morality Alexandr Solzhenitsyn.”<sup>54</sup> Reagan credited Solzhenitsyn’s spiritual struggle against communism, quoting his warning that “the forces of evil have begun their decisive offensive, you can feel their pressure, & yet your screens & publications are full of prescribed smiles and raised glasses... What is the joy about?” Reagan credited Solzhenitsyn for living “through the horror of the Soviet Gulag” while maintaining “the courage to defy the slave masters of his homeland. I’ve quoted him because he does not see in us that same courage.” Reagan shared the worry that “if the West doesn’t have the will to stand firm Solzhenitsyn says ‘nothing is left then but

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<sup>53</sup> Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, *Solzhenitsyn: The Voice of Freedom* (Washington D.C.: American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, 1975), 30.

<sup>54</sup> Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds., *Reagan’s Path to Victory* (New York: Free Press, 2004) Radio Address of Sept. 1, 1976, 63.



concessions & betrayal to gain time.”<sup>55</sup> Solzhenitsyn’s example bolstered Reagan’s refusal to accept the détente era diplomatic tone.

Reagan kept his anticommunist edge from the early Cold War by calling the Soviets “a Godless tyranny” of “slave masters” acting as “an aggressor and a threat to world peace.”<sup>56</sup> He viewed the Soviet system as “incompetent and ridiculous.” Reagan quoted *American Spectator* publisher R. Emmett Tyrell Jr.’s nickname for the Soviet Union—the “arsenal of anarchy”—owing to its support for “international terrorism, hijackings, kidnappings, and other assorted barbarities.” Commenting on the condition of American anticommunism in the late 1970s, Reagan worried that the state department no longer took the Soviet threat seriously. Meanwhile his beloved Hollywood disappointed the former actor by making “movies and TV specials in which noble souls” blacklisted by the McCarthy era film industry stood against conservative demagogue-led hysteria. Reagan believed these story lines incorrectly designated FBI informants as the antagonists rather than the communists.<sup>57</sup> Reagan and many in Hollywood would find themselves on opposing sides once again in the early 1980s with the rise of the Nuclear Freeze movement.

Reagan’s exuberance in exposing the ills of communism led him to quote Gus Hall, the 1976 Communist Party presidential candidate, in his funeral oration for the party chair in 1961: “I dream of the hour when the last congressman is strangled to death on the guts of the last preacher—and since the Christians seem to love to sing about the

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<sup>55</sup> “Radio Address of June 27, 1978” in *Ibid.*, 326-328.

<sup>56</sup> “Radio Address of November 2, 1976” in *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>57</sup> Reagan might have been alluding to works such as the documentary *McCarthy; Death of a Witch Hunter* (1971); the Academy Award Winning *The Way We Were* (1973); *The Front* (1976), a Woody Allen film; or the 1976 documentary *Hollywood on Trial*.

blood, why not give them a little of it?” The communist candidate continued, “Slit the throats of their children and draw them over the mourners’ bench and the pulpit and allow them to drown in their own blood, and then see whether they enjoy singing those hymns.”<sup>58</sup> Reagan reconsidered, crossing out that section, noting he “didn’t have the nerve” to use it. Yet such a graphic quotation epitomized Reagan’s view of communism. He believed the struggle between west and east amounted to a life and death struggle in a spiritual as well as temporal sense. The moral overtones of waging a battle of ideas against the forces of communism with the backing of ethereal and material Christian soldiers later informed the foreign policy section of Reagan’s Evil Empire speech.

Countering the unwillingness of leaders during the détente era to cast Cold War issues in terms of good and evil, Reagan denounced the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II) with the Soviet Union for moral reasons. He considered limiting the capability of the U.S. military to launch a complete nuclear strike over Soviet territory immoral. According to Reagan, treaty limitations would allow U.S. nuclear weapons to reach only fifteen percent “of the people and industry of the Soviet Union,” while the Soviets would be allowed to hit 69 percent of the United States and its Western European and Japanese allies. America had the moral imperative to seek deterrence through increased nuclear capabilities.<sup>59</sup> In reality, scholars agreed that the Carter administration was attempting to convince the Soviets to make “deep cuts in the SALT II limits on strategic weapons—cuts than would have benefitted the United States

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<sup>58</sup> Radio Address of May 25, 1977 in *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>59</sup> Radio Address of November 8, 1977 in *Ibid.*, 75-76.

disproportionally.”<sup>60</sup> Despite evidence that SALT II benefitted Washington more than Moscow, Reagan continued characterizing the ratification of SALT II as an existential threat to the United States. His ardent distrust of the arms control process as president was partly responsible for the growth of the Nuclear Freeze movement in the early 1980s.

Reagan’s wariness toward the so-called peace lobby emerged as a corollary to his distrust of détente. Peace groups supported a form of deterrence that diametrically opposed new weapons such as the neutron bomb. Expressing concern that the World Peace Council supported unilateral disarmament and the phasing out of nuclear power, Reagan claimed that these types of organizations did the bidding of communists. A coalition of antinuclear and peace groups organized in 1978 under the title “Mobilization for Survival.” He claimed that loyal liberal peace groups such as the War Resisters League, American Friends Service Committee, and Women Strike for Peace had coordinated with more subversive American branch of the World Peace Council, or as Reagan deemed it, the “National Center to Slash Military Spending,” which had in its ranks many veteran members of the United States Communist Party.<sup>61</sup> Reagan saw communist infiltration of left-leaning political groups in the static 1970s no differently than he had during the dynamic 1940s. These groups may not have practiced the vigilance necessary to ward off the appearance of associating with communists. The inattention of peace groups to their image allowed Reagan to conflate loyal American

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<sup>60</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: 2005), 345; Strobe Talbott, *Endgame* (New York: 1979).

<sup>61</sup> Radio Address of March 13, 1978 in *Ibid.*, 140; Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb, Vol. 3. Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement 1971 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 86-87. According to Wittner, the World Peace Council was an organization that condemned Western nuclear power, but remained conspicuously silent on the issue of Soviet nuclear weaponry. The organization even went as far as defending the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

liberals with treasonous communists, a time-tested tactic that he continued to us as president.

Reagan's rhetoric promoted his strategic vision. He marshaled the myths and meanings of American history to juxtapose the ideological virtue of the American idea with the moral bankruptcy of communist thought. He quoted 17<sup>th</sup> century Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop's notion that Puritans created a city on a hill under God's protection destined to last unless it dealt "falsely with our God." Reagan supported his point with religious rhetoric from Thomas Jefferson: "The God who gave us life gave us liberty—can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God." He contrasted these pious utterances that evangelized American ideals with calls from disparate communist voices such as V.I. Lenin, *Pravda*, and the Communist Party of the United States of America "for treachery, deceit, destruction, and bloodshed."<sup>62</sup> Reagan's sermonizing against base Soviet impulses showed the United States in a virtuous light.

The former governor's words had a strong continuity with the Evil Empire speech by reflecting an innate distrust of the Kremlin. Reagan's 1978 attacks on the Soviet Union for its dealings during SALT I and SALT II demonstrated the consistency of his anticommunism. While discussing the prospects for ratification of SALT II, Reagan stated: "As we approach the Salt II talks with Russia we should keep in mind that... Russians don't keep their word even when they understand the meaning."<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, he laid out the case that the Soviets had broken the terms of the SALT I agreement,

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<sup>62</sup> "Radio Address of August 7, 1978." Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, Eds. *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 14-15.

<sup>63</sup> Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, Eds. *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 57.

concluding: “They must really be looking forward to the new negotiations---just think they’ll have a brand new treaty to violate.”<sup>64</sup>

Reagan believed that America’s two decade old plan for nuclear deterrence, the policy known as mutually assured destruction (MAD), could no longer effectively prevent nuclear war. Reagan claimed to understand Soviet actions better than the Carter Administration: “Do the Russians subscribe to our belief in ‘mutual assured destruction’ as a deterrent to war? Apparently we think so but just as apparently the Russians do not... The Russians have told their own people that while it would be a calamity it is not unthinkable; that it very well might happen and if it does the Soviet Union will survive and be victorious.”<sup>65</sup> Reagan loathed MAD, much as he loathed diplomatic jargon that avoided rhetorical confrontation with the Kremlin. The Reagan presidency would challenge MAD and standard diplomatic language in his dealings with the Soviets as he proposed a form of nuclear abolition and “straight talk” with America’s Cold War rival.

Part of rediscovering national greatness for Reagan involved restoring the national backbone to fight the existential evil of Soviet communism. The memoir of Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky reinforced this idea. Bukovsky later emerged as one of the people who wrote Reagan prior to the Evil Empire speech arguing for a toughened rhetorical stand against the Soviet Union. His torturous treatment in Soviet prisons and mental hospitals undergirded Reagan’s ardent anticommunism with examples of the Kremlin’s moral bankruptcy. Reagan found hope, however, in Bukovsky’s tale of active dissent within the Soviet Union: “They are speaking out openly and citing their rights

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 79, 82.

under the Soviet constitution. (yes there is such a thing).” Reagan reveled in Bukovsky’s account for “60 years of unceasing propaganda has not made the people a docile mass of willing slaves.” The dissident contended that “no one believes in Marxist dogma anymore.” Reagan concluded that the “slave masters” understand their notion of “building a communist state is a fairy tale.” Reagan finished the comment with a shot at the Carter administration: “Let our state dept. take heed—a little less détente with the politbureau and more encouragement to the dissenters might be worth a lot of armored divisions.”<sup>66</sup>

The arrival of John Paul II, an anticommunist Polish Pope, on the geopolitical scene boosted Reagan’s long time criticism of domestic secularism as well as détente. He condemned the Soviet domination of Poland, while praising the resiliency of the Polish people for having looked “past those menacing weapons and listened to the voice of one man who has told them there is a God and it is their inalienable right to freely worship that God.” Then in trademark fashion, Reagan pivoted on this important anticommunist milestone to attack domestic liberal enemies. While the Holy Father addressed millions behind the Iron Curtain, atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair attempted to take “In God We Trust” off U.S. currency.<sup>67</sup> Reagan defended her Constitutional right to say what she wished, but judged her stance un-American.<sup>68</sup> He employed a tactic he would reuse in the Evil Empire speech. He linked liberal secularists with communist oppression while demonstrating his side to be that of moral American values. Reagan,

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<sup>66</sup> “Radio Address of June 29, 1979” in Ibid, 149-150.

<sup>67</sup> Murray O’Hair was also responsible for filing one of the two lawsuits that led to a ban on recitation of prayers and Bible reading in public schools in 1963.

<sup>68</sup> “Radio Address of June 29, 1979” in Ibid., 176-177.

John Paul II, and persecuted Christians abroad and at home allied against Brezhnev, communist repression, and aggressive international atheism; the contrast could not be starker or potentially more beneficial for Reagan. He worried that the foreign policy of détente had embraced arms control at the expense of renewed military strength and support for Soviet dissidents.

### **The Wobblest Leg of the Table: Social Issues**

The Republican Party in which Reagan came to power can be understood as a three-legged table. The face of the table was supported by the three legs of the party: anticommunism, libertarianism, and social issues. Unlike the ease with which he discussed Soviet communism, the former governor never seemed as engaged on so-called social issues of the Christian Right. The social issues that Christian conservatives cared most about, including abortion and school prayer, did not factor into his political ascent until the Evangelical awakening of the late 1970s.

Reagan did not ponder the issues that, unbeknownst to him, would define the cultural landscape of his presidency. The importance of social issues such as abortion, school prayer, and parental notification prior to abortion forced him to evolve politically. These subjects were not discussed during his most intellectually formative years in the 1950s. Reagan believed in “traditional” values learned from his mother, but not until the late 1960s did he begin crafting his personal beliefs into policy positions. He adapted by giving these social issues more time in his speeches. Greater attention to the concerns of social conservatives, however, did not change Reagan’s true political passion, the other two legs of the conservative coalition, anticommunism and tax cutting.

The most prominent social issue, abortion, left Reagan groping for a pragmatic stance on this divisive medical procedure. The battle lines were drawn differently prior to the 1973 *Rowe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. Liberal and conservative Catholics tended to oppose abortion while liberal and conservative Protestants generally supported abortion rights. Abortion did not receive open public discussion during the 1960s. Most newspapers would not even use the word, instead calling it an “illegal medical procedure.” A 1966 poll of California voters showed that seventy-two percent of Californians favored liberalized abortion laws, including almost fifty-nine percent of Catholics.<sup>69</sup> The issue remained under the national political and social radar until events intervened.

A bill in the California State Legislature called the Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967 allowed abortions in cases of rape, incest, or when the mother’s physical or mental health was in danger. If signed, the legislation represented the most permissive abortion bill in the nation. The Roman Catholic Church in California mobilized mass opposition to the bill out of fear that passage would lead to similar bills in other states. Supporters of the bill estimated that 100,000 illegal abortions occurred per year regardless, often times performed by unskilled doctors. Meanwhile, abortion mills flourished just south of the border in Mexico.

The issue caught Reagan unprepared. He thought the abortion bill would die in the legislature. Upon reaching his desk, advice from the governor’s aides split down religious lines, leaving the staff unable to reach a consensus on his next move. Nancy Reagan broke the tie, urging her husband to speak with her stepfather, a physician and

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<sup>69</sup> Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 208-209.



staunch supporter of abortion rights. He publicly equivocated over the legislation, angering fellow Republicans who had put themselves on the line to support the bill with assurances he would provide them political cover. Finally, press secretary Lyn Nofziger took charge, telling Reagan he wanted to issue a statement saying Reagan would sign the bill. He agreed to sign the legislation. By 1968, five years before the *Roe vs. Wade* decision changed the terms of debate, Reagan told journalist Lou Cannon that he regretted his decision. Party loyalty had trumped personal feelings. Reagan confessed that had he possessed more experience, he would not have signed the bill. This instance marked the only time as governor or president that he admitted to a major legislative mistake.<sup>70</sup>

With the exception of the abortion bill, Reagan tended not to equivocate. After his conversion to conservatism in the 1950s, his emphases and principles remained remarkably consistent. Yet, such issues did not capture Reagan's interest. He devoted only three percent of his 1975-1979 addresses to social issues. For example, only two of his 1,044 broadcasts focused on abortion.<sup>71</sup> Reagan admitted in his abortion commentary that he had lacked engagement on the topic: "It was a subject I'd never given much thought to and one upon which I didn't really have an opinion." He nevertheless communicated a clear argument for the pro-life position despite the fact that the issue was not as important to him in 1975 as it was 1980. By the time he became president, Reagan demonstrated a clear understanding of how to use the abortion issue to his political benefit.

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<sup>70</sup> Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 214.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. The author disagrees with Cannon slightly. Cannon says only one broadcast dealt solely with abortion, but I found two addresses centered on the abortion issue.

Reagan struggled to acquaint himself with the gray areas of the abortion issue, such as whether a woman should be allowed an abortion in cases of rape or the health of the mother. The former governor regained his political footing, however, by presenting a clever argument against abortion revolving around the property rights of an unborn child. He proposed a hypothetical situation to his gubernatorial staff lawyers dealing with the legally protected property rights of an unborn child. He asked what would happen if a father died during his wife's pregnancy after their unborn child had been written into his father's will at the expense of the wife inheriting her husbands' belongings, causing the mother to abort the fetus for personal gain. Killing for personal gain in the case of abortion did not have a legal answer, according to Reagan's sources, but the scenario seemed to him no different than had the fetus been born.<sup>72</sup> Reagan's example helped him politically in two ways; first, it demonstrated the complexity of the abortion issue; second, it placed him squarely on the pro-life side. He tended to mention his opposition to abortion in a general way without much elaboration of his position aside from opposing government-funded abortions.<sup>73</sup>

Twelve years after signing the nation's most liberal abortion law, Reagan repudiated that decision in a pragmatic move demonstrating his adaptability. On July 27, 1979 Reagan wrote to Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL) in support of his Human Life Amendment that would restrict all abortions to a pre-1967 level. Making his opposition to abortion unequivocal comprised a crucial part of the preparation for Reagan's 1980

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<sup>72</sup> Radio Address of April 1975 in Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds. *Reagan, In His Own Hand.*, 380-384.

<sup>73</sup> "Radio Address of Sept. 1, 1976." Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds. *Reagan, Reagan's Path to Victory*, 61-62; "Radio Address of Nov. 16, 1976" in *Ibid.*, 89; "Radio Address of Oct. 2, 1979" in *Ibid.*, 474.

presidential run. As president, he used the abortion issue as a means currying favor for his foreign policy with social conservatives who opposed both abortion and his arms control policies. Abortion acted as a brace that connected the social conservative leg of the Republican table to the rest of the conservative coalition. He possessed a deep passion for the other legs of the table, lowering taxes and fighting communism, but not social issues per se. The actor-turned-politician proved adept, however, at adjusting to this new point of emphasis. His movie training helped project a level of passion for social issues that his actions indicated he simply did not feel.

### **Conclusion**

Ronald Reagan's ideology was mature by the time he made his national political debut in 1964. His subsequent oratory served to distill the beliefs forged through a lifetime of experience. He had refined the most resonant anticommunist appeals such as tying liberals to communists in a broad leftist ideology, which he reused in the Evil Empire speech. His enduring hatred of communism fit the times in the early 1950s, but seemed out of place by the détente era of the mid 1970s. The former governor nevertheless stayed true to his principles and the American people moved toward his worldview by the 1980. He also displayed a great deal of adaptability for a man with a reputation as a rigid conservative. Only a skilled politician could have kept the three legs of the Reagan coalition sturdy in their support of the former governor. Reagan realized the utility of the abortion issue to tighten the wobbly social conservative leg of the Republican coalition, as he later demonstrated in the Evil Empire speech. In many ways,

the Evil Empire speech was a compilation of some of Reagan's favorite anticommunist themes and social conservative appeals from his pre-presidency.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### THE NUCLEAR FREEZE MOVEMENT AND THE WHITE HOUSE

In his first press conference, President Reagan dispelled the possibility of another détente or relaxation in the strained relations between the United States and Soviet Union. Reagan returned to the strident anticommunism of the early Cold War with his warning about the Soviet Union that “the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat.”<sup>74</sup> The president’s anticommunism did not preclude him from pragmatic attempts to improve relations with the Soviet Union despite his deep-seated hatred of its political system. Soon after he was shot in March 1981, Reagan sent a handwritten letter to General Secretary Brezhnev with a personal plea for renewed diplomacy. Brezhnev responded unfavorably to Reagan’s offer.

Later that spring, Reagan dismissed the Soviet Union in his commencement address at the University of Notre Dame in May 1981 as “some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.”<sup>75</sup> By October 1981, Reagan was on the record as discussing limited nuclear war, although he declared the prospect highly unlikely. His confrontational rhetoric, the economic recession of 1981-1982, and the growing anti-nuclear movement in Western Europe combined to foster discontent in the United States with Reagan administration foreign policy.

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<sup>74</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44101>. (accessed April 2, 2010)

<sup>75</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43825>. (accessed April 2, 2010)

That restless sense of unease turned into the Nuclear Freeze movement, a campaign against which Reagan defined himself in the Evil Empire speech. The Freeze movement began in relative obscurity in 1978, but developed into a vast and vocal opposition to the nuclear arms buildup during the first two years of Reagan's presidency. The Nuclear Freeze movement was a wide-ranging grassroots group led by peace activists, which gained political support by reacting against Reagan's military rearmament. The Nuclear Freeze movement's opposition to increasing the U.S. nuclear arsenal placed Reagan at odds with the Freeze. Broad backing for the Nuclear Freeze among Christian groups forced Reagan to fight for moral high ground the administration had lost to the Freeze movement. The primary means of garnering administration support involved using agreement on social issues and characterizing Freeze organizers as fellow travelers to split evangelicals away from a movement politically hostile to Reagan. The Freeze—more than by any other foreign policy issue during his first term—tested Reagan's pragmatic mix of conservative and politically expedient solutions to problems.

Reagan wanted to demonstrate that the movement had seduced Americans with unrealistic peace rhetoric. The president saw the moral equivalent of détente in the words and actions of the Freeze. Reagan had opposed the détente of Presidents Ford and Carter during the 1970s. Reagan argued that détente led to American weakness, which allowed Moscow to increase its global influence.<sup>76</sup> Regardless, the Reagan administration failed to produce a swift and effective response to the Freeze. Such inaction caused the

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<sup>76</sup> Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds. *Reagan, In His Own Hand* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 26-178.

administration's foreign policy to appear under siege, which forced the president to challenge the Freeze in the Evil Empire speech.

This chapter will address three main topics. First, it will examine the emergence and growth of the Nuclear Freeze movement. Second, it will discuss Reagan's inability to connect with the broadly popular Freeze movement as support grew for a nuclear freeze resolution in Congress. Third, it will argue that the White House was slow to decide which tactics to emphasize against the Freeze movement. The administration discussed stressing Reagan's support for the concept of a nuclear freeze, but not the Nuclear Freeze movement. It also proposed promoting the idea of Reagan as a peacemaker and proponent of arms control. The White House settled for attempting to drive apart the broad and diverse Nuclear Freeze coalition by using "wedge issues" such as abortion.

### **Emergence of the Freeze**

The roots of the popular 1980s Nuclear Freeze movement can be traced to the late 1970s. Divergent events signaled growing support for a broad-based antinuclear movement. Owing to the nuclear arms race and a near catastrophic nuclear power accident, many American began questioning the costs of nuclear weapon and nuclear power plants. In 1978, a group of concerned citizens founded the Nuclear Weapons Facilities Task Force to organize anti-nuclear protests against weapons production facilities.<sup>77</sup> The March 1979 partial core meltdown of the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor near Middletown, Pennsylvania boosted anti-nuclear forces by popularizing the

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<sup>77</sup> David Cortright, *Peace Works* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1993), 9-11.

visceral fear of nuclear radiation.<sup>78</sup> This accident, along with increased protests, inspired the idea of a joint U.S.-Soviet freeze in the production of nuclear weapons.

The notion of a nuclear freeze stretched back to the early 1970s when Gerard Smith, chief U.S. arms negotiator during the Nixon administration for the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I), proposed the concept. It did not gain currency until later in the decade. Richard Barnet of the Institute for Policy Studies, an expert on Soviet disarmament in Kennedy's State Department and later a dogmatic proponent of disarmament, reintroduced the idea in the spring 1979 issue of *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>79</sup> Following Barnet's opening argument, formal action on the proposal came that June when Senators Mark Hatfield (R-OR) and George McGovern (D-SD) introduced an amendment to the SALT II Treaty calling for a freeze on U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear weapons. The amendment died when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and the Carter administration withdrew the treaty from Senate consideration.<sup>80</sup>

Despite that setback, the nascent Nuclear Freeze movement found its voice in Randall Forsberg, director of the newly formed Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies in Brookline, Massachusetts, in her treatise, "Call to Halt the Arms Race." Crafting a simple set of principles around which grassroots supporters could rally, Forsberg called on the superpowers to agree to a "mutual Freeze on testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons." Avoiding the jargon and political fisticuffs of treaty negotiations, Forsberg simply called on both sides to halt production of nuclear

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<sup>78</sup> "Fact Sheet on the Accident at Three Mile Island." <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/3mile-isle.html> (accessed May 28, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> "Institute for Policy Studies." <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/1777/ips1.htm> (accessed Dec. 9, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Cortright, *Peace Works*, 9-11.



weapons. The simplicity of this direct message during an era of heightened tensions facilitated a grassroots mobilization of Freeze supporters.<sup>81</sup>

While other issues overshadowed the Freeze in the 1980 presidential election, it received some consideration. National religious organizations such as Clergy and Laity Concerned, a coalition of religious leaders, faith communities, institutions, organizations, and lay leaders committed to social peace and economic justice, and the American Friends Service Committee discussed the concept.<sup>82</sup> Freeze proponents introduced an antinuclear resolution at the Democratic National Convention that received support from almost forty percent of the delegates. In 1980, the Freeze also found backing outside traditional Democratic interest groups. On the same day that Ronald Reagan won the presidency, three rural state senate districts in Western Massachusetts tempered the conservative tide in their area by voting for a ballot resolution calling for a bilateral nuclear freeze. While Eastern Massachusetts birthed the American Freeze movement, in western Massachusetts the initiative received support from influential Republican Congressman Silvio Conte. Fifty-nine percent of voters endorsed the Freeze.<sup>83</sup> The bipartisan nature of the movement increased the legitimacy of the issue for politicians on both sides of the aisle.

Reagan's increased defense spending in his 1981 budget compelled the movement to publicize their protests to a degree unseen during the Carter years.<sup>84</sup> Reagan's February 1981 address to a joint session of Congress outlined his "program for economic

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 11-13.

<sup>82</sup> "United for Peace and Justice," <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?list=type&type=90> (accessed Dec. 9, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 118.

recovery,” which included cutting funding to eighty three social programs while increasing the defense budget 9.1 percent per year from fiscal year 1982 through fiscal year 1986. The president’s proposal increased defense spending from \$162 billion in fiscal year 1981 to \$343 billion by fiscal year 1986. Moreover, military spending as a percentage of GNP would rise from 5.7 percent in fiscal year 1981 to 7.1 percent in fiscal year 1986 provided the economy grew at 4.4 percent during this period.<sup>85</sup> Enormous defense spending increases combined with social spending cuts created conditions for the Freeze’s rise to popularity. With the Freeze gaining strength and raising its profile with each successive administration misstep, the Reagan administration continued on a collision course with the movement.

The Nuclear Freeze soon moved from the minds of a few elites to the streets as a grassroots movement. Freeze movement leaders met during March 1981 to officially organize the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. They structured the movement as an informal network rather than a top-down organization. For example, one of the major leadership forums of this amorphous bottom-up movement, the National Committee, picked St. Louis as the central office’s “clearinghouse.” The committee chose St. Louis owing to its symbolic status in America’s heartland. Moreover, the term “clearinghouse” symbolized that the Freeze movement consisted of a loose confederation of credentialed supporters. The goals of this meeting included establishing the Freeze as a movement that appealed to the middle class by working within political power structures. Freeze organizers courted church groups, unions, and professional associations. By the end of 1981 the Freeze had cultivated support from tens of thousands of activists in forty-three

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<sup>85</sup> “Beware of Reagan’s Military Spending,” *New York Times*. May 31, 1981.

states.<sup>86</sup> It had baby-boomers at its core, but also included older leaders such as Helen Caldicott founder of Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND); Admiral Gene LaRocque who joined the Center for Defense Information (CDI) to travel around the country promoting the Freeze; and Roger Molander, a former national security staffer during the Ford and Carter administrations and eventual organizer of the Ground Zero Week anti-nuclear demonstrations in June 1982.<sup>87</sup>

The Nuclear Freeze movement, however, had a fatal flaw, a lack of clear structure that might allow it to weather a political challenge from the Reagan administration. Freeze organizers preoccupied themselves with making the organization non-hierarchical and non-elitist. The organization lacked a strong foundation. The Nuclear Freeze movement cut across too many divergent demographic groups (rich and poor, rural and urban, black and white, religious and secular) to remain coherent. The amorphous "clearinghouse" of ideas in St. Louis did not strengthen or centralize the Freeze. Nevertheless, in the short term this diverse and popular movement caused Washington to take notice.

The Freeze movement rode a wave of good publicity toward the 1982 midterm elections. Along with the support of the Friends Service Committee and Clergy and Laity Concerned, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church declared the Freeze "its top non-church issue for the 1980's." More significant, the Roman Catholic bishops

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<sup>86</sup> Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb Vol. 3. Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement 1971 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 176-177.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-172.

overwhelming endorsed the Freeze at the 1981 National Catholic Bishops Conference.<sup>88</sup>

As a worldwide movement, the Nuclear Freeze first demonstrated broad popularity with large protests that autumn of 1981 in Western Europe and by 1982 the Freeze had reached the United States as a large scale social phenomenon.<sup>89</sup>

### **Reagan Fumbles over the Freeze**

The president warned that the Freeze constituted another version of détente that would favor the USSR. Such ideological pronouncements facilitated the Nuclear Freeze movement's ascent. Reagan's blunt denunciations of the Soviet system worried many Americans comforted by the diplomatic language of détente. Reagan's first press conference served as a boon to the antinuclear movement by demonstrating his proclivity for confrontation over diplomacy. He noted that lie, cheat, and commit any crime in order to attain their goals.<sup>90</sup> These words added tension to superpower relations and caused concerned citizens to act.

In early 1982, Freeze supporters announced their arrival on the national political scene. The movement spawned non-hierarchical and loosely affiliated committees and organizations. One such group, Citizens for a Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze, took out a full page advertisement in *The New York Times*. They argued for the verifiability of a freeze, the possibility of nuclear parity, and the preventability of the arms race. Moreover, the organization claimed a freeze would reduce inflation, balance the budget, lower taxes, and raise employment. These ambitious claims received support from what

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<sup>88</sup> "Arms-Freeze Votes Lift Hopes in State," *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 1981.

<sup>89</sup> Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb Vol. 3*, 130-201.

<sup>90</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44101>. (accessed April 2, 2010)

Anthony Dolan, primary author of the Evil Empire speech, deemed “the glitter set.” Entertainers such as Sally Field, Norman Lear, Paul Newman, and Joanne Woodward lent their support to a freeze referendum on the 1982 California ballot.<sup>91</sup> The Freeze movement had moved from one self-contained group to another, from the intellectual elites in New England to entertainment elites on the West Coast. More substantially, the Freeze garnered broad support among a growing religious component particularly Catholics and mainline Protestant denominations. This development worried the Reagan administration, which feared that a combination of media-savvy spokespeople and grassroots foot-soldiers would spread the Freeze movement to Middle America.<sup>92</sup>

Freeze resolutions passed the state legislatures of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Vermont and Oregon. They were also approved in the midwestern states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Kansas. In addition, ballot initiatives supporting the Freeze were planned for California, New Jersey, Delaware, and Michigan. These legislative measures demonstrated the coalition of civic and religious leaders worried about Reagan’s massive military build-up. Congress added further credence to the Freeze as one hundred-fifty members sponsored a resolution calling on Washington and Moscow to “pursue a complete halt to the nuclear weapons race.” The administration responded to the Freeze’s political momentum by attempting to position itself in the middle of the issue. A State Department spokesperson claimed that while the administration supported

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<sup>91</sup> “Only one person can prevent a nuclear war. You,” *New York Times* (Paid Advertisement), Feb. 21, 1982. This referendum passed in November.

<sup>92</sup> Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb*, Vol. 3, 312; Cortright, *Peace Works*, 20.

“the goals of arms control,” it termed the bipartisan congressional Freeze proposal “dangerous” and destabilizing.<sup>93</sup>

Western Europe’s antinuclear movement expanded in the early 1980s as a reaction against the rise to power of hawkish Western leaders such as Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain in 1979, Reagan in 1981, and Helmut Kohl in West Germany in 1983. The peace movements opposed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) nuclear deployment on the continent of intermediate range cruise and Pershing II missiles, dubbed “Euromissiles,” scheduled to begin in late 1983. Protests occurred primarily among religious organizations, labor federations, and Social Democrat parties. Majorities or pluralities in most Western European nations opposed stationing this class of nuclear weapons on their soil. Public opinion polling demonstrated that fears of a nuclear war had increased markedly from the late 1970s to the early 1980s in part as a result of Reagan’s election.<sup>94</sup> The Kremlin looked to capitalize on this burgeoning fear.

Reagan’s attempt to co-opt and finesse the Nuclear Freeze issue received a public relations blow as Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev announced a plan to suspend the deployment of new SS-20 nuclear missiles to European Russia. In this way, the Kremlin appeared to adhere to the spirit of a nuclear freeze, while Washington remained obstinate. Brezhnev stated that the Red Army planned to dismantle some of its medium-range missiles in 1982. The premier fueled the alienation between the international freeze movements and the Reagan administration’s arms buildup. Seeking to undermine

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<sup>93</sup> “Effort to ‘Freeze’ Nuclear Arsenals Spreads in U.S.,” *New York Times*, Mar. 15, 1982; “Center for Nuclear Freeze Set Up in St. Louis,” *New York Times*, Mar. 23, 1982.

<sup>94</sup> Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb*, Vol. 3, 130-131. Jeffrey Herf, *War By Other Means* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

political support for Washington's plan to place intermediate range nuclear weapons in Western Europe, Brezhnev launched this public relations campaign. Charges and counter-charges flew between the superpowers as to which side would benefit from a freeze, but by making the first move Brezhnev seized the political initiative.<sup>95</sup>

The Dutch nuclear disarmament movement revealed the Kremlin's public relations accomplishment by welcoming Brezhnev's moratorium on further deployment of weapons systems. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher reacted skeptically, however, to Brezhnev's announcement. She noted that the general secretary did not propose the weapons freeze until after Soviet SS-20 missiles had been dispatched to European Russia. Even if the missiles were moved to Soviet Asia, they could still reach Western Europe. Conservative skeptics had good reason to cast a wary eye toward Brezhnev's peaceful rhetoric. He coupled his words with a threat to "retaliate" in an unspecified manner if the United States deployed intermediate range nuclear missiles to Europe.<sup>96</sup> While Soviet moves regarding the Freeze elicited both support and criticism, American inaction received mostly criticism in Europe.

Reagan countered such assertions by using moral arguments to attack the Soviets and the Freeze movement throughout 1982. At a joint session of the Oklahoma Legislature, the president called Brezhnev's proposal of a freeze in Europe disingenuous. The administration deemed the premier's words "propaganda" to sidetrack arms negotiations in Geneva.<sup>97</sup> Though Reagan had little trouble convincing the American

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<sup>95</sup> "Soviet Announces Freeze On Missiles In European Area," *New York Times*, Mar. 17, 1982.

<sup>96</sup> "Soviet Freeze: Europe's View," *New York Times*, Mar. 17, 1982.

<sup>97</sup> "Remarks Of The President To A Joint Session Of The Oklahoma State Legislature," Nuclear Freeze: Edwin Meese Files, (March 16, 1982), box 1; "Statement By The Principal Deputy Press Secretary,"

public that Brezhnev was a bear in peacenik's clothing, the general secretary received some credit for his peaceful rhetoric on the world stage. Even if Americans did not trust the Kremlin, Freeze supporters wanted Reagan to match Brezhnev's gesture. Grassroots support appeared so strong that Reagan attempted to co-opt the issue by supporting a freeze, but only after a weapons buildup.

The president also faced a growing foreign policy problem as the scheduled December 1983 deployment approached of the Euromissiles to counter the Soviet SS-20 missiles already in Eastern Europe. Stationing these missiles in Europe had been planned since the Carter presidency; however, Reagan's rhetoric had made the issue a political lightning-rod. Protests erupted during autumn 1981 in West Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy—nations scheduled to receive Euromissiles. Reagan did receive support for the deployments from Britain's Margaret Thatcher, France's Francois Mitterrand, and West Germany's Helmut Schmidt. Although Schmidt supported the deployment, his German Social Democratic Party faced a schism over the issue. Prominent anti-nuclear protestors in the party proposed that the superpowers reduce their nuclear deployments to zero, a move he endorsed out of self-preservation.<sup>98</sup>

Richard Perle was interested in winning the propaganda battle created by the missiles rather than reducing their number. Perle was a neoconservative, a favorite of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, and an advisor on arms control who opposed almost all arms control. While Perle was at best a third-echelon advisor, his keen

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Nuclear Freeze/Reduction: Public Affairs, White House Office and Records, (Mar. 16, 1982), box 5. Reagan Library.

<sup>98</sup> Samuel Wells, "Reagan, Euromissiles, and Europe." In *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and its Legacies* W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham, eds. (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas), 136.



intellect provided intellectual ammunition for administration hawks to oppose arms control. He developed an arms control proposal that he believed would appeal to Reagan and that the Soviets would reject. Perle proposed the Zero Option, which would cancel the NATO deployment of cruise missiles and Pershing II missiles provided Moscow removed all SS-20 missiles in Europe and Asia. He argued that Soviet agreement to the proposal would not cost the United States anything since the Euromissiles were not scheduled for deployment until late 1983. If Moscow refused, Washington would score a propaganda victory in Europe, and NATO could increase nuclear deployments with impunity.<sup>99</sup>

Reagan favored the Zero Option's simplicity over a State Department plan of Zero Plus, which would allow both sides to retain up to one hundred launchers. The State Department's plan was more realistic, but the Defense department fought Zero Plus because the Pentagon did not want a viable arms control agreement the Soviets might accept. Reagan, on the other hand, resisted for stylistic reasons; "zero" was simply easier to sell to the public than the nuance of "zero plus." Moreover, the Zero Option appealed to Reagan's support for nuclear abolition, the eventual destruction of all nuclear weapons.<sup>100</sup> Neither the Soviets nor the European governments and protestors took the Zero Option seriously; hence, the anti-nuclear protests continued unabated.

The president also faced the looming fight against the Nuclear Freeze Resolution in Congress with Senate co-sponsors of the Freeze resolution, Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and Mark Hatfield (R-OR) formally soliciting support from colleagues in March

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<sup>99</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 260-261.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.; FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 177-78.

1982.<sup>101</sup> Kennedy was the liberal lion of the Senate, while Hatfield was a pacifist evangelical Republican who backed both the Freeze and school prayer legislation.<sup>102</sup>

With the Freeze resolution working its way through Congress, the administration produced talking points explaining its opposition to the Freeze. The White House listed numerous reasons to oppose the resolution: it was not “equitable and verifiable;” the bilateral elimination of intermediate range nuclear missiles in Europe, the so-called “zero option” was more substantial than freezing weapons at current levels; the Freeze would leave the U.S. at a tactical disadvantage; Soviet compliance would be nearly impossible to verify; and a Freeze would “damage Alliance security and arms control objectives.” These themes were espoused in Reagan’s Oklahoma City address as the administration scrambled to organize a counteroffensive.<sup>103</sup> National Security Adviser William Clark asked the secretaries of state and defense and other national security higher-ups to build a public case against the Nuclear Freeze.<sup>104</sup> The Freeze had the attention of the executive branch, but would have to survive the political counteroffensive to remain viable.

The president supported a bipartisan antidote to the Freeze co-sponsored by Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D-WA) and John Warner (R-VA) that proposed new strategic bombers, missiles, and submarines before implementing bilateral arms reductions. The Warner-Jackson proposal had the support of over fifty senators, an auspicious beginning to the administration’s legislative counter-offensive. This bill assured “our friends and

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<sup>101</sup> “Letter from Kennedy and Hatfield to Congressional Colleagues,” Nuclear Freeze: Morton Blackwell Files (Mar. 2, 1982), Reagan Library.

<sup>102</sup> “Senator Hatfield’s Farewell,” *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1995.

<sup>103</sup> “Nuclear Freeze,” Nuclear Freeze: Morton Blackwell Files (Mar. 12, 1982), Reagan Library.

<sup>104</sup> “Declassified White House Memorandum,” Nuclear Freeze: Morton Blackwell Files (Mar. 15, 1982), Reagan Library.

allies abroad” that the United States was willing “to play a responsible role in the restraint of nuclear arms” by calling for verifiable and bilateral nuclear weapons reductions.<sup>105</sup> Aside from this legislation, which went beyond a freeze by calling for arms reductions, Republicans began attacking the Freeze as soft on arms control. GOP “talking points” argued that opposing the Freeze was not equivalent to opposing arms reduction. Moreover, Reagan had a bipartisan plan for arms reduction.<sup>106</sup>

The administration noted that an overwhelming majority of Americans believed that Brezhnev’s proposal to pull all intermediate nuclear missiles out of Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe amounted to a propaganda ploy.<sup>107</sup> The White House believed that a Freeze would compromise Western security by weakening the land-sea-air strategic triad. The administration claimed that “Soviet air defense improvements would soon render our bomber force... ineffective.” Furthermore, the land component of the triad, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) would be vulnerable and that a Freeze would stop “development of better ballistic missile submarines.” Ultimately, Moscow’s nuclear superiority “would lock the Soviet Union into a position of permanent advantage.”<sup>108</sup> Soviet nuclear superiority only existed in land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), while the United States possessed the advantage in mobile air and sea-based nuclear weapons. Hence, each side had a certain degree of superiority, in other words, a stalemate.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> “Letter from Warner and Jackson to Congressional Colleagues,” Nuclear Freeze: Morton Blackwell Files (Mar. 23, 1982), Reagan Library.

<sup>106</sup> “Talking Points.” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (Jan.-June, 1982), April 9, 1982, box 24, Reagan Library.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 262-263.

Senators Kennedy and Hatfield teamed up to write a book outlining their pro-Freeze position in early 1982. *Freeze! How You Can Help Prevent Nuclear War* acted as a resource and manual for those looking to engage further in the Nuclear Freeze campaign. The book also sought to debunk a number of popular myths that had arisen regarding nuclear war. At least two of those myths had some grounding in Reagan's statements or posture. First, they disputed the notion that "if we had more nuclear strength than the Soviets, we could fight and win a limited nuclear war." The second myth derived from the first, stating, "The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki proved that nuclear war is survivable."<sup>110</sup>

Kennedy and Hatfield described an anxious nation in late 1981 and early 1982, worried that a nuclear exchange had become inevitable. The Reagan administration's November 1981 "Zero Option" plan received little serious consideration. This blueprint for nuclear disarmament suggested dismantling all intermediate range missiles within the Soviet sphere while NATO would halt deployments of intermediate range nuclear missiles. A potential arms control agreement was further stymied by the institution of martial law in Poland at Moscow's urging. Communist quelling of the Solidarity movement's protests made the Kremlin appear belligerent and unreasonable.<sup>111</sup> The superpowers were stalled rather than moving toward negotiations.

A missed opportunity for disarmament and increasingly chilly Cold War rhetoric made the nuclear situation between Moscow and Washington seem dire by 1982. Coupled with the economic recession, the Reagan administration was losing the argument

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<sup>110</sup>Edward M. Kennedy and Mark O. Hatfield, *Freeze! How You Can Help Prevent Nuclear War* (New York: Bantam, 1982), i.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 122-123.

on the Freeze. Kennedy and Hatfield argued that the Freeze could save \$18 billion per year or \$90 billion over five years. The savings “could be applied to conventional forces” and “used to cut the deficit or to pay for vital social programs.” The senators predicted that administration unwillingness or inability to forge an arms control agreement could make it an election issue not only in 1984 for Reagan, but the 1982 midterm elections. Hatfield and Kennedy contended that American democracy compelled the people to challenge arms control experts when they felt the experts did not seem to take seriously the life and death stakes of arms control.<sup>112</sup>

House Foreign Affairs Committee chair, Clement Zablocki (D-WI), criticized the Warner-Jackson plan as “nothing more than a fig leaf over the nuclear arms race.” Yet, Zablocki attempted to find the middle ground between the Kennedy-Hatfield proposal and the Warner-Jackson bill. This compromise called for renewing strategic arms talks in an effort to obtain substantial verifiable reductions and a moratorium on new destabilizing weapons. The administration was not inclined to compromise. It viewed the Warner-Jackson proposal as a means of regaining the political momentum the administration sorely lacked, with sixty percent of Reagan’s 1980 supporters backing a Freeze on testing, development, and deployment of new nuclear weapons.<sup>113</sup> The administration’s muddled position on the Freeze did not satisfy proponents and worried some Freeze opponents that Reagan had softened on the issue.

Public resistance and ambivalence toward Reagan’s defense buildup caused the administration’s Freeze policy to appear jumbled in the early months of 1982. They

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 149, 157.

<sup>113</sup> “Reagan, Under Pressure on Arms, Now Favors Freeze After Buildup,” *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1982.

vacillated between co-opting and confronting the movement. After speaking favorably of Freeze supporters, the president explicitly rejected the Freeze in a primetime news conference. Reagan claimed that the Soviet “margin of superiority” remained too great to allow a Freeze. Asserting that the Kremlin possessed nuclear superiority contradicted the Freeze position that parity existed between the superpowers. This thrust moved Reagan toward confronting the Freeze by attempting to scare people into supporting peace through strength. With one closed-fisted hand and an olive branch extended in the other, he took the offensive against the Freeze while pragmatically giving himself room to maneuver to co-opt the Freeze. For example, the president spoke of possible cooperative superpower space exploration leading to a “breakthrough for lasting peace on earth,” while at the same time describing the Soviets as a mortal enemy that could not be trusted to implement a freeze. His Janus-faced pose was awash in the contradictions of cooperation and confrontation.<sup>114</sup>

The mixed signals of the Reagan administration created speculation among pundits regarding the true nature the president’s Freeze policy. James Reston of the *New York Times* argued that Reagan’s opposition to the Freeze movement was partly born out of a need to appease his political base. Yet, the journalist did not account for that part of his evangelical base that supported the Freeze. Reston also believed Reagan’s pragmatic conservatism had become unfocused: “He is trying to be faithful to his campaign promises and his old buddies one day, rejecting their policies the next day, compromising with everybody, and convincing nobody.” Reston explained that the muddled messages

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<sup>114</sup> “President Rejects A Nuclear Freeze But Calls For Cuts,” *New York Times*, Apr. 1, 1982.

of the administration hurt the president's attempts to win converts to his anti-nuclear Freeze position.

Reagan had failed to adequately explain the seeming contradiction between his opposition to the Freeze and his advocacy of nuclear arms reductions. Without a clearly reasoned position, Reagan could not sell his viewpoint. Indeed, the ailing Brezhnev had courted anti-nuclear activists all over the world more successfully than had the president.<sup>115</sup> Reston argued that Reagan failed to grasp the world-wide malaise stemming from unchecked increases in Soviet and U.S. nuclear arsenals. As superpower energies funneled into maintaining the balance of terror, neither side effectively dealt with economic issues such as unemployment and poverty. Reston contended that nuclear fear had metastasized into anger over issues such as poverty losing money to the nuclear arms race.<sup>116</sup>

The economic argument for the Nuclear Freeze explains one of the reasons for the Freeze's popularity through the first two years of Reagan's first term. Between November 1981 and November 1982 the U.S. economy suffered its worst decline since the Great Depression. The Reagan presidency faced comparisons to the economically disastrous tenure of Herbert Hoover. By January 1983, unemployment exceeded the 11.5 million mark. The president's approval rating fell from 60 percent in the middle of 1981 to 35 percent by January 1983.<sup>117</sup> Meanwhile, Reagan lost his working majority in the House as twenty-six Republicans and conservative Southern Boll Weevil Democrats went down to defeat in the 1982 congressional midterm elections. The dire economic

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<sup>115</sup> "Thunder on the Horizon" *New York Times*, Mar. 7, 1982.

<sup>116</sup> "Reagan's Failing Tactics," *New York Times*, Mar. 17, 1982.

<sup>117</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 232-233.

situation of Reagan's first two years coupled with the president's falling approval numbers meant that public support for increased defense spending had been replaced by surging support for the Nuclear Freeze movement.<sup>118</sup>

### **The Freeze Paints Reagan into a Corner**

Reagan's defense policy received criticism from the Left and the Right. Democrats such as Representative Les Aspin of Wisconsin blasted Reagan for his false assertion that the Kremlin had a margin of nuclear superiority. Aspin argued that through mammoth and uncompromising defense spending increases, he had splintered the defense consensus that existed when he took office in 1981.<sup>119</sup> Even on the Right, Senator John Tower (R-TX), chair of the Armed Services Committee and a supporter of larger defense budgets, tried to impose some fiscal restraint on the White House's relentless spending increases. He proposed cutting funds for the deployment of highly destructive and unpopular intercontinental MX missiles and the production of new Army attack helicopters. Former President Gerald Ford, a moderate Republican and Reagan's former rival, also supported a cut in the rate that Reagan's defense budget increased. He noted that less military spending would help corral the federal deficit.<sup>120</sup>

Outside the halls of power, Reagan faced his most vibrant opposition. European antinuclear activists came to the United States in spring 1982 to rally against administration defense policies. Many of these groups' leaders consisted of clergy intent upon increasing communication and organization between the European and American anti-nuclear movements. The visitors received high-profile support in Atlanta from

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<sup>118</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 187.

<sup>119</sup> "The Nuclear Freeze," *New York Times*, Apr. 1, 1982.

<sup>120</sup> "Senate Panel Asks Shaving Of Outlay For the Military.." *New York Times*, Apr. 2, 1982.



Coretta Scott King, the widow of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. While in Philadelphia, nearly twenty thousand protestors marched for peace in subfreezing temperatures. American and Western European peace groups formed a tentative alliance during the Europeans' tour of the United States, agreeing to cooperate in working against the scheduled deployment of Euromissiles. Moreover, the drumbeat of support for the movement grew louder with Freeze resolutions passing in twenty-three cities across the country from Maryland to California and in over one hundred fifty New England town meetings.<sup>121</sup> Reagan could see that the Freeze continued gathering support with no signs of faltering.

Billy Graham chose 1982 to begin "the most ambitious crusade of his long career." The widely-admired evangelist had vowed in 1979 to spend the rest of his life preaching about the dangers of nuclear weapons. He disavowed the idea of limited nuclear war and called for "peace in a nuclear age."<sup>122</sup> His words, coupled with the growing wave of Freeze backers, created a political problem for the president with religious supporters. Americans viewed Graham as a conservative religious counselor to presidents, including Reagan. His was a measured, influential voice on the side of the Nuclear Freeze. Graham's stand exemplified the increasingly critical assessment of Reagan's defense policy from religious conservatives. The pragmatic conservative instincts that landed him in the White House had yet to locate a politically tenable Freeze position for the president.

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<sup>121</sup> "European Atomic Arms Foes Tour U.S.," *New York Times*, Apr. 3, 1982; "Anti-Nuclear Groups Forging Tentative Links," *New York Times*, Apr. 9, 1982.

<sup>122</sup> "Graham Opens Antinuclear Crusade," *New York Times*, Apr. 16, 1982.

Prominent Senate evangelicals including Hatfield and Jesse Helms (R-NC) urged the reverend to fulfill his long-held desire to preach in Russia. Graham accepted the offer to speak to the Christian Peace Conference (CPC) titled despite White House urgings to stay away. These pleas originated with National Security Advisor William Clark and came through personal phone calls by Vice President Bush and Secretary of State Alexander Haig. The administration worried that Graham's visit would be used as a propaganda tool. Their appraisal was correct. He was scheduled to speak at the May 9 Soviet national holiday commemorating the end of World War II. On this day the religious leaders planned to ratify a pre-written statement praising Soviet peace efforts. The CPC's role as a collection of Soviet-bloc Christian organizations that endorsed Soviet policy made the decision tougher on Graham, but his desire to preach the Gospel in the USSR proved decisive.<sup>123</sup> Graham faced much criticism upon his return from Moscow, but the damage was temporary. The public viewed his peaceful intentions as good.

Graham referred to ending the arms race as his "pilgrimage" and "number one concern." The minister had received criticism from arms control opponents for lacking specifics since embracing arms control. As a pacifist evangelical, Hatfield had convinced him to publicly support arms control.<sup>124</sup> Yet, he vacillated on the Nuclear Freeze by backing the two opposing plans. Graham supported the liberal Hatfield-Kennedy plan, while claiming to concurrently support the conservative Warner-Jackson plan. Jim

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<sup>123</sup> "Billy Graham in Moscow?" *Newsweek*, Kenneth L. Woodward, March 22, 1982; "Graham Will Preach in Moscow," Harry Genet, *Christianity Today*, April 9, 1982.

<sup>124</sup> "The Evangelist and the Pope Confer Privately in Rome," *Religious News Service*; "Graham Moscow Visit Stirs Controversy," *Christian Inquirer*, April 1982.

Wallis, the liberal Christian editor of *Sojourners* magazine, tried to explain the contradiction by arguing that Graham acted more as a barometer for Christian public opinion on arms control than as a leader. His support for arms control mattered, not his incongruous endorsement of rival plans.<sup>125</sup>

### **The White House Formulates a Freeze Policy**

The gathering grassroots support for the Freeze movement increased the pressure on the president to either co-opt or neutralize the Freeze. National Security Director William Clark continued his attempts to counter act the Nuclear Freeze movement. He sent a memo on April 22, 1982 to the troika that ran the White House: Chief of Staff James Baker, Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver, and Counselor to the President for Policy Edwin Meese arguing for an aggressive public relations strategy. He worried that Ground Zero week, scheduled for June, would leave the worried public “open for exploitation by others of all stripes.” Clark wanted to convince Americans that “our policy solutions best meet their desire that the United States do something to lessen the prospect of a nuclear holocaust.” He believed that the president needed to go on the offensive against the Freeze during the months leading up to the November midterm elections “rather than waiting and reacting – a situation likely to give the Soviets and anti-government forces in this country the upper hand.”<sup>126</sup>

He agreed with Communications Director David Gergen that the White House and NSC must work together to counter the Freeze: “I want to involve all departments in

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<sup>125</sup> “Graham Blends Preaching with Appeal for Peace,” *New York Times* April 25, 1982.

<sup>126</sup> “Memorandum for Edwin Meese III, James A. Baker III, Michael Deaver from William P. Clark.” April 22, 1982, David Gergen Files, Box 4 OA 10542 “The Day After,” Reagan Library. Emphasis in original.

a coordinated strategy, bringing their talents to bear on specific aspects of the problem.”

Clark continued with a nod to rhetorical rearmament: “We should emphasize the President’s role as a peacemaker, but we must not let the Russians off the hook.” He proposed holding meetings with Nuclear Freeze supporters to find common ground rather than “fostering a ‘we/they’ syndrome, wherein we become antagonists with Roger Molander of Ground Zero, or Billy Graham, or 40 Catholic Bishops, or the Mayor of Pella, Iowa.” He argued that engaging arms control critics would “at least show the public that we are paying attention to the national message of concern.”<sup>127</sup>

The national security advisor suggested demonstrating the administration’s commitment to arms control by heavily promoting their plan for arms control, the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START). By emphasizing administration activism on this issue, he hoped to counteract “the media leap on the inevitable leak to portray us and secretive and defensive.” Clark believed that for the administration to neutralize the Nuclear Freeze as a political issue, the president needed to articulate his arms control policy, engage Freeze activists, and give a televised speech dealing with arms control.<sup>128</sup> Baker agreed that “policy and public affairs strategies” needed better coordination. He chose Gergen to head the public affairs side and deputy national security advisor Robert McFarlane to lead the policy side of the effort, but Clark’s plan was not fully or successfully enacted in the months before the midterm elections.<sup>129</sup> Republicans lost

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> “Memorandum For William P. Clark From James A. Baker III.” April 28, 1982; Elizabeth Dole Files, Series I: Subject Files, 1981-1989, Box 24, OA6390, Reagan Library.

twenty-six seats in the House and Reagan continued fumbling over the Nuclear Freeze issue well into 1983.

John Kwapisz, a lawyer with an expertise in field organizing, warned Meese that the Freeze movement could grow larger than the administration had previously imagined.<sup>130</sup> “The Rules of the political game are now changing. Policy is no longer simply being determined in the halls and rooms of Congress. As a result of years of organizing activity by the left and the existence of emotional issues (e.g., Ground Zero<sup>131</sup>), the focus is shifting to local communities, to the grass roots.”<sup>132</sup> Kwapisz advised the administration to develop its own defense policy at the grass roots level to “head off the groundswell potentially looming for the left’s position.”<sup>133</sup> Similar to Clark, he proposed a media counterattack to slow the Freeze’s momentum.

Kwapisz told the president himself that the administration needed “a more effective approach for countering the activities and disinformation of this movement.” He presented his case for a media counteroffensive to the commander-in-chief as a battle over public opinion. Kwapisz warned that Soviet attempts at media manipulation could give the Kremlin “world domination ‘without a shot being fired.’” He contended that the administration should illustrate the growing Soviet threat and sell Reagan’s defense and foreign policy programs as an appropriate response. He suggested that the administration

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<sup>130</sup> “The ‘Star Wars’ Battle.”

[http://www.ascfusa.org/publications/american\\_century/americancentury\\_triumph\\_starwars.htm](http://www.ascfusa.org/publications/american_century/americancentury_triumph_starwars.htm) (accessed Apr. 11, 2005).

<sup>131</sup> Kwapisz is referring to Ground Zero Week, a nonpartisan national collaboration between peace groups of teach-ins and demonstrations that reached over one million people.

<sup>132</sup> “Proposed Administration response to the Nuclear Freeze/Anti-Defense Movement,” Letter from John Kwapisz to Edwin Meese, Apr. 30, 1982. Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (July-Dec. 1982), folder 2, Reagan Library.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

aim its propaganda efforts at clergy, religious organizations, and educational associations. Kwapisz raised the specter of Vietnam in arguing that the “anti-defense movement” contained “seasoned organizers” of the “anti-Vietnam movement.” Appealing to Reagan’s loathing of Vietnam protestors remained a way to ensure the president would remember his words. Closing his arguments by stressing the need for grass roots organizing and media savvy, the attorney predicted that “the ‘peace movement’ has not yet begun to ‘fight.’”<sup>134</sup>

An NBC News/ Associated Press Poll released in April 1982 supported some of Kwapisz’s assertions. Seventy-four percent of Americans favored a bilateral Freeze while fifty-six percent of people had not yet formed an opinion regarding Reagan’s disarmament policies.<sup>135</sup> The idea of a freeze had wide backing, but not necessarily deep support. Americans broadly favored the Freeze, but administration policies had not yet been publicly defined. Kwapisz argued the conservative grassroots should persuade this mass of undecided public opinion to support peace through strength. Conservative forces needed to frame the Soviet Union as a nation with values too alien to adhere to a bilateral Freeze.

The president’s periodic moves toward a more diplomatic line with the revolving Soviet gerontocracy received broad skepticism rather than acclaim. He had difficulty finding a potential diplomatic partner as Leonid Brezhnev died in November 1982, his successor Yuri Andropov passed away in February 1984, and his successor Konstantin Chernenko died in March 1985. Americans did not favor Reagan’s attempts to neutralize

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<sup>134</sup> “A proposed Administration response to the ‘peace movement,’” Memorandum from John Kwapisz to Ronald Reagan. Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (Jan-June, 1982), folder 2, Reagan Library.

<sup>135</sup> “Poll Results.” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (Jan.-June, 1982), Series I. Reagan Library.

the Freeze; instead, the public rallied around the Freeze at the expense of peace through strength.<sup>136</sup> In addition, luminaries of the Cold War national security state from both parties questioned the administration's continued defense buildup. Former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union and father of the containment doctrine George F. Kennan; former Defense Secretary during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations Robert S. McNamara; former National Security Advisor to Kennedy and Johnson, McGeorge Bundy; and former Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and leader of the Nixon administration's arms negotiating team during SALT I, Gerard C. Smith, jointly wrote a *Foreign Affairs* piece sympathetic to the Freeze. This foursome wanted to go a step beyond the Freeze. They stated that America should move unilaterally toward a policy of not initiating the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>137</sup>

Kennan also contributed a piece to an edited collection that sought greater understanding of the Russians on their own terms rather than through the prism of U.S. fears. He cited Christian ethicist John M. Swamly, Jr. in his argument that American apprehensions blocked the ability to understand Russian actions. Institutionalizing notions of the Russians as "untrustworthy, aggressive, and warlike" prevented a fuller comprehension of Soviet behavior. Swomley argued that the Soviet Union acted out of a defensive posture. Quoting former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Maxwell Taylor, he rejected the idea that the Kremlin planned a war against the United States. Taylor contended that the Soviets had armed in a defensive manner that protected their national

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<sup>136</sup> "The Nuclear Freeze," *New York Times*, Apr. 1, 1982. The poll quoted in the NYT story stated the Freeze was supported by a margin of 70 percent to 24 percent opposed, numbers similar to the NBC poll quoted earlier in the chapter.

<sup>137</sup> "Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance," *Foreign Affairs*. Spring 1982 Vol. 60, No. 4 p. 753-768. "U.S. Urged To Vow To Avoid First Use Of Atom Weapons," *New York Times*, Apr. 8, 1982.

interests from hostile outsiders. Moscow faced hostile nations at every border. The Soviets realized that owing to their poor geostrategic position that a nuclear war would exterminate their nation. The Kremlin also worried that a conventional war with the United States would lead the non-Russian nationalities within the USSR to rise up as they had in World War II.

Pam Solo, Nuclear Freeze activist and MacArthur Genius Grant winner, challenged Reagan's contention that the United States lagged behind in the arms race. Peace through Strength proponents equated parity with falling behind. She asserted that the United States led the arms race in almost every stage as the Soviets struggled to catch up. The Americans led the Soviets in the early 1980s in the number of nuclear weapons deliverable by air and sea, while the Soviets led in the number of land missiles. Solo argued that Eastern Bloc nations intent upon "bolting from the tight grasp of the Soviet Union" made Moscow more defensive than offensive in their military assessments. Solidarity in Poland and independent peace movements in East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR challenged Soviet control of their buffer zone. Nuclear parity did not do anything to change the hearts and minds of captive peoples looking for freedom. Solo argued for pragmatic understanding of the defensive stance of the Soviet Union in the world.<sup>138</sup> The president faced a building critical assessment of his policies from diverse public voices. Reagan was slow to locate a politically tenable Nuclear Freeze position.

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<sup>138</sup> "The Arm's Race: Who's Ahead?" Pam Solo in *What about the Russians?* Dale W. Brown, ed. (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press), 1984, 79-89.



### **Catholics and the Freeze**

The administration sought to gain some political traction with Catholics by dividing the Nuclear Freeze movement from the Catholic Church, America's largest Christian denomination. The church had been hawkish in foreign policy matters, however this stance began changing during America's disorienting experience fighting in Vietnam. During the intervening years, the church had become wary of using the military. In November 1981, the Catholic Church appointed a commission to study Reagan's massive arms buildup and his talk of a limited nuclear exchange. On May 3, 1983, by a vote of 238 to 9 the Catholic bishops adopted a pastoral letter critical of administration foreign policy. "We feel that the world and the nation are heading in the wrong direction," they declared. Furthermore, the letter supported the Freeze by noting that "the first imperative is to prevent any use of nuclear weapons." The church was spiritual home to many Reagan supporters, but seventy-eight percent of Catholics favored the Nuclear Freeze over peace through strength.<sup>139</sup>

As the Reagan administration assessed its political situation in spring 1982, support for the Freeze among a broad cross-section of society, particularly in religious circles, caused concern. Chief of Staff Jim Baker received a memorandum from Thomas Patrick Melady, Assistant Secretary for Post Secondary Education in the U.S. Department of Education, stating that the administration needed to take the nuclear peace initiative away from Catholics.<sup>140</sup> It argued that Catholic opponents of the president had orchestrated "a campaign to pit the President and his administration against the Pope, the

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<sup>139</sup> Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb*, Vol. 3, 180-81.

<sup>140</sup> "Thomas Patrick Melady." [www.thepresidency.org/events/lead.991022tpm.htm](http://www.thepresidency.org/events/lead.991022tpm.htm) (accessed Nov. 28, 2005).

Vatican, and the Catholic Church on the issue of nuclear force.” Observers within the executive branch forecasted that Catholic Freeze supporters would use Reagan’s meeting with the Pope in June to protest the president’s opposition to the Freeze.<sup>141</sup> Pope John Paul II was ambivalent about the Freeze and not likely to pressure Reagan to support the resolution.<sup>142</sup>

The memo contended that Reagan needed to present himself as a “responsible leader” with a “deep concern for and service to humanity.” The president should try to communicate that his “position is the moral one for a responsible major power in an imperfect world, where aggressive communist-atheistic forces are out to destroy Judeo-Christian values.”<sup>143</sup> This assertion reflects a particular strain of thought within the administration that argued Reagan should cast himself in a moral light, while attacking the motives and judgment of Freeze proponents.

The president had a difficult time matching the moral authority of the pro-Freeze Catholic bishops. Nevertheless, Reagan criticized the church hierarchy for supporting the measure during a speech to the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic service organization. Reagan called the Freeze “obsolete” and proposed that the superpowers completely remove intermediate-range nuclear weapons, the so-called Zero Option, and verifiably reduce the numbers of strategic weapons. In Reagan’s estimation, only after achieving those goals should a freeze commence. Despite proposing a

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<sup>141</sup> “Personal Memorandum from Thomas Patrick Melady to James A. Baker, III Chief of Staff and Assistant to the President,” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (Jan.-June, 1982), April 13, 1982, box 24, Reagan Library.

<sup>142</sup> Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb*, Vol.3, 230.

<sup>143</sup> “Personal Memorandum from Thomas Patrick Melady to James A. Baker, III Chief of Staff and Assistant to the President,” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (Jan.-June, 1982), April 13, 1982, box 24, Reagan Library.

disarmament program more sweeping than the Freeze, the president did not make much headway on this issue. The National Conference of Catholic bishops adopted not only a freeze resolution, but also condemned the use of offensive nuclear weapons. Rhetorical Rearmament had so damaged the president's credibility among clergy that they rejected his deep cuts in favor of freezing existing nuclear arsenals.

Reagan attempted to overcome opposition through a political tactic, reprised in the Evil Empire speech, of mixing his controversial Freeze position with social policies popular among conservative Christians. Reagan spoke to his audience's core concerns by stating his support for pro-life legislation and tax credits for families with children in private school.<sup>144</sup> These popular positions did not, however, lead to broad support for the administration's defense policy as evidenced by the Catholic Bishops public pastoral letter supporting the Freeze. The bishops acknowledged the Catholic Church's traditional support for just wars, but argued that the moral dimension of war and peace necessitated an attempt to influence public policy.<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, Reagan had found a viable tactic; stressing agreement on social issues as a means of obtaining support for an unpopular defense policy. While forging agreement with many Catholics proved untenable, the resonance of social issues had the potential to sway evangelicals, a group less wedded to placing strict limits on military confrontations.

The ongoing Freeze debate within the Catholic Church did not benefit the administration. Freeze supporters seized and retained the moral high ground from which

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<sup>144</sup> "Reagan Calls on Catholics in U.S. To Reject Nuclear Freeze Proposal," *New York Times*, Aug. 4, 1982.

<sup>145</sup> "Proposed Catholic Bishops' Letter Opposes First Use of Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 1982.

they condemned the bellicose maneuvers of the administration. Ethical arguments for using part of the defense budget to fight poverty and disease, as stated by the pro-Freeze Catholic organization Pax Christi, resonated with many within the faith.<sup>146</sup> The traditional perception of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops as an organization that supported just wars and the necessity of nuclear weapons made untenable the administration claim that fringe peaceniks led the Freeze.

Supporting the Freeze also coincided with the church's doctrine by sustaining the "sacredness of life." Opposing abortion and questioning the continued manufacturing or use of nuclear weapons exemplified the church's vow to uphold this virtue. The bishops called indifference to the threat of nuclear weapons "sinful." They continued by noting that Christian values required believers to "stand against the commonly accepted axioms of the world." The National Conference of Catholic Bishops criticized the high levels of defense spending, American unwillingness to invest in renewable energy, inattentiveness toward world hunger, and that "in 32 countries, governments spend more for military purposes than for education and health care combined."<sup>147</sup> The bishops tied support for the Freeze to criticizing immorality in other facets of American domestic and foreign policy. This development made moral arguments against the Freeze even less defensible. The line of argument did, however, leave abortion open to exploitation as a wedge issue to draw supporters of the "sacredness of life" to the administration's side.

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<sup>146</sup> Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb*, Vol. 3, 180.

<sup>147</sup> "Church, State and The Bomb," *The New York Times*, Oct. 27, 1982.

### **Evangelical Leaders Counter Catholic Support for the Freeze**

As administration officials attempted to undermine Catholic support for the Freeze, they enlisted Christian soldiers from the evangelical ranks to neutralize the Freeze's moral authority. Arguing that evangelicals had been underutilized by the administration, Red Cavaney, Deputy Director of the Office of Public Liaison, assumed that "virtually all of this community of millions will be in support of our position." Building upon this reasonable yet false premise, he suggested to Deputy National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane that the administration organize evangelical supporters of peace through strength to counterbalance Catholic Freeze proponents. Noting evangelicals' savvy with electronic media and direct mailings, Cavaney nominated the televangelist Pat Robertson to become a leader of the Christian opposition to the Freeze. He also deemed Campus Crusade for Christ a "strong anti-nuclear Freeze" group that could preach the administration's message on college campuses.<sup>148</sup> The administration's assumed power within the evangelical community seemed logical. The White House, however, still did not fully understand the deep nuclear fear within the evangelical rank and file. A large pro-Freeze demonstration would help the White House comprehend the scope and passion of the Nuclear Freeze movement.

Cavaney understood that the conditions existed for large pro-Freeze protests. He viewed "economic dislocation" as the primary factor that would create massive demonstrations. Rather than take the protestors at their word, Cavaney believed "the interaction of a large number of unemployed (particularly minority youth), students free

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<sup>148</sup> "Memorandum For Robert C. McFarlane From: Red Cavaney," Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (Jan.-June 1982), box 24, April 30, 1982. Reagan Library.

of attendance responsibilities, hot weather, and the prospect of little immediate [economic] relief markedly increases the potential for public demonstrations.” While he rightly predicted that the potential political damage any pro-Freeze protests would be moderate, he failed to understand the substance of the demonstration. Rather than rabble-rousing for the sake of it, the nuclear freeze ideal mattered to the movement’s rank and file.<sup>149</sup>

While Cavaney thought that the administration could eventually triumph over the Freeze, he believed that its moral and emotional appeal revealed the temporary dominance of the issue in the public mind. As the Freeze’s moral resonance cut across political and ideological lines, Reagan could not diffuse it with a deft political ploy. Cavaney still contended that the president could weather this political storm by comporting himself “as an honest man wrestling with a very real dilemma.” He understood that the Freeze would succeed or fail not on its intellectual merits, but by people’s reactions to Reagan’s presidential leadership on the major events of the day.<sup>150</sup>

Though Cavaney’s premise was eventually borne out by events, in the meantime he sought the enlistment of conservative evangelicals to sap the Freeze’s moral authority. Cavaney understood that, “We are fighting a two-pronged war on the nuclear freeze issue – the strategic national security threat and the domestic political threat.” Thus, he argued that the involvement of churches against the Freeze gave the anti-Nuclear Freeze position a “moral weight” that “cannot be overstated.” He proposed that the administration work to “minimize the intensity” of the Freeze because he did not believe it could be

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<sup>149</sup> “Memorandum For Michael Deaver From: Red Cavaney,” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (Jan.-June 1982), box 24, April 16, 1982. Reagan Library.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

neutralized. Cavaney cautioned against deriding the Freeze or the morality in the movement's argument. Instead, the administration should encourage "pragmatic approaches to dealing with the issue of national defense."<sup>151</sup> The administration took an uneven approach to Cavaney's recommendations as Reagan vacillated between deference toward the Freeze and attacking the movement. Despite this muddled reaction, the administration was admitting the pragmatic political necessity of improving relations with the Nuclear Freeze movement.

### **The Apex of the Nuclear Freeze Movement**

Cavaney's predictions proved prescient as Freeze proponents staged the largest protest in United States history on June 12, 1982 in Manhattan. Between 500,000 and 700,000 protestors from across the nation and the world marched from the United Nations Plaza to Central Park in support of the Freeze.<sup>152</sup> The rally marked the meeting of the United Nations Second Special Session on Disarmament.<sup>153</sup> Organized by a coalition of religious and peace groups, the protest included religious leaders, students, children, union members, Communists, anarchists, and peace activists.<sup>154</sup> The protestors came from the ranks of both blue collar and white collar workers.<sup>155</sup>

This demonstration looked like a last gasp of the Sixties protest movements as one of the widows of '68, Coretta Scott King, inspired the crowd by calling them a potent political force. The Left was striking back as African-American and Hispanic leaders spoke about their belief that large military budgets came at the expense of social

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> "Throngs Fill Manhattan to Protest Nuclear Weapons," *New York Times*, Jun. 13, 2005.

<sup>153</sup> "Rally Speakers Decry Cost of Nuclear Arms Race," *New York Times*, Jun. 13, 1982.

<sup>154</sup> "Throngs Fill Manhattan to Protest Nuclear Weapons," *New York Times*, Jun. 13, 2005.

<sup>155</sup> "A Spectrum of Humanity Represented at the Rally," *New York Times*, Jun. 13, 1982.

programs for the poor, while union leaders called for jobs instead of expensive weapons system. These and other speeches were interspersed with a soundtrack for the event provided by James Taylor, Bruce Springsteen, Jackson Browne, Joan Baez, Linda Ronstadt, and Peter, Paul, and Mary.<sup>156</sup>

Legendary writer and director Orson Welles attended the rally as did a plethora of politicians, mostly Democrats.<sup>157</sup> With the music, crowds, and celebrities this protest marked the high water point of the Nuclear Freeze movement. A poll taken prior to the march revealed that seventy-two percent of Americans supported the Freeze.<sup>158</sup> The size and middle-class composition of the march surely alarmed the administration. The marchers' demographics skewed toward yuppies. The movement counted doctors, lawyers, nurses, scientists, teachers, ministers, and priests among its numbers. Even worse for the administration, Freeze activists believed that their divergent constituency had mobilized against Reagan himself. Along with belligerent rhetoric toward Moscow, the president's pronouncement that he could imagine the use of tactical nuclear weapons had sparked a grassroots movement that no amount of organizing could accomplish.<sup>159</sup> This response to Reagan, however, represented a problem for the Freeze. The movement was reacting rather than shaping the argument.

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<sup>156</sup> "Rally Speakers Decry Cost of Nuclear Arms Race," *New York Times*, Jun. 13, 1982.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> "Momentum Gains on Nuclear-Limit Rally," *New York Times*, Jun., 6, 1982.

<sup>159</sup> "Anatomy Of The Nuclear Protest," *New York Times*, Jul. 11, 1982, SM14. The Public Papers of the President. "Talking Points," Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (Jan.-June, 1982), April 9, 1982, box 24, Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, Calif. "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Working Luncheon With Out-of-Town Editors," Oct. 16, 1981. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43144>. (accessed Apr. 4, 2010).



As the movement burgeoned during 1982, its leaders became more partisan and political in their confrontations with the president. While the Freeze developed a liberal political identity, Reagan continued attempting to co-opt its supporters with conciliatory rhetoric. When speaking about the Freeze, Reagan repeatedly proclaimed his support for the concept, but with caveats relating to Soviet behavior such as during one of his weekly radio addresses in April 1982 and his June 1982 commencement address at his alma matter, Eureka College.<sup>160</sup> The president's nuanced proposal did not galvanize supporters as did the Freeze's simple message.

The president's dealings with the Freeze symbolized a larger issue outlined by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's national security adviser and Reagan's expert on Polish affairs during the Solidarity crisis. His personal experience led Brzezinski to call the president "essentially passive until [he is] pushed too hard and then he becomes active and assertive." This assessment fit Reagan's persona as the affable Gipper. Reagan showed this tendency on numerous occasions in his dealings with the international antinuclear movement. For example, as the Freeze rapidly expanded in Western Europe he rushed his plans to place intermediate nuclear missiles in Europe. He acted quickly so he could negotiate from a position of strength with the Soviets before protesters could attempt to preempt the installation of nuclear missiles. In the same vein, Reagan stood up to the domestic Nuclear Freeze movement by continuing his rapid military buildup and continuing his hard-line in superpower arms negotiations.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> "Anatomy Of The Nuclear Protest," *New York Times*, Jul. 11, 1982; "Radio Address to the Nation on Nuclear Weapon," April 17, 1982 John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42414>. (accessed Apr. 4, 2010).

<sup>161</sup> "Reagan Puts His Stamp On U.S. Foreign Policy," *New York Times*, Sept. 5, 1982.

Despite the growing sense in some religious quarters that the Reagan administration defense policy was immoral, during 1982 the president still had the political might to impose his will on Congress. In August 1982, the Nuclear Freeze Resolution came to a vote in the House of Representatives. Reagan argued that bipartisan support for the resolution would undermine U.S. negotiating strength in the Geneva arms talks.<sup>162</sup> His plea carried the day as the Freeze failed by a vote of 204 to 202. Instead of a Freeze, the House passed a version of the administration-approved Warner-Jackson arms reduction resolution calling for bilateral arms cuts followed by a Freeze, similar to Reagan's earlier "freeze" plan. White House lobbying paid off as only twenty-seven Republicans voted against the alternative arms control resolution while Reagan persuaded fifty-three Democrats to endorse the resolution.

Democrats called the closeness of the vote a moral victory. Freeze leaders such as Edward Markey (D-MA) warned that voters would reject legislators who spurned the Freeze resolution.<sup>163</sup> Les Aspin added that the vote created a paper trail, removing legislators' ability to hedge on the issue. Ted Kennedy promised that all 204 House members who voted against the Freeze would be targeted for defeat.<sup>164</sup> Despite these Democratic threats and the overwhelming popularity of the Freeze, the administration had eked out a victory.

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<sup>162</sup> "President Lobbies Against Freeze On Eve of Vote on Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, Oct. 27, 1982.

<sup>163</sup> "House Supports Reagan on Arms, Adopting His Idea of Atom Freeze," *New York Times*, Aug. 6, 1982.

<sup>164</sup> "Nuclear Freeze Vote: Both Sides Term It a Victory," *New York Times*, Aug. 7, 1982. Kennedy's threat proved largely empty as only twenty-six House members were defeated, but these losses were a result of the weak economy and general discontent with the party in power rather than a referendum on Freeze support.

As criticism of Reagan's defense policy continued unabated throughout summer 1982, administration insiders developed methods of reaching voters in the midterm elections. Their strategy included "creating a climate for successful marketing" and not to "start too small" when considering ways to disrupt the Freeze.<sup>165</sup> The National Security Council (NSC) provided Cavaney ready-made, politically-charged rebuttals of the Freeze through the Office of Public Liaison. In its report to Cavaney, the NSC went out of its way to note that the Freeze "represents the best of intentions" and that "The administration shares the genuine and deeply felt convictions that have given rise to the Freeze proposal;" however, it concluded that "a Freeze is not good enough." The NSC put forth many of the old chestnuts from previous discussions of the issue. It alleged that a Freeze would make arms control more difficult because the Kremlin's nuclear superiority in intermediate weapons provided no incentive to enact arms reductions. A Freeze would create the impression that American leadership of NATO was weak. The Freeze would slow development of modern land, air, and sea weapons. In addition, because many elements of the Freeze could not be verified, the administration alleged that "Soviet advantages could increase even more." It argued ultimately that a freeze jeopardized the future of arms control.<sup>166</sup> The administration was moving away from engaging the Freeze and back toward confronting the movement.

These arguments against arms control and assertions that peace through strength represented a more prudent course of action became key components of the

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<sup>165</sup> These quotes come from four pages of notes handwritten on legal paper outlining the administration's anti-nuclear Freeze strategy. The Morton Blackwell Files, folder 4. Reagan Library.

<sup>166</sup> "National Security Council Memorandum For Red Cavaney," Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze (July-Dec. 1982), folder 2, July 29, 1982. Reagan Library.

administration's talking points. While White House guidelines for discussing the Freeze included respectfully applauding the sentiment of Freeze supporters, the plan also called for noting the vulnerability inherent in the Freeze. Both Director of the Office of Public Liaison Elizabeth Dole and David Gergen provided administration surrogates with the party line in their discussions of the Freeze.<sup>167</sup> They stressed that the Freeze would make the United States vulnerable to an attack and make the Soviets unwilling to negotiate arms control agreements. A destabilization of the nuclear arms race would result in American weakness and Soviet strength.

The administration had to act carefully in undermining the Freeze as “concerted opposition to the [Freeze] proposals would probably result in creating a ‘warmonger’ image for the Administration.” Dole and others in the Office of Public Liaison urged administration surrogates to stress that arms control talks were underway. The office noted that its public education program had demonstrated positive results in the wording of Wisconsin’s nuclear freeze proposal. It differed from other proposals in stressing nuclear weapons reductions and “appropriate verification with the Soviet Union and other nations.”<sup>168</sup> The effectiveness of emphasizing verification as a means of derailing the Freeze was a bright spot in an otherwise cruel summer for the Reagan administration’s anti-Nuclear Freeze public relations offensive.

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<sup>167</sup> “Memorandum For Administration Spokesmen From David Gergen.” Michael Barody Files: Nuclear Freeze/Arms Control. (July-Dec. 1982), box 1, Aug. 6, 1982. “Guidance for Speakers on the Administration’s Position on the Nuclear Freeze Resolution.” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze, (July-Dec. 1982), folder 1. Reagan Library.

<sup>168</sup> “‘Nuclear Freeze’ Proposals,” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze, (July-Dec. 1982), folder 1. Reagan Library.

As summer turned to fall, the administration maintained a low profile on the anti-nuclear issue, owing to difficulty formulating an effective opposition. Caught in a reactive mode, administration media liaisons scrambled to marshal information from the State Department and Defense Department they could use against the Freeze.<sup>169</sup> Many voices and agendas clamored to direct the Freeze policy of the executive branch. Bill Triplett, another member of the Office of Public Liaison, suggested that the administration use political operatives like Jack Burgess to persuade the Catholic Bishops to support neither the Freeze nor the proposal to deem Catholic participation by in nuclear weapons production immoral.<sup>170</sup>

These tactics failed as the Freeze proved popular throughout the country. Freeze referenda passed by substantial margins in Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, and was narrowly approved in California where it faced active administration actively opposition. The Freeze resolution was only defeated in Arizona. Yet, it did not prove decisive in any congressional races as Freeze activists had predicted.<sup>171</sup> Undaunted Freeze leaders claimed that 1982 was only a dress rehearsal for the bruising political battles of 1984.

### **The Administration Thaws the Freeze**

Meanwhile in her post-election analysis of the Freeze, conservative icon Phyllis Schlafly called for a White House coordinator of anti-Nuclear Freeze activities to counter

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<sup>169</sup> “Memorandum For Red Cavaney From Bill Triplett,” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze, (July-Dec. 1982), folder 1, Aug. 13, 1982. Reagan Library.

<sup>170</sup> “Memorandum To Red Cavaney From Bill Triplett,” Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze, (July-Dec. 1982), folder 1, Oct. 26, 1982. Reagan Library.

<sup>171</sup> “Widespread Vote Urges Nuclear Freeze,” *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 1982.

the Freeze's strength among women.<sup>172</sup> Elizabeth Dole heard from enough disparate voices in 1982 to agree with Schlafly. The administration needed a central person or committee to deal with the Freeze "because of the domestic political implications of the issue." Dole proposed that all White House liaison and policy offices coordinate to speak with one voice rather than continuing to send mixed messages.<sup>173</sup>

Perhaps a direct result of this move toward a centralized message regarding the Freeze movement was the administration's attempt to neutralize the issue in the Catholic Church. Once again, forging consensus on social issues to weaken differences over the Freeze was the method of undercutting the movement. The White House recognized that the anti-nuclear weapons issue hurt the administration politically with Catholics. Therefore, the administration considered moving away from confrontation over the Freeze and toward agreement on the abortion issue. Factions within the administration suggested that they "take the offensive away from them [the Catholic Bishops] on the issue, with the abortion question." Administration insiders deemed abortion a "public relations goldmine" that would divide the bishops over whether the Freeze or abortion was the most important issue for the church.<sup>174</sup>

The GOP lost seven percent of the Catholic vote in the 1982 midterm elections compared to 1980 and argued that a continued focus on the Freeze could cost even more votes. Morton Blackwell, a special assistant in the White House's Office of Public

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<sup>172</sup> "Memorandum For Red Cavaney From Dee Jepsen," Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze, (July-Dec. 1982), folder 1, Nov. 16, 1982. Reagan Library.

<sup>173</sup> "Memorandum For James A. Baker, III From Elizabeth H. Dole," Elizabeth Dole Files: Nuclear Freeze, (July-Dec. 1982), folder 1, Nov. 23, 1982. Reagan Library.

<sup>174</sup> "Memorandum: Catholic Bishops Nuclear Freeze Initiative," Morton Blackwell Files: Nuclear Freeze, (Dec. 14, 1982), folder 4, Reagan Library.

Liaison, framed the president's choice as either facing Catholic opposition to the Freeze or their support on "right to life issues."<sup>175</sup> De-emphasizing the Freeze, while fanning the emotional flames of the abortion issue, was a wily political maneuver by an increasingly organized White House. The administration was attempting to fracture the consensus of support for the Freeze by driving the ultimate "wedge issue" between pro-Freeze factions on differing sides of the abortion debate.

Aside from using "wedge issues" to divide the Freeze, the administration's anti-Nuclear Freeze campaign moved to a higher level by deeming the movement a Soviet conspiracy. Deputy White House press secretary Larry Speakes informed the news media that the administration had State Department reports and articles from the conservative periodicals *The Reader's Digest*, *Commentary*, and *The American Spectator* to back up Reagan's assertion that Moscow secretly controlled the Nuclear Freeze movement.<sup>176</sup> While asserting the "sincere and well-intentioned" nature of Freeze supporters, Reagan himself cited evidence from the aforementioned magazines that "in the organization of some of the big demonstrations, the one in New York, and so forth, there is no question about foreign agents that were sent to help investigate and help create and keep such a movement going."<sup>177</sup> This assertion did not gain much traction. *Reader's Digest* lacked the intelligence gathering capabilities of the CIA.

A month later Reagan played the other half of the administration's "good cop/bad cop" routine as he cast aspersions on the Soviets, while praising Freeze supporters. He

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> "Sources Are Cited for Charge Of Soviet Tie to Arms Freeze," *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 1982.

<sup>177</sup> The Public Papers of the President, "The President's News Conference," Nov. 11, 1982. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41985>. (accessed Apr. 4, 2010).

went a step further by arguing that Freeze proponents unwittingly aided the Soviet Union while maintaining that Freeze supporters were “sincere and well-intentioned.” The president erroneously claimed that “the first man who proposed the Nuclear Freeze was in Feb. 21, 1981, in Moscow, Leonid Brezhnev.” In truth, the first politician to propose a freeze was Senator Mark Hatfield during the SALT II talks in 1979.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, an FBI report declassified in March 1983 revealed that the Kremlin did not “directly control or manipulate” the U.S. Nuclear Freeze movement.<sup>179</sup> Nevertheless, with the president’s allegation unrefuted since November, a seed of doubt had been planted.

As the administration waged a ruthless political battle against the Freeze in an attempt to link the movement to pro-choice and procommunist agendas, the president projected a diplomatic image toward his European allies. Western Europe, however, registered diminishing support for the ever-increasing American defense initiatives. The White House redoubled its efforts by publicizing the implementation of National Security Decision Document (NSDD) 77, a plan to improve public diplomacy. Perhaps born as much out of domestic considerations as by U.S.-European relations, the departments of defense and state, the national security council, the United States Information Agency, and the agency for international development planned to coordinate “public information policies” to counter “the Soviet peace offensive.”<sup>180</sup> Reagan demonstrated his intent by proposing a compromise with Moscow over his “Zero Option” proposal for the total elimination of intermediate nuclear weapons in Europe.

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<sup>178</sup> “President Says Freeze Proponents May Unwittingly Aid the Russians,” *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1982.

<sup>179</sup> “F.B.I. Rules Out Russian Control Of Freeze Drive,” *New York Times*, Mar. 26, 1983.

<sup>180</sup> “Reagan Intensifies Drive To Promote Policies In Europe,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1983.



Western European allies believed that the president's proposal was not serious. They awaited a plan to which the Soviets might agree. Reagan's offer would be an interim agreement that would allow each side to keep 300 warheads provided both sides agreed to the eventual elimination of intermediate nuclear weapons.<sup>181</sup> Reagan was attempting to change his international image from that of irrational ideologue to a rational man of peace.

### **Conclusion**

Reagan discussed respectful diplomacy with the Soviet Union, but his words and deeds during this period reflected anticommunist ideology more than pragmatic diplomacy. Reagan's history as an ardent Cold Warrior and his polemics as president deepened the worldwide malaise over nuclear war. The president failed to convey to Americans his support for arms control, and that arms control on the terms of the Freeze was imprudent. He believed that the Freeze movement operated in the tradition of détente and would allow the Soviets to continue their renewed expansion of influence began in the late 1970s. The president's eschewal the Freeze's tangible realism for his ethereal nuclear abolitionism was out of touch with the nation's mood. Yet, Reagan attempted to co-opt the movement since both sides supported a form of arms control. The president was in a political hole of his own making, but showed few signs of finding his way out.

Opposition to the president's national security policy ran deeper than his choice of words. Recession and high unemployment strengthened the economic arguments for a freeze. Reagan was cutting money for social programs and funneling the savings into a

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<sup>181</sup> "Aides Say Reagan Is Ready To Offer Arms Compromise," *New York Times*, Mar. 23, 1983.

massive defense buildup. Choosing to fund weapons systems over the needs of poor people eroded support for peace through strength among many religious Americans. The administration realized it was losing the debate within religious communities. In lieu of gearing persuasive security arguments toward Christian Freeze supporters, administration political operatives used “wedge issues” such as abortion in an attempt to regain support for the president. The Reagan administration calculated that diverting people’s passions to these issues would take the political momentum from the Freeze. The cynical actions of the White House underestimated the amount of nuclear fear in the United States during the early 1980s. With Reagan’s staff unable to make an effective argument against the Nuclear Freeze, Reagan took it upon himself to do so in the Evil Empire speech.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### CONSERVATIVES SEEK MORE RHETORICAL REARMAMENT

Ronald Reagan received an invitation in December 1982 to deliver a speech before the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) that coming March in Orlando.<sup>182</sup> The president and his speechwriters formulated an address that attempted to link social conservatism with moralistic foreign policy. With the other large religious organizations supporting the Nuclear Freeze movement, Reagan needed the backing of a large Christian organization such as the NAE to help neutralize the moral arguments against his foreign policy. The Freeze espoused the Biblical notion from the Book of Mathew that “blessed be the peacemakers.”<sup>183</sup> The Nuclear Freeze movement—backed by many church organizations—had the moral high ground in discussions regarding nuclear weapons. The president attempted to usurp the Freeze’s moral authority by using the rhetoric of “evil” to link domestic and superpower opponents as immoral.

The job of binding domestic and international rivals under an “evil” phraseology fell to speechwriter Anthony Dolan, at best a second level administration official. Dolan took the initiative in formulating the idea for a speech that higher level officials thought would deal with Reagan’s political problems with religious conservatives and Cold Warriors. The speechwriter worked to address the concerns voiced to him by a web of evangelical and conservative activists. Dolan faced the challenge of reinforcing Reagan’s religious conservatism and the reality of his Cold War conservatism in one address. He

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<sup>182</sup> Letter, Dugan to Deaver, December 3, 1982, folder 6 in Series I: Presidential Records, “National Association of Evangelicals” File, 1981-1989,” Reagan Library.

<sup>183</sup> Mathew 5:9 <http://bible.cc/matthew/5-9.htm> (accessed Mar. 11, 2010).

found an ally in Robert Dugan, legislative liaison for the NAE Office of Public Affairs. Dugan collaborated closely with Dolan in writing a speech addressing the social issues that concerned evangelicals. The oration would link those domestic concerns with a moralistic foreign policy that included opposition to the Nuclear Freeze by evangelicals. The right wing was looking for more strident anticommunism out of Reagan, and the political wing of the White House was seeking to appeal to religious Freeze supporters. The speechwriters began crafting a sermon that spoke to both congregations.

### **The President's Target Audience**

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), a primarily conservative Protestant organization dating back to 1942, counted 36,000 churches and 3.5 million members in its organization including: Mennonites, Brethren, Assemblies of God, and evangelical sects of Lutheranism, Methodism, and Presbyterianism.<sup>184</sup> The NAE formed a core constituency in the political coalition that swept Reagan into White House in 1980.<sup>185</sup> During the campaign, Reagan echoed their opposition to abortion, homosexual rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment along with their support for school prayer. Soon after Reagan's inauguration, the NAE and the National Religious Broadcasters held a joint conference to discuss the course the new presidency might take. Televangelists and conservative preachers comprised Reagan's most enthusiastic supporters at the gathering. Televangelist and NAE member Dr. D. James Kennedy argued that Reagan's election would counteract the "brainwashing" by "secular humanists." Meanwhile, Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell urged patience with the administration's efforts on

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<sup>184</sup> "Member Denominations and Networks of Local Churches."

<http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=nae.members> (accessed Dec. 9, 2005).

<sup>185</sup> "Evangelicals Debate Their Role in Battling Secularism," *New York Times*, Jan. 27, 1981.

social issues. He believed the president shared support for a conservative social agenda, but needed time to work on these issues.<sup>186</sup>

The NAE was not monolithic, however. Moderate elements criticized conservatives for pronouncing certain political positions as Biblically ordained. Marlin Van Elderen, a moderate evangelical leader, chided conservatives. “No person or organization,” he declared, “speaks on behalf of biblical Christianity in matters social and political.” Conservative evangelicals also found a surprising and powerful critic within the NAE, the Reverend Billy Graham. The world-renowned evangelist and counselor to numerous Cold War presidents warned evangelicals about the dangers of televangelism and the threat of renewing the arms race. Graham took issue with the administration’s increased defense budgets by questioning the ethics of the nations of the world spending \$550 billion per year on weapons while millions starved. Contrary to conservative evangelical opinion, Graham did not view Reagan’s election as God’s judgment. He furthermore declared that not all evangelicals were conservatives.<sup>187</sup> Graham’s criticism of an arms buildup echoed his pronouncements prior to Reagan’s election. For example, as the second strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT II) moved toward a ratification vote in the Senate during 1979, Graham called on evangelicals to become involved in the nuclear disarmament movement and support the treaty’s passage.<sup>188</sup>

Many political born-again evangelicals ignored Graham’s message of peaceful cooperation during these heady times for conservative Christians. For example, Bobbie

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<sup>186</sup> “Evangelicals Debate Their Role in Battling Secularism,” *New York Times*, Jan. 27, 1981; “Evangelical Leaders Hail Election And Ask Continuation of Efforts,” *New York Times*, Jan. 27, 1981.

<sup>187</sup> “Graham Warns on Arms and ‘Dangers’ in TV Evangelism,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1981.

<sup>188</sup> “Support for Arms Treaty Is Urged by Billy Graham,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 1, 1979.

James, wife of Alabama Governor Fob James said, “It was Jesus that gave us this victory in November.... God in his mercy heard the prayers of Christians all over this country... perhaps the world.” Aside from calling Christ the ultimate political operative, the First Lady of Alabama noted that she spent “most of [her] time in the prayer closet, which is where women belong.” Buffering her argument for the immaculate election with numerology, James noted that 444, the number of days the American hostages spent in Iran also signaled a new beginning. Through the divinations of numerology, she concluded that “God has intervened in American history.”<sup>189</sup>

Early in his first term, the president struggled to garner support for his foreign policy from conservative Christians. Even when they engaged in politics, most evangelicals tended not to support Reagan’s initiatives. Though he endorsed conservative Christian concerns, rhetorical rearmament failed to resonate with his base.<sup>190</sup> The president attempted use social issues to lure evangelicals from supporting the Freeze to peace through strength. His pleas married strident anti-communism with social conservatism by employing the same moral language in discussions of the Kremlin usually reserved for issues like abortion. By fusing domestic and international concerns, conservative Christians slowly began embracing the administration’s global anti-communism agenda. This philosophy diverged from détente by placing foreign relations in moral terms, which had fallen out of favor defining the Vietnam War era.

During his first days in office, however, Reagan chose not to reward evangelicals for supporting his administration’s new foreign policy course. The president did not

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<sup>7</sup>“Evangelical Christians Meet to Develop Strategy for 1980s,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 30, 1981.

<sup>190</sup> “Policy by The Book,” *Washington Post*, Jul. 25, 1980.

appear at the NAE conference or make significant political appointments to his administration from the ranks of the Christian Right. Many conservatives disapproved of his cabinet appointees including: Treasury Secretary Donald Regan, whose party affiliation was unclear to some former associates; Education Secretary Terrell Bell, a professional educator whose entire department was an anathema to conservatives; and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, a supporter of liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller in the 1964 California primary over conservative standard-bearer Barry Goldwater.<sup>191</sup> These early days set the tone for the Reagan presidency as the commander-in-chief placated rather than heeded his religious allies until he needed their support.

Reagan, however, maintained a private courtship with evangelical leaders to keep them in the fold as useful allies. This tactic began during the debate over selling the airborne warning and control system (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia in 1981. Reagan coupled the moral rhetoric of social issues with foreign policy initiatives. For example, the president cultivated key evangelicals like Robert P. Dugan, Jr., a pastor for 18 years, a denominational president, and failed congressional candidate from Colorado. Dugan led the political wing of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in their Office of Public Affairs.<sup>192</sup> Dugan spoke out for Reagan's foreign policy in the pages of the monthly governmental affairs newsletter he edited, *NAE Washington Insight*, and acted as an administration ally in organizational debates over the nature of the organization's

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<sup>191</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 144, 145, 498, 730; "Evangelical Christians Meet to Develop Strategy for 1980s," *Washington Post*, Jan. 30, 1981.

<sup>192</sup> "'The Washington Office' A Voice Above the Clamor," *Christianity Today*. Oct. 8, 1982, p. 53, folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

national security position. Thanking Dugan for his political aid, Reagan emphasized their agreement on “the importance of family values and the sanctity of innocent human life.”<sup>193</sup> Speaking to the conservative social agenda, Reagan used domestic issues to build support for his foreign policy, but gaining support from Christian conservatives in his subsequent fight against the Freeze proved difficult.<sup>194</sup>

### **Reagan’s Evangelical Ally**

Despite Reagan’s assiduous courting of conservative Christian leaders, his unwillingness to act on their social agenda caused restlessness within the Christian base by 1982. This constituency threatened to sit out the midterm election because Reagan had not worked for constitutional amendments banning abortion and reinstating school prayer. Reagan further angered social conservatives by abandoning the abortion and school prayer fights after a successful Senate filibuster of those issues.<sup>195</sup> While the administration claimed the president’s work on economic and budgetary matters precluded vigorously pushing a conservative social agenda, Christian conservatives saw Reagan’s inaction as an “immoral compromise” and “crass political expediency.”<sup>196</sup> Cal Thomas, Moral Majority communications director, expressed evangelical opinion by asserting that the president “has not followed through on his personal beliefs.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Reagan “Thank You” Letter to Robert Dugan, Aug. 28, 1981. White House Office of Record Management Subject File: FG 051, Federal Government Organization (The Supreme Court of the United States), Reagan Library.

<sup>194</sup> Reagan “Thank You” Letter to Robert Dugan, Nov. 9, 1981. White House Office of Record Management: Collection: FO 003-02, Reagan Library.

<sup>195</sup> “Reagan Backs Anti-Abortion Bill As Opponents Resume Filibuster,” *New York Times*. Sept. 9, 1982. “Reagan, in Campaign Shift, Plans Less Emphasis on the Social Issues,” Steven R. Weisman. *New York Times*. Sept. 24, 1982.

<sup>196</sup> “Religious Right Growing Impatient With Reagan,” *New York Times*, Aug. 16, 1982.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.



Locating Reagan's convictions on social issues proved difficult for those claiming to understand him. He often sounded religious, even sanctimonious throughout his public life; yet, the president never attended church regularly. Though his mother Nelle was a fundamentalist Christian, he did not follow in her path.<sup>198</sup> Reagan forged his identity as an actor and lived among the same Hollywood elites so distrusted by conservative evangelicals. He and his first wife, actress Jane Wyman, divorced in an era when it was uncommon outside Hollywood. He eventually married another actress, Nancy Davis—who developed a strong faith in astrology—which in some ways guided his own life.<sup>199</sup> Reagan spoke as a pro-life president, but as governor of California signed into law the most liberal abortion statute in the country before the Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973.<sup>200</sup> These contradictions, combined with Reagan's seeming apathy toward social issues, had alienated single-issue conservative voters by 1982.<sup>201</sup>

Undaunted, the politically ambitious Robert Dugan continued defending Reagan. His newsletter, *NAE Washington Insight*, claimed the president was acting on the issues of school prayer and abortion. He blamed Congressional obstructionism for waylaying the administration's school prayer bill. Dugan also reported that Reagan had lobbied “vigorously” for the Constitutional amendment banning abortion.<sup>202</sup> He met with White House Chief of Staff James Baker to plan strategy at the height of the 1982 Senate filibuster over a pro-life amendment. During this meeting, Reagan “popped in” to greet Dugan and voice his support for the amendment, a move that convinced him of Reagan's

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<sup>198</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, 246-247.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 515-518.

<sup>200</sup> Lou Cannon, *Reagan* (New York: Putnam, 1982), 128-132.

<sup>201</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, 196-197.

<sup>202</sup> “Hill Gets Reagan's Prayer Amendment,” *Washington Post*, May 18, 1982.

personal commitment to the issue. Gushing with self-importance, Dugan bragged about the president's "sincere eleventh hour efforts," which revealed "his convictions" to the pro-life movement.<sup>203</sup> After the amendment failed, he asked for greater coordination with the White House to rally evangelical voters. Using his support for Reagan's defense policies as leverage, Dugan promised to lay the groundwork for attaining evangelical support for "peace through strength."

Dugan's aid offer came in a December 1982 letter to Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver, requesting that the president speak at the NAE annual convention during March in Orlando, Florida. Dugan pitched the speech to the pragmatic Deaver as a means for the president to articulate his defense policy. He called the address "politically strategic" in the sense that addressing the NAE offered a means to counter the National Council of Catholic Bishops, an organization drifting toward supporting the Freeze, and the National Council of Churches, which already supported the Freeze. The NAE remained the only major Christian organization not aligned with either side. Dugan argued that a presidential address to the organization could move support toward Reagan's defense policy. Moreover, it would be important not to have three major religious organizations opposing administration foreign policy.

Dugan assured the White House that the political arm of the NAE backed the president's military budget and would work behind the scenes "to counteract some of the drift toward the Nuclear Freeze position." He declared that NAE leaders would work through religious media and NAE gatherings to garner support for peace through

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<sup>203</sup> *NAE Washington Insight*, Oct. 1982, Vol. IV, No. 10. Series: White House Office of Speechwriting, folder 3, Reagan Library.

strength. Dugan concluded, however, that a presidential address at the NAE convention would be the best way “to assure strong conservative voices” would win the heart of evangelicals.<sup>204</sup> Dugan displayed his shrewdness by using pragmatic political considerations to convince Deaver of the value in addressing the organization. He believed Reagan could win over rank and file NAE members, but the president needed to communicate to them in clear and dynamic terms.

Dugan’s proposal offered an opportunity for the president to reiterate the ideological conservatism that some right-wing supporters believed he lacked. In a subsequent February 1983 letter to Anthony Dolan, Dugan wrote collegially of the cohesion between the men and their objectives rather than in the business-like tone of the Deaver letter.<sup>205</sup> As a supporter of a foreign policy denouncing Moscow and calling for increased defense spending rather than a Nuclear Freeze, Dugan was the speechwriter’s natural ally. He understood the ideological cleavage between pragmatists like Deaver, who favored a more diplomatic tone toward the Kremlin, and hard liners represented by Dolan. Dugan and Dolan agreed that the president had not made his voice heard in the administration’s internal debate over whether to pragmatically revive détente or to use hawkish language to position the United States as “good” and the Soviets as “evil.”

Dugan made a prudent calculation in pitching the NAE address to the administration. He appealed to the pragmatic political instincts of Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver and Chief of Staff James Baker. He then presented his organization as a

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<sup>204</sup> Letter, Dugan to Deaver, December 3, 1982, folder 6 in Series I: Presidential Records, “National Association of Evangelicals” File, 1981-1989,” Reagan Library.

<sup>205</sup> Letter, Dugan to Dolan, February 25, 1983, folder 6 in Series I: Presidential Records, “National Association of Evangelicals” File, 1981-1989,” Reagan Library.

sympathetic audience to Reagan's premier conservative speech writer. Dugan likely recognized that courting Dolan could raise his profile and promote the NAE agenda within the administration.

### **Anthony Dolan: Architect of “Evil Empire”**

Anthony “Tony” Dolan was a Yale graduate who won the 1978 Pulitzer Prize for investigating organized crime in Stamford, Connecticut for the *Stamford Advocate*. At age 30, he joined the Reagan campaign and subsequently became a White House speechwriter. Dolan had strong conservative credentials as a protégé of *National Review* editor William F. Buckley and a friend of William Casey, Reagan's 1980 campaign manager and later CIA chief.<sup>206</sup> He sided with the ideological “hawks” led by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger over the moderate-minded “pragmatists” who came to be epitomized by Secretary of State George Shultz after his appointment to the Cabinet in 1982. Pragmatists favored diplomacy and arms control agreements with the Soviets while hawks viewed the Soviet Union as an intractable menace with which the administration could not negotiate.<sup>207</sup> These sides waged bureaucratic battles over Soviet policy and social policy. Dolan's conservative cadre wanted to “let Reagan be Reagan” and free him from moderate West Wing influences.<sup>208</sup>

During winter 1982-83, Dolan received correspondence pressuring him to reenergize the administration's rhetorical rearmament against Moscow from conservatives outside the administration. Reagan had failed in their minds to sustain rhetorical pressure on Moscow. Erstwhile supporters among non-governmental

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<sup>206</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 273-74.

<sup>207</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 265-67.

<sup>208</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 274.

organizations and Southern Christians thought the president had stopped fighting for the conservative agenda. These observers did not have formal roles in the administration, but they represented elements of the conservative interest groups that had helped elect Reagan. Dolan's contacts did not mince words in telling him that the president appeared weak toward the Kremlin and seemed unwilling to stand up to the Soviets. They urged a more aggressive rhetorical strategy that would give America the moral high ground and put their communist rivals on the defensive. While these fringe figures represented a small minority of conservatives, Dolan acted to meet their demands in drafting the Evil Empire speech.

One restive conservative whom Dolan worked to placate was H. Malone Cochran, a Southern Baptist minister from Jonesboro, Georgia and chairman of his local "Citizens for Reagan" branch. He sent a letter of discontent to Congressman Bill Lowery (R-CA), who deemed the message worthy of forwarding to Reagan. Cochran believed Reagan's economic program was "in total disarray" and claimed that liberals had "gutted" the conservative principles of the president. Most damning, he opined, "I like the president's strong language... however... I must on the basis of all evidence thus far conclude that these strong words are like all other strong words he has spoken... and he is no more than an old time Democrat with a slightly new twist and some words that count for little, if anything at all."<sup>209</sup> While such sentiments did not abound in Congress or the news media, discontent appeared on other fronts as some conservatives puzzled over Reagan's true beliefs.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Dolan, Anthony, folder 3, Series IV: Correspondence, Jan. 4, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>210</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 290.

Some Soviet dissidents began questioning the president's devotion to their cause. For example, Vladimir Bukovsky expressed "rage over American defensive/defenseless foreign policy." From his position as a political exile in Cambridge, England, he deemed 1983 a decisive year, stating "there will hardly be another moment to turn the tide with Presidential elections coming in 1984." Bukovsky did not feel confident that the administration would take the opportunity to rhetorically rearm: "Instead of energetic and offensive policy, all we hear is bickering in the Congress over social security and cuts [?] in military budget [sic]." For Bukovsky, "The debate over peace and disarmament were [sic] very much mishandled, while the Soviets continue to pump millions into the peace movements."<sup>211</sup> He called on Dolan to act: "My feeling is that the idea of ideological offensive [sic] is shelved by the President. Please, let me know if I am wrong [sic]."<sup>212</sup> Bukovsky's challenge must have weighed heavily on the hawkish Dolan's mind. Here was a native of the evil empire claiming that Reagan had accommodated "evil" in the tradition of détente, the foreign policy anathema of Reaganite conservatives. Dolan's speech drafts indicated that he had Bukovsky's "ideological offensive" on his mind in his earliest brainstorming of the speech.<sup>213</sup>

The network of conservative activists did not end with Soviet dissidents and some Southern Baptist ministers. Frank R. Barnett director of the National Strategy Information Center, Inc., a conservative think tank, also lobbied the White House and Dolan to keep pressure on the Kremlin. He warned against embracing "a 'trust-the-

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<sup>211</sup> Reagan too made the claim that peace movements such as the nuclear Freeze were financed by Moscow. Although research showed them to be self financed, the KGB did attempt to infiltrate peace movements.

<sup>212</sup> Dolan, Anthony, folder 3, Series IV: Correspondence, Jan. 18, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>213</sup> Dolan, Anthony, folder 7, Series I: Speech Drafts, Jan-June 1983, Reagan Library.

Russians' policy on Arms Control" claiming that "President Reagan's 'defensive consensus' is coming apart just as the Soviet Empire regains dangerous vitality under a space-age Czar," new Soviet leader Yuri Andropov. Barnett blamed this faltering consensus on "cadres in the liberal media" that "persist in pressuring the White House and Pentagon to be 'more reasonable' in dealing with this Soviet godfather."<sup>214</sup>

Directing his ammunition at the administration's self-consciously muscular military posture, Barnett wondered if Reagan had been emasculated: "Is the West so effete, amoral and pusillanimous that we will bestow 'respect' on this Marxist Mafia Chief [Andropov] by negotiating a 'mutual' non-aggression pact, implying ethical and political symmetry between democracy and dictatorship?" Along with impugning the Reagan administration for losing its nerve to fight communism, Barnett mentioned an equally unsettling reality for the hawks: "America is losing the battle of public opinion to the Peace Movement, which often paints the Pentagon as a greater threat to mankind than the Kremlin's war-machine."<sup>215</sup> The evidence continued to mount that Reagan needed to address the weakening of his conservative credentials.

Within the conservative press, M. Stanton Evans of the *Washington Times*, commented on the administration's lack of offensive strategy in dealing with domestic opponents. He contended Reagan needed to discuss what he deemed Soviet unwillingness to abide by previous arms control treaties: SALT I, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and the unratified SALT II Treaty. Evans believed the president should decry this perceived Soviet duplicity and use it to justify further defense spending

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<sup>214</sup> Dolan, Anthony, folder 3, Series IV: Correspondence, Jan. 27, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>215</sup> Dolan, Anthony, folder 3, Series IV: Correspondence, Jan. 27, 1983, Reagan Library.

increases. He argued that a timid attitude toward Democrats and the Nuclear Freeze movement had caused a certain lethargy and defensiveness in the administration.<sup>216</sup> The drafts of Dolan's speech reflect that he internalized conservatives' criticism of the administration. Dolan must have sensed that an ideological political offensive would prove politically beneficial.

Dolan realized that Reagan needed the proper forum to burnish his conservative credentials in both the domestic and foreign spheres. He became convinced of this reality as more mail arrived from conservative confidants. Dolan's friend Marshall Clark argued that Reagan should "take the initiative on the communication front" to "generate the voter pressure needed to bend Congress to your will." Clark suggested the president launch a media blitz replete with "prime time television programs" to reach the voters and explain "why we cannot afford to cut defense expenditures." Yet, Clark did not trust the television news media, claiming that "T.V. news tends to distort or sensationalize facts to maximize ratings."<sup>217</sup>

Along with their ever-present fears that Reagan had been overridden by Congress, conservatives worried that their message had been distorted by the mainstream news media or as they called it, "the liberal media." The "liberal media" consisted of the three network television news divisions, the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and any other prominent media outlet that criticized the president or Republican causes.<sup>218</sup> Many on the Right believed that conservative opinions could reach voters by speaking over the

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<sup>216</sup> Dolan, Anthony, "Evil Empire Speech Preparation Materials," folder 6, Series I: "Reagan's defense needs an offense"; *Washington Times*, Feb. 24, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>217</sup> Dolan, Anthony, folder 3, Series IV: Correspondence, Feb. 21, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>218</sup> "What Liberal Media?" Eric Alterman, *The Nation*.

<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml%3Fi=20030224&s=alterman2> (accessed July 3, 2005).



filter of the news media. President Reagan possessed the power, if he chose to use it, to speak over that filter and persuade Americans that he was making sound policy decisions.

Dolan sought to find Reagan a forum to display his conservatism by speaking directly to the people. Yet, owing to the ideological divide within the administration it would not be possible to give this address in prime time as some hardliners had suggested. A year earlier, Dolan's attempt to strengthen Reagan's denunciations of the Kremlin during his June 1982 Westminster Speech to the Houses of Parliament in London had been blocked by pragmatists. While Reagan did predict that Soviet communism would be consigned to "the ash heap of history," suggestions by hardliners that the president use terms such as "focus of evil" did not survive into the final draft.<sup>219</sup> Dolan agreed with his right-wing friends that the president had not kept up the rhetorical pressure. He believed that the commander-in-chief would be receptive to renewing and stiffening his anti-Soviet rhetoric.

Dolan sought advice on writing an anti-Soviet address from his mentor and fellow Whittaker Chambers admirer, William F. Buckley, Jr.<sup>220</sup> Buckley argued that Dolan needed to craft an address that cast the Kremlin as "the anti-Christ." Buckley, however, warned that "there is no more difficult a point to communicate in a world essentially secular which simply thinks of the Soviet Union as another society given to occasional spasms of barbarism." He suggested Dolan consult the writings of Whittaker Chambers, the famously crusading anti-communist of the second Red Scare, and

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<sup>219</sup> "The Battle of Evil Empire," Frank Warner, March 5, 2000. [www.tysknews.com/articles/empire.htm](http://www.tysknews.com/articles/empire.htm). (Accessed Feb. 19, 2005).

<sup>220</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 274.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the preeminent Soviet dissident of the Cold War.<sup>221</sup> Dolan devoted an entire paragraph to Chambers—perhaps Reagan’s favorite anticommunist author. The Evil Empire speech did not refer to Solzhenitsyn, but his description in 1975 of the Soviet Union as “the concentration of World Evil” may have inspired the phrases “focus of evil in the modern world” and “evil empire.”<sup>222</sup>

### **The NAE and the Bully Pulpit**

Dugan lunched with Dolan on a couple of occasions to discuss the speech. Dugan’s legislative researcher Richard Cizik and White House speechwriter Dana Rohrabacher also attended. Dolan and Rohrabacher seemed most interested in learning about the NAE as a constituency and how a presidential address might be received. Dugan did not attempt to place any stipulations on what he wanted Reagan to say in the speech.<sup>223</sup> Cizik urged the White House to address the moral implications of the arms race to counter Freeze protestors. Cizik believed pro-Freeze NAE members did not understand the gravity of the nuclear weapons issue. He proposed casting anti-Nuclear Freeze arguments in moral terms. Regardless of how the address turned out, the legislative office felt proud that the administration had chosen their convention for a speech Cizik hoped would be “rocko-socko” against moral adversaries.<sup>224</sup>

Dolan desired to “let Reagan be Reagan” through a forceful address evoking the ideas and imagery of Chambers and Solzhenitsyn. Dolan and Dugan cooperated to create an address that would reassert peace through strength. Dolan and Rohrabacher dined

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<sup>221</sup> Dolan, Anthony, folder 3, Series IV: Correspondence, Mar. 2, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>222</sup> “The Battle of Evil Empire,” Frank Warner, Mar. 5, 2000. [www.tysknews.com/articles/empire.htm](http://www.tysknews.com/articles/empire.htm). (accessed Feb.19, 2005).

<sup>223</sup> Robert Dugan, Telephone Interview, Jan. 17, 2008.

<sup>224</sup> Richard Cizik, Telephone Interview, Feb. 15, 2008.

with Cizik and Dugan at Kristos Charcoal House in Alexandria, Virginia on February 23 where they sketched an outline of Reagan's forthcoming NAE speech. Dugan sought to impress upon Dolan the differences between the NAE and the Religious Right. The NAE had moderate and peaceful elements not easily swayed to support the president's defense policies. Yet, Dugan argued that by addressing the NAE, Reagan had an opportunity to gain informal backing from a religious group with an undefined position on the Nuclear Freeze. The support of a religious organization could prove strategically important with other religious groups continuing to endorse the Freeze. Dugan noted that the Nuclear Freeze Resolution would probably pass the House Foreign Affairs during the March 7-9 period.<sup>225</sup> The administration needed a bold statement of purpose to counteract rising public opposition to Reagan's defense policy.

On a personal note, Dugan requested that Dolan write into the speech an expression of gratitude to Dugan and his fiefdom, the Washington Office of Public Affairs, for maintaining "a helpful working relationship" with Reagan. Dugan also suggested that Dolan attach the word "voluntary" to Reagan's school prayer proposal. He was attempting to keep the peace between the liberal and conservative factions of the NAE. Dugan surmised that the word "voluntary" would put the case for school prayer on favorable First Amendment grounds.<sup>226</sup> Dugan discussed the finer points of the speech rather than the political benefits of giving the address, as he did with Deaver. Suggesting that Dolan not treat the NAE like the "New Religious Right" and proposing he temper

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<sup>225</sup> Letter, Dugan to Dolan and "Kristos Charcoal House" menu February 25, 1983, folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, "National Association of Evangelicals File," 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

Reagan's references to school prayer with the word "voluntary," demonstrated Dugan's own pragmatism toward NAE moderates.

Dolan chose not to preoccupy himself with the incipient national security position of the NAE in his speech drafts. Rather, he consulted NAE literature summarizing the organization's political and spiritual beliefs. He likely read about the NAE's beginnings as a reaction to the Social Gospel movement of the Progressive Era during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The NAE's forbears believed cooperation between disparate churches evaporated as theological liberals moved to temper traditional sensibilities of "the evangelical voice" in their churches. An early incarnation of the NAE came into existence in 1929, while the organization formally began in 1942. The stated mission of the NAE was "not to eliminate denominations, but protect them; not to force individual churches into a mold of liberal or radical sameness, but provide a means of cooperation in evangelical witness."<sup>227</sup> A historical perspective on the NAE helped Dolan mold his speech to the traditional views on social issues held by many within the organization.

The size and influence of the NAE made it a potential counterweight to other Christian groups supporting the Freeze.<sup>228</sup> The organization produced three separate publications for its members, contained a field services department as part of its service ministry which helped over ten million people, and maintained a D.C.-based Office of Public Affairs. The NAE also included a number of ministerial commissions and affiliates including the eight-hundred fifty member-strong National Religious

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<sup>227</sup> Pamphlet, "Cooperating Together for the Faith of the Gospel." folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

Broadcasters comprised of religious station owners and religious program producers.<sup>229</sup>

Dugan presented the administration with the possibility that this group could work to counteract the moral authority the Nuclear Freeze movement had monopolized by winter 1983.<sup>230</sup>

The NAE was a large organization whose members possessed a predominantly conservative philosophy. According to a 1983 Gallup survey, conservative evangelicals comprised an estimated twenty percent of American adults and constituted “the largest cohesive minority in the United States.” In addition to their numbers, Dugan argued for their importance in terms of moral authority. He contended that evangelicals held clear beliefs not apparent in moderate denominations supporting the Freeze. “Evangelicals possess a well-developed, intelligible coherent philosophy of life. This gives meaning and richness to their religious experience and direction to their lives.... Liberal churches have no such philosophy.”<sup>231</sup> Dolan understood that a church organization purporting to have such a strong religious grounding could be a powerful ally in challenging the Nuclear Freeze movement.

Dugan also sent Dolan the January and February 1983 editions of *NAE Washington Insight* as an example of how he promoted administration foreign policy to NAE members. One of Dugan’s talking points in the newsletter pertained to the nuclear arms debate. He noted that the NAE had not followed the National Council of Churches

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<sup>229</sup> Pamphlet, folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>230</sup> Letter, Dugan to Michael Deaver, folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, “National Association of Evangelicals File,” 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>231</sup> Memorandum, “Who Are Evangelicals?” folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops by supporting the Freeze. It remained neutral in the debate as “the NAE is being courted from both sides.” Then he stated, in a message meant for the administration, “Liberals want evangelicals to jump onto the Nuclear Freeze bandwagon. Conservatives, and perhaps even the White House itself, hope that evangelicals will become a major religious bloc supporting the President’s position.” Dugan’s thin veneer of objectivity belied an ambitious man eager to please the administration rather than remain nonaligned.<sup>232</sup>

Removing any doubt that this edition of *Insight* was meant for an audience beyond the casual evangelical reader, Dugan noted that a 1981 Gallup Poll “showed that 78% of evangelicals favored higher defense expenditures while 68% of non-evangelicals did. That’s one clue... that the majority of evangelicals still lean toward maintaining peace through strength.” Although these remarks denote an implicit agreement with Reagan administration foreign policy, Dugan remembered to mention that “the NAE has a minority among its membership who renounce any use of force as a matter of conscience.”<sup>233</sup> He was referring to the quarter of NAE membership comprised of pacifist sects such as Quakers, Brethren, and Mennonites.<sup>234</sup> These groups’ support of the Nuclear Freeze contributed to the president’s ebbing popularity during winter 1983. Administration officials realized the Nuclear Freeze campaign had wounded them politically among religious groups. Thus, Dugan’s lobbying for the NAE Convention as a forum to counterattack the Freeze proved impossible to resist.

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<sup>232</sup> *NAE Washington Insight*, Robert P. Dugan, Jr., January 1983, Vol. V, No. 1 folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> “Presidential Pulpit,” *Commonweal* March 25, 1983: 164-165.

In preparation for Reagan's remarks, Dolan familiarized himself with the NAE and its temporal agenda. He also considered the words of the conservative print media in drafting the foreign policy portion of the address. Dolan kept a sensational account of Soviet nuclear superiority from the *New York Post*, which stated the Kremlin was "at least a generation ahead" of U.S. nuclear capability. That story may have been a strategic administration leak to gain support for the next round of increases in the Pentagon's budget; nevertheless, it demonstrated that obtaining support for the defense budget would be a key mission of the speech<sup>235</sup> He also saved a *Washington Times* opinion piece urging Reagan to stop "backpedaling" on his defense budget requests. Its argument for defense budget increases asserted that Moscow had taken advantage of détente to increase its strategic forces. Some conservatives worried that Reagan would abandon further defense spending increases, but the president gave no indication he would deviate from his policy of modernizing strategic forces. Nevertheless, Dolan used such opinions to justify anti-Soviet rhetoric as a means of selling further defense spending increases.

### **Conclusion**

Reagan's career in public service was most notable for its anticommunism. He had already given high profile speeches denouncing communism at the University of Notre Dame in 1981 and at the Houses of Parliament in 1982. Nevertheless, the right wing worried that the president was not doing enough to fight Soviet communism and its fellow travelers. The White House took these warnings seriously and sought to alleviate their concerns. At the same time, the administration saw political danger in restive social

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<sup>235</sup> "New Nuke Shocker: Soviets Far Ahead," *New York Post*. Feb. 24, 1983, folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

conservatives being seduced by the moral arguments of the Nuclear Freeze movement.

Inspired by conversations with the NAE, White House speechwriters used the thread of moralistic phraseology to tie social and foreign policy. They decided the best course of action would be to write a compelling presidential meditation on good and evil. The stage was set for a memorable address.



## CHAPTER FOUR:

### THE EVIL EMPIRE SPEECH

Speechwriter Anthony Dolan kept the concerns of social conservatives close at hand in drafting the Evil Empire speech. Most of the address, which was not conceived as a foreign policy speech, dealt with issues such as school prayer and abortion. Dolan produced provocative early drafts of the address that attacked social liberals among the so-called “glitter set.” He juxtaposed the virtuous values of Middle America with the immorality of cultural and intellectual elites. The president was wary of this polemical populism and proved unwilling to cast cultural clashes in such stark terms. Reagan demonstrated pragmatism in the social policy portion of the address by tempering Dolan’s “evil” phraseology in discussing domestic opponents. Conversely, the president and his speechwriter turned the foreign policy section into a new rhetorical milestone for his anticommunist ideology by calling the Soviet Union “an evil empire” and “the focus of evil in the modern world.”<sup>236</sup>

Reagan left the “evil” phraseology in the address to tie together his domestic and Cold War rivals. The president espoused the conservative line on social issues in an attempt to lure religious supporters of the Nuclear Freeze movement over to his peace through strength position. Gaining support for higher defense spending and opposition to the Nuclear Freeze proved difficult. The Evil Empire speech marked a concerted effort to rally evangelical and conservative Christian agreement on social issues and then parlay

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<sup>236</sup> “Draft of ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,’” folder 2, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

that consensus to foreign policy. The actions of the administration demonstrate their concerted effort to execute this ambitious political maneuver.

### **Building the Case for “Evil Empire”**

Dolan sought inspiration from Reagan’s own words in crafting the address. He later said that he wrote presidential speeches by plagiarizing Reagan’s earlier words and ideas.<sup>237</sup> The speechwriter highlighted an article from *Time* magazine reporting Reagan’s criminal characterization of Soviet leaders during his first press conference: “The only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat.”<sup>238</sup> Dolan noticed Reagan’s answer to a question in that press conference regarding the Kremlin’s inclination toward world domination. He recycled Reagan’s claim that the Soviets “hold their determination that their goal must be the promotion of world revolution and a one world Socialist or Communist state.”<sup>239</sup> Dolan looked at these sorts of pronouncements as the means to combat the politically potent Nuclear Freeze Resolution moving through the House of Representatives.<sup>240</sup>

Despite Democratic opposition to his agenda and disillusionment from some social and foreign policy conservatives, Reagan intended to change existing Soviet

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<sup>237</sup> Fred I. Greenstein, *Leadership in the Modern Presidency* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 278.

<sup>238</sup> “On Soviet Morality.” *Time*. Feb. 16, 1981, folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> Accounts in Dolan’s personal file include “Synagogue Council Endorses Nuclear Freeze” Charles Austin *New York Times*, Feb. 25, 1983, and “Nuclear Freeze” *Congressional Quarterly*. Feb. 19, 1983, p. 369, folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

policy. He sought ways non-military power could alter Soviet international behavior.<sup>241</sup>

In that spirit, on January 17, 1983 the National Security Council (NSC) issued National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 75 calling for “sustaining steady, long-term growth in U.S. defense spending and capabilities – both nuclear and conventional.” The document argued that political, economic, and ideological forces could “influence the evolution of Soviet policies and the Soviet regime in directions favorable to our interests.” Its Reaganesque thesis argued for enunciating a U.S. public relations counter-offensive to the Kremlin’s “disinformation activities.” The NSC called for improving the organization, planning, and coordination of public diplomacy as a means of increasing support for Washington’s national security objectives. The council argued the essence of the plan would create a public diplomacy apparatus “strong and flexible enough to affect Soviet calculations in a variety of contingencies.”<sup>242</sup>

NSC Soviet policy would consist of three measures: “external resistance to Soviet imperialism; internal pressure on the USSR to weaken the source of Soviet imperialism; and negotiations to eliminate, on the basis of strict reciprocity, outstanding disagreements.” The directive sought to shape the “Soviet environment” by engaging Moscow on a political level to “prevent the Soviet Propaganda machine from seizing the semantic high-ground in the battle of ideas through the appropriation of such terms as ‘peace.’” The president took it upon himself to gain the “semantic high ground.” It did

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<sup>241</sup> “National Security Study Directive Number 11-82: U.S. Policy Toward The Soviet Union.” August, 21, 1982. Executive Secretariat Meeting Files, NSC 52-139 (NSC Meeting Files), Dec. 16, 1982. Reagan Library.

<sup>242</sup> “National Security Decision Directive Number 77: Management Of Public Diplomacy Relative To National Security.” January, 14 1983. “National Security Decision Directive Number 75 Draft,” folder 1. Executive Secretariat Meeting Files: NSC 52-139. Reagan Library.

not even allude to bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union or winning the Cold War. Reagan's first important address after the release of the directive attacked both his domestic and foreign enemies. The Evil Empire speech framed the domestic and international debate regarding the Soviet Union's values for the rest of the Reagan presidency.<sup>243</sup>

### **A Pragmatic Interlude**

The president was not, however, marching directly toward ideological confrontation in early 1983. Secretary of State Shultz sparked Reagan's interest in renewing negotiations with the Kremlin through an informal personal appeal. On a wintry Saturday evening in February, with the Reagans snowbound at the White House, they invited the Shultzs to dinner. George Shultz argued that Reagan should meet discreetly with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. The president had not had a substantive meeting with any senior Soviet official while in office.<sup>244</sup> Shultz suspected that Dobrynin—a gregarious storyteller—and Reagan—who never forgot a story he liked—would have personal chemistry. The president agreed to the visit.<sup>245</sup>

A few days later on Tuesday, February 15 Shultz “sneaked” Dobrynin into the White House for a two hour late afternoon visit that was “pretty nose to nose.”<sup>246</sup> The Soviet ambassador was mystified by the impromptu meeting with a leader who had “scrapped détente, directly confronted the Soviet Union by all means possible, and

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<sup>243</sup> Robert C. McFarlane, *Special Trust* (New York: Cadell & Davies, 1994), 372-374.

<sup>244</sup> George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 163-164.

<sup>245</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 169.

<sup>246</sup> Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 131

emphasized the strengthening of military force.”<sup>247</sup> Reagan explained the pragmatic political considerations behind United States foreign policy. He explained to the ambassador how the strong feelings many Americans had for their ancestral nations guided public opinion. When those “nations are persecuted, we can’t make concessions to countries that mistreat them.” His allusion pertained to the Solidarity movement fighting communist oppression in Poland and their allies among Polish-Americans in politically strategic swing states.<sup>248</sup>

Reagan furthermore assessed domestic Soviet politics. “Probably, people in the Soviet Union regard me as a crazy warmonger. But I don’t want a war between us, because I know it would bring countless disasters.” The president pressed the ambassador to show good faith by releasing a small group of Siberian Pentecostals cloistered in the American Embassy in Moscow since 1978. If the two sides could reach an agreement for their emigration, then Reagan would be favorably disposed toward negotiations. Dobrynin departed the meeting thinking “Reagan was the real boss” in the battle between pragmatist and ideologues.<sup>249</sup> Reagan was excited by Dobrynin’s assessment that “this could be an historic moment.”<sup>250</sup> William Clark and his NSC staff, meanwhile, condemned the meeting. Clark thought it bad policy, while Michael Deaver believed softening Reagan’s image would be politically beneficial. Reagan had decided to improve diplomatic contacts with the Kremlin, but as he would demonstrate, that path

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<sup>247</sup> Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York: Random House 1995), 480.

<sup>248</sup> Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 558.

<sup>249</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 517-518, 521.

<sup>250</sup> Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 131

contained ideological detours. The president followed a unique course that confounded both ideologues and pragmatists.<sup>251</sup>

### **Evil at Home and Abroad**

This new national security directive gave Dolan the bureaucratic initiative needed to craft a tough speech on the Soviet Union that would be hard for pragmatists to block. Speechwriter Aram Bakshian called the “B-list” address a routine speech for a targeted audience, but worried that it would throw the State Department into “conniption fits.” He conspired with National Security Council staffer Sven Kraemer, who often had the responsibility of clearing speech drafts, to make this a “stealth speech.” He argued to the sympathetic Kraemer that the address was factually correct “and it’s not going to lead to World War III.” Kraemer agreed to help insure that the speech was not widely circulated in the State or Defense departments. Dolan’s words had been flagged a year before when he tried to slip the phrase “evil empire” into Reagan’s June 8, 1982 Westminster speech in London. Pragmatists removed the line, but Dolan persisted, and the sides continued to struggle over whether to use the phrase. Communications Director David Gergen and deputy national security adviser Robert MacFarlane found the offending phrase and cut the “evil empire” section from the NAE speech. When Reagan saw the speech, however, he saved the phrase and even toughened the anticommunist rhetoric.<sup>252</sup> Pragmatists relented, erroneously believing the speech to be unimportant.<sup>253</sup> Gergen consoled himself

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<sup>251</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 163-167.

<sup>252</sup> Robert Schlesinger, *White House Ghosts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2008), 327-328.

<sup>253</sup> Greenstein, *Leadership in the Modern Presidency*, 275-276.

with his ability to spin an attack on foreign and domestic opponents as consistent with Reagan's past pronouncements.<sup>254</sup>

The president's speech at the National Religious Broadcaster's (NRB) Annual Convention on January 31, 1983—written by Dolan—presaged the Evil Empire speech. This lower profile address enunciated reoccurring pro-life, pro-school prayer, and anti-Soviet themes. Dolan highlighted Reagan's praise for the Bible as a political building block by echoing the words of George Washington, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. According to Reagan, Washington concluded "there could be no real morality in society without religion," while Adams called the Bible "the best book in the world," and Franklin believed in the necessity of God governing "in the affairs of men." Reagan demonstrated faith in moral arguments as the best way to parry opponents.<sup>255</sup>

Dolan had various political strands to keep in his head as he sorted out the priorities for Reagan's address. He understood that the speech needed to mention the new sense of hope felt by "evangelical, conservative, pro-family, and pro-life communities" derived from "the so-called 'social issues.'"<sup>256</sup> An evangelical blessing for Reagan's foreign policy could mobilize a potent voting bloc against Freeze supporters in Congress. Another important strand included renewing rhetorical rearmament by condemning the Kremlin. Reagan had denounced Moscow for decades and continued the habit as president. Speaking to the NAE gave Reagan the unique opportunity to couch his criticism in religious terms. This one speech presented the chance to shore up his

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<sup>254</sup> David Gergen, *Eyewitness to Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 241-242.

<sup>255</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40550>. (accessed Apr. 4, 2010).

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

political base while at the same time attacking the USSR and the Nuclear Freeze from the moral high ground provided by the venue.

Dolan set about laying the base of moralistic social conservatism for the address. The speechwriter went back through the words he had written and circled the section of the president's address assailing the Supreme Court for ruling school prayer unconstitutional. It was a theme he believed Reagan should reprise. Dolan recycled the president's stated support for tuition tax credits in funding private education. Furthermore, he repackaged Reagan's musings on the abortion issue for the NAE address. Both speeches touched upon "infanticide" and the pending bill of Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL) calling for expanding and strengthening restrictions on government financed abortions. Moreover, Dolan believed a religious address would be an ideal opportunity to mention aspects of the president's Soviet policy. The president tested discussing foreign policy with church groups during his religious broadcasters address by revealing Voice of America's expanded and improved Jewish and Christian broadcasts.<sup>257</sup> The January speech acted as a template for mixing religion and foreign policy in one oration.

Some administration officials wanted to reuse as much of the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) speech as possible. Dee Jepsen and Morton Blackwell, Reagan aides in charge of coordinating with Christian Conservatives, viewed the address to the NAE as a companion piece to the NRB speech. Revisiting the messages of the NRB speech proved shrewd because the speech had been constantly replayed in Christian

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.; See also folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.



media and cited as “the best speech ever made by any President.”<sup>258</sup> Jepsen and Blackwell reminded him that Reagan’s NRB speech had decried a Federal Court of Appeals decision that deemed granting equal treatment for religious and nonreligious groups meeting in schools during “noninstructional” time unconstitutional. Such rhetoric proved popular with evangelicals, especially coupled with presidential support for a voluntary school prayer amendment to the Constitution. They stated that the amendment would turn the standard legal reasoning of “liberal opponents of the Administration” back on them by arguing for school prayer on freedom of speech on anti-discrimination grounds.

While school prayer and unlimited religious speech concerned the NRB and NAE, the aides noted that abortion would resonate as an issue more than any other. Jepsen and Blackwell suggested numerous ways to advocate the “value of human life” issue. They proposed Reagan discuss not only abortion but also connected issues such as surrogate mothering, infanticide, and genetic experimentation. They urged him to call for congressional hearings on infanticide and the pain experienced by unborn children at abortion. Raising these issues “broadens the abortion issue to one of the value of human life and will help us place our opponents on the defensive and increase public support for the President’s stand on abortion. It will help us start framing the issues and setting the debate.”<sup>259</sup> Having evangelicals on Reagan’s side would also provide greater moral

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<sup>258</sup> “Memorandum for Red Cavaney.” Feb. 18, 1983, folder 7, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library. Emphasis in original. The memo, written by Jepsen and Blackwell, does not give the source of its assertion that Reagan’s NRB address was the “best speech ever made by any President.”

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

currency in “framing the issues” in his political fight with religious Nuclear Freeze supporters.

Dolan drafted this ambitious speech outline in his own hand on at least two occasions. His proverbial cocktail napkin was the menu of Kristos Charcoal House in Alexandria, Virginia. In early brainstorm “evil” was a buzzword that he hoped to incorporate. Dolan formulated a line of thought stating that those who oppose prayer in school and support abortion instead of educating women about other options “don’t believe in evil.” The theme of “evil” reappeared farther up the steak menu as Dolan etched out Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky’s contention that the Soviet regime was evil. Dolan claimed Moscow had an “evil fever” that made it “by nature expansionist” and unable to prevent its self destruction. These sentiments hearkened back to the address often called the “Westminster speech” that Dolan wrote for Reagan’s appearance before the Houses of Parliament on June 8, 1982. The address complemented the NAE speech he was writing by denouncing communism as a failed system that would be consigned to “the ash heap of history.” Early drafts of the Evil Empire speech mentioned Lenin and Stalin as “saints” of Soviet communism and “the antithesis of all that we hold sacred.”<sup>260</sup> In addition, a discarded draft of the Westminster speech contained the term “focus of evil” that pragmatists nixed in 1982, but reappeared in the Evil Empire speech.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> “Kristos Charcoal House (steakhouse menu).” folder 7, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>261</sup> “The Battle of Evil Empire,” Frank Warner, March 5, 2000.  
[www.tysknews.com/articles/empire.htm](http://www.tysknews.com/articles/empire.htm) (Feb. 19, 2005).

A later sketch of a more cogent incarnation of the address again hearkened back to the notion of evil among the Soviet leadership and American society. The mixing of religious symbols and political messages developed further in Dolan's draft. He struggled to find the right phraseology for Soviet policy. The speechwriter considered reasserting the Voice of America's decision to launch Christian and Jewish broadcasts over its airwaves, as Reagan announced in his speech to the NRB. This news, however, was recycled material not consistent with his desire to "let Reagan be Reagan" in a dramatic manner. Jepsen and Blackwell told Dolan to repackage the earlier speech, add to it, and make a new address. He tried several early incarnations of a pithy "evil" phraseology such as: "evil is reckless selfishness," "doctrine of sin," and "phenomenology of evil." In a more structured vetting of ideas, he decided that the Freeze and the Kremlin needed to be colored in black and white terms identifiable to an evangelical audience. Formulating the phrase "evil empire" originated in phrases like "right and wrong," "good and bad," "to resist evil," "ego pride," and "temptation of pride" as expressions of the administration's divinely inspired foreign policy.<sup>262</sup>

As the date of the speech approached, the revisions entered a formal stage. Numerous agencies and bureaucrats vetted it for errors, omissions, and general editing. After that process concluded, the president took his pen to the speech and made his own changes. One of the most telling aspects of crafting the completed address was that Dolan's condemnations of the Soviet Union remained in the speech. Pragmatists tried to

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<sup>262</sup> "Notes and rough outline of the Evil Empire Speech" folder 7, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

temper that language, but had to settle for offering edits regarding how to talk about conservative social issues without appearing extreme.<sup>263</sup>

Before the address received comments from cabinet departments, Dolan had to tie together its main topics. One of the earliest drafts derided Freeze proponents for “ignoring the aggressive impulses of an evil empire” just as in the final draft. Yet, he went through many more drafts before strong criticism of the Freeze was in place. Dolan stressed collusion between the news media, liberal Hollywood elites and Freeze supporters, “I ask you to resist the attempts of those who would have you bargain away your support for our efforts to keep America strong and free for the sake of a few glowing minutes on the nightly news and a little cooing from the glitter set.”<sup>264</sup> He exemplified the fear among conservatives of the “liberal media” reporting signs of fissure within the Reagan coalition.

A subsequent draft sharpened Dolan’s attacks by tying “the glitter set” and the Nuclear Freeze movement in a populist strike against elites within the organization. He linked the Freeze with the Soviets for not understanding Moscow’s repudiation of “the morality that proceeds from supernatural ideas.” Dolan concluded that “this refusal is the central premise upon which the Nuclear Freeze movement is based.”

This draft also parlayed attacks on Moscow and the Freeze into a denunciation of the Democratic Party’s presumptive presidential candidates in 1984. He connected “three [unnamed] Democratic candidates” to the “appeasement” of the Kremlin through the Freeze. He noted, “Their first act as president would not be to rush to Mr. Andropov a

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<sup>263</sup> Greenstein, *Leadership in the Modern Presidency*, 275-276; Cannon, *President Reagan*, 273-74.

<sup>264</sup> “Draft of ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,’” folder 2, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

framework for arms control negotiations and instead rush to Mr. Andropov and ask for a settlement... These men don't understand the nature of those we are dealing with." The naïve weakness of Freeze proponents emerged as one of Reagan's rhetorical touchstones during this political battle. The phraseology about asking "for a settlement" also goes back to the standard speech Reagan was giving on the mashed potato circuit in the 1950s and 1960s. The administration noted that the movement received soft support from the public. People opposed the Freeze if they believed the Soviets would not comply, but supported the concept should the USSR abide by a bilateral Freeze. Dolan insisted on making morality the organizing principle of the speech as a means of weakening the broad, though shallow, public support for the Freeze.<sup>265</sup>

Another early draft attempted to undermine the Freeze movement by using historical illusions to bolster peace through strength. In a riff against peace activists, Dolan argued that historians "looking back at our time, will look in wonder at the naiveté, the self-doubts, and the moral blindness of the unilateral disarmers." He continued: "Surely they will note that it was not the West that intervened by proxy in Angola, in Ethiopia, and South Yemen or Central America. It was not democracies that invaded Afghanistan, or suppressed Polish Solidarity or used chemical and biological weapons in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia." Dolan concluded history would find totalitarian communists "the focus of evil in our world." While the speechwriter's historical lesson

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<sup>265</sup> "Draft of 'Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,'" p.12-13 folder 4, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library. The three unnamed candidates were likely Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA), Senator Gary Hart (D-CO), and Former Vice President Walter Mondale.

would be struck from the final draft, locating Moscow as “the focus of evil in the modern world” emerged as the other rhetorical flashpoint.<sup>266</sup>

Considerations of the media reaction to Reagan administration pronouncements existed even in the earliest full draft. Dolan preemptively fought against unfavorable coverage by conflating the news media, entertainment industry, and liberal elites as one multi-faceted bogeyman that derided values cherished by evangelicals. Dolan juxtaposed the strength of American families, churches, and neighborhoods with the “secularist and decidedly liberal... value system” of “the media.” He argued that media elites possessed a different value system than the religious Americans they derided. For example, Dolan cited a survey stating that “elites in the media and entertainment industry” do not share the values of most Americans by voting “for liberal candidates, most see nothing wrong with adultery and homosexuality, abortion is approved of by overwhelming margins and less than 10% give religion an important place in their lives.”<sup>267</sup>

He additionally argued that the opponents of parental notification prior to abortion illustrated “the desire of the liberal-secularists to impose their views on us.” Dolan used an early draft of the speech to frame the issue of school prayer as a choice between traditional Christian values and the “liberal social philosophy” of “American intellectual life in the 50s and 60s” that taught “the wonders of value-free science and moral relativism.” The scripted remarks furthermore warned of a “small elite on the left” who

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<sup>266</sup> “Draft of ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,’” p. 7-8, folder 4, Series I: Presidential Records, “dates,” Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>267</sup> “Draft of ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,’” p. 1-15, Folder 4, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

allegedly used their positions of power to deny to millions the time-honored right of religious expression in public places.<sup>268</sup>

Despite our attacks on the president's old Hollywood friends, Dolan retained the trademark Reagan optimism in the script. He forecasted "that we now stand at a turning point, a time when old liberalism – decadent and dying – is being replaced by a new political consensus, a consensus that wants government to perform its legitimate duties such as maintaining domestic peace and our national security but otherwise leaving the people alone." The "new political consensus" was an explicit concern of the address. In attempting to broaden the consensus, this draft focused on casting liberalism in a sinister light rather than promoting social conservative causes. Dolan called on social conservatives to be happy with symbolic victories: "Remember for the first time the Congress is openly debating and dealing with the prayer and abortion issues – that's enormous progress right there." Reagan's subsequent editing of the speech reinforced Dolan's view that the new political consensus based itself on reaching out to moderates while offering the Religious Right symbolic victories.<sup>269</sup>

Dolan segued from social issues to a discussion of foreign policy based on the speech's transcendent theme, "evil." He used the word no less than eight times in drafting a script that would lump liberals, Nuclear Freeze activists, and the Soviet Union under Reagan's evil phraseology. Dolan discussed a "phenomenology of evil" or a "doctrine of sin" in the Soviet Union. He implied that a "liberal-secularist" would not accept these moralistic concepts as descriptions of America's Cold War adversary. Then,

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

in classic sermon-style, Dolan confessed America's sins from slavery to racial bigotry and organized crime. After gaining rhetorical consensus with universally accepted evils, Dolan parlayed this mutual agreement into a denunciation of the Freeze and the Kremlin. He deemed the inability to see evil in the Soviet Union another "gulf between values of everyday Americans and many of the professional elite in the government and the media." Dolan gave Reagan the opportunity to defend and build upon his harsh condemnation of Moscow during his first presidential news conference. Reagan's scripted attacks on the Nuclear Freeze movement as "simple-minded appeasement" and the Soviet Union as "the focus of evil in the modern world" and "an evil empire" satisfied conservative critics.<sup>270</sup>

As drafts of the speech evolved through the early days of March 1983, the religious components of social issues monopolized the debate over how to craft the address. Dolan's drafts relentlessly criticized the media, the entertainment industry, "liberal-secularists," and the abhorrent value system of these groups. He used the support of alleged "liberal-secularists" for adultery, homosexuality, and abortion to cast them as challengers to traditional American values. For example, he suggested that this cadre of elites harbored a conspiracy to give parental control of children to the state. In addition, liberal opposition to the "squeal rule," which mandated that parents be notified before their underage daughters had abortion, became a rallying point for conservative groups. Secular humanist opposition to religious expression in public places—as discussed in a Lubbock, Texas case disallowing the use of school facilities after-hours by religious

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<sup>270</sup> "Draft of 'Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,'" p. 1-15, Folder 4, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library. The previous three pages and subsequent page of text are derived from numerous drafts of the speech.



school groups—provided more evidence in the case against “decadent and dying” liberalism.<sup>271</sup>

Through casting liberals as moral relativists, the address presented the president as a righteous thinker who understood the American responsibility to confront “a phenomenology of evil.” The speech preached that evil did not know national boundaries by illustrating past American evils such as slavery and racial injustice. The immorality of refusing to confront social ills permeated Reagan’s speech and helped build his credentials as a vocal opponent of “evil.” Dolan may have assumed that a repetitive discussion of evil provided Reagan with the bona fides to criticize the Freeze as well meaning, but naïve. Reagan’s discussion of “evil” in American history preempted hypocrisy charges by demonstrating his understanding of the destructive nature of evil. The president’s foreign policy represented moral virtue juxtaposed with the immorality shown by aggressive Soviet actions. Reagan needed the moral platform provided by the NAE to bolster his credentials at a time when religious Americans doubted his leadership in foreign affairs.<sup>272</sup>

Tactics used to gain support for the president’s foreign policy included using provocative social issues. This linkage between supporters of “liberal secularist” social policy and the Soviet foreign policy apparatus constituted an audacious political attack. “The same liberal secularists who did a marvelous job of giving us inflation, recession, unemployment, unmanageable bureaucracy, trillion dollar deficits and a host of foreign policy debacles now want us to let them preempt parental rights and run the sex lives of

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

our underage teenagers.” Dolan asserted that liberals sought to “water down traditional values and abrogate the original terms of American democracy.” As a counter philosophy to the sinister motives of Reagan’s political opponents, he affirmed that “freedom prospers when religion is vibrant and the rule of law under God is acknowledged and respected.” Dolan contended that irony existed in “liberals using their positions of power and influence... to deny to millions a traditional right of religious expression in public places.”<sup>273</sup> The strategy of using liberal support for the irreligious as a contrast to conservative support for religious positions held the possibility of electoral benefits. With Americans favoring cuts in defense spending in 1983 by a margin of fifty-seven percent to thirty-five percent, the Nuclear Freeze movement enjoyed broad support with the growing unpopularity of ever-increasing defense budgets.<sup>274</sup> Such sentiments led the administration to gamble that a faith-inspired political message amounted to a necessary risk in regaining support for peace through strength.

Dolan drew some of the concepts he used in arguing for a religion-based foreign policy address for the president from a June 1982 speech by Francis A. Schaeffer, an important Presbyterian minister who believed Evangelicals should engage in politics and foreign policy.<sup>275</sup> His signature issue was abortion. He teamed with Billy Graham and Reagan’s future surgeon general C. Everett Koop to found the Christian Action Council, which lobbied Congress to tighten abortion restrictions in the mid 1970s.<sup>276</sup> His foreign

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> *The Gallup Poll Public Opinion, 1935-1997*. CD-ROM Edition. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2000), 28.

<sup>275</sup> “Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984).” <http://www.rationalpi.com/theshelter/bio.html> (accessed March 11, 2010).

<sup>276</sup> D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39-40.

policy in a speech, “The Secular Humanistic World View Versus The Christian World View and The Biblical Perspectives On Military Preparedness,” argued that the Judeo-Christian consensus in America that existed at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been replaced by “the loss of compassion” within the humanist consensus. Schaeffer discussed a legally sanctioned case of infanticide emblematic of the humanistic “loss of compassion” that made its way into early drafts of the Evil Empire speech. This change would manifest itself “in the syndrome of abortion leading to infanticide leading to the euthanasia of the aged.”<sup>277</sup>

Dolan noted Schaeffer’s contention that the First Amendment “has been stood on its head” as humanistic society decreed that “Christian values are not allowed to be brought into contact with the governmental process.” Schaeffer stated that atheistic rather than religious governance had triumphed in the USSR. The Soviets’ lack of spiritual grounding led to a dim view of human life that took two forms according to the theologian. First, the Kremlin enforced internal oppression. Dolan agreed with Schaeffer and in his own readings noted Lenin’s contention that the French Revolution did not succeed because French revolutionaries did not kill enough people. Second, Moscow practiced a consistent foreign policy informed by external expansion and oppression.<sup>278</sup> The themes of oppression and expansion by the USSR found their expression in the phrase “evil empire.”

Dolan also analyzed the minister’s religiously oriented perception of a strong foreign policy. Dolan underlined Schaeffer’s assertion that an American atomic deterrent

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<sup>277</sup> “Draft of ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,’” p. 1-17, Folder 5, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

prevented the Soviets from dominating Europe. Schaeffer argued that if nuclear balance ceased to exist, the Kremlin would conquer Western Europe. He criticized the European peace movement for not comprehending this reality. Schaeffer furthermore believed that following the recommendations of the peace movement would lead to a disaster. The “anti-God” Soviets could not be trusted to work with the West toward bilateral disarmament.<sup>279</sup>

Schaeffer equated the Nuclear Freeze movement with those who appeased Hitler prior to the outbreak of World War II such as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Dolan noted the words of Winston Churchill in 1938, used by the reverend to demonstrate that cooperating with “evil” led to disaster. “This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year after year unless, by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigor, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in olden times,” the pastor insisted. Schaeffer viewed the pacifism inherent within Christianity as a hindrance in dealing with the Nazis during the 1930s and as a similar hindrance in negotiating with the Soviets during the 1980s. Dolan circled the minister’s belief that “Christians, full of good intentions, were thinking only of peace and were loudly proclaiming pacifism. In matters of that kind, Christians’ good intentions are often disastrous.” Schaeffer argued that deciding where America stood on the Freeze was equivalent to the choice of “Churchill versus Chamberlain.”<sup>280</sup> Dolan’s historical allusions to 1930’s-style appeasement—inspired by the minister—remained in the final version.

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

While Schaeffer's words inspired the fusing of theology with foreign policy, the oration was also subjected to nuts and bolts bureaucratic recommendations. Suggested alterations to the body of the address by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, and the Office of Management and Budget were largely ignored.<sup>281</sup>

National Security Council staffer Sven Kraemer provided the president with one of the memorable lines of the address: "I would agree to a freeze if only we could freeze the Soviets [sic] global desires." He also made sure the phrase "peace through strength" made it into the speech. Kraemer also spoke of offering a more alluring alternative to the Nuclear Freeze. He suggested alluding to Reagan's version of arms control, the Zero Option, by referring to the "proposed 50 percent cuts in strategic ballistic missiles and the elimination of an entire class of intermediate range nuclear missiles." This issue was part of Kraemer's belief that that administration should stress that it sought "to negotiate real and verifiable reductions in the worlds [sic] nuclear arsenals."<sup>282</sup> Dolan's attention to the security component of the speech rather than the health and education facets of the address reinforces the contention of many Reagan scholars that national security constituted one of the few issues that moved the president.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> For examples of ignored suggestions see: "Draft of 'Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,'" folder 6-7, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>282</sup> "Draft of 'Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,'" Folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library. Emphasis in original.

<sup>283</sup> These arguments are put forward by Cannon in *President Reagan*, 71-72 and Fitzgerald in *Way Out There in the Blue* 103-104.

### Reagan's Contribution to the Evil Empire Speech

Reagan showed a deep interest in his script for the address to the NAE. In contrast to the popular belief that he “was recklessly and unconsciously provoking the Soviets into war,” the speech was delivered with “malice aforethought.”<sup>284</sup> The president rewrote entire sections of the address, substantially edited other portions, and deleted parts he did not believe fit with that day’s message. These edits showed a chief executive honing the message called for in National Security Decision Directive 75 to “seize the semantic high-ground.” Reagan began putting his personal imprint on the address from the first sentence. He changed it from “Nancy and I are delighted to be here today” to “I am delighted to be here today.” Perhaps the president was sensitive to the idea that the worldly first lady might not be an enthusiastic attendee. Nevertheless, the president tightened the language and simplified the allusions in the speech’s introduction. Reagan even took the poetic license to reword a quotation from Alexis de Tocqueville.<sup>285</sup>

The president tempered Dolan’s confrontational rhetoric that deemed liberals and the media enemies of evangelicals. Rather, he called those opposed to a conservative social agenda “secularists,” an elastic, nonspecific term. Furthermore, Reagan discarded Dolan’s polling data that purported to show that media and entertainment industry “elites” were out of touch with most Americans on adultery, homosexuality, religion, and parental notification prior to an abortion. The president’s rewrites tempered Dolan’s anti-abortion rhetoric by chiding rather than condemning those who opposed parental notification. Reagan promoted supporters of parental notification as an “organization of

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<sup>284</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 568-569.

<sup>285</sup> “Draft of ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,’” Folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

citizens sincerely motivated and deeply concerned about the increase in illegitimate births and abortions involving girls well below the age of consent.” Reagan preached that morality “played a part in the subject of sex” in a manner ignored by his opponents. The president’s measured talk of parental notification by teenagers seeking guidance at Planned Parenthood clinics contrasted with Dolan’s denunciations of media critics for calling this practice the “squeal rule.” Reagan cut the speechwriter’s tenuous connection between “liberal secularists” supporting abortion rights and their role in “giving us inflation, recession, unemployment, unmanageable bureaucracy, a trillion dollar debt and a host of foreign policy debacles.” The president eliminated his discussion of underage girls taking advantage of welfare regulations to obtain abortions without parental consent.<sup>286</sup>

Reagan discarded a page of Dolan’s sermonizing against “so-called progressive education.” He must have realized that the harsh tone of yet another piece of shrill oratory attacking “elites” could alienate moderate listeners. The president nixed a tedious paragraph-long discussion of curriculum standards for religious schools. Reagan crossed out Dolan’s characterization of abortion as “a great moral evil” and instead added that the “unborn child” deserved a “right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>287</sup> The president demonstrated an aversion to negative condemnations of those who sanctioned abortion.<sup>288</sup> Rather, Reagan couched the issue in the language of evangelical Americanism by taking a stand to extend legal protection and the American dream of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” to the fetus.

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 211-214.

Reagan proved unwilling to call for class or ideological warfare. The president predictably removed all of Dolan's persistent denunciations of "the intelligentsia," "the glitter set," and "liberal – secularists" from the address. He did not explicitly seek a "new political consensus" in this speech as Dolan had suggested. Reagan preferred to stay on message regarding social issues and not overload an already ambitious speech; any attempt to alter the political consensus would remain implicit. He may have figured that making grandiose statements about political realignment could undermine scripted attacks on the Nuclear Freeze and the Kremlin. The President demonstrated his understanding that an audience could only digest three main points: first, he supported the NAE on social issues; second, because of the Soviet Union's evil and untrustworthy nature the Freeze was naïve and wrong; third, since Reagan sided with the NAE on social issues they should support peace through strength.

Reagan also axed a two paragraph discussion of the war on drugs. The president probably recognized that the topic was beyond the scope of his remarks. He left the public discussion of drugs to Mrs. Reagan in an upcoming episode of "a very special *Diff'rent Strokes*."<sup>289</sup>

As Reagan turned his attention to the Soviet Union, his editing focused on Dolan's combative rhetoric. Reagan nixed the speechwriter's laundry list of expansionist moves by Moscow during the late 1970's and early 1980's. Instead of discussing Cold War geo-strategy, Reagan told a personal anecdote that summed up a religious person's revulsion toward communism. The president described a time in California when he

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<sup>289</sup> "Television Week." *New York Times*, Mar. 13, 1983. Ironically, the tragic drug addictions of the child actors on *Diff'rent Strokes* later came to symbolize the dark side of stardom at a young age



heard a man speaking about the possibility of communism spreading to the United States versus a potential nuclear war and the repercussions for his daughters. Just as he expected the speaker to say the equivalent of “better Red than dead,” he surprised Reagan by asserting, “I would rather see them die now still believing in God, than have them grow up under communism and one day die no longer believing in God.” The president’s story captured the imagination of his audience in ways historical analogies and discussions of Cold War proxy wars could not. The story also created an intimate set-up for one of his most memorable lines, his denunciation of the Kremlin as “the focus of evil in the modern world.”<sup>290</sup>

Reagan aimed to create a spiritual bond between those gathered in Orlando, his national constituency, and an international audience. While the president removed many of Dolan’s uses of the term “evil” in earlier parts of the speech, he kept every characterization of Moscow as “evil.” In seeking evangelical support of his administration’s defense policies, he asked for God’s help. Reagan took his biggest political gamble in the conclusion by implying that the Nuclear Freeze and Soviet Communism represented something bigger than themselves. Moscow and the peace movement were elements of a spiritual crisis, “a test of moral will and faith.”<sup>291</sup>

The president had equivocated over the Nuclear Freeze movement since the beginning of his presidency. Reagan believed nuclear weapons were evil and hoped for their total elimination. He agreed with the sentiment of the Nuclear Freeze movement, but questioned their methods. The president had leveled subdued criticism of the Freeze

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<sup>290</sup> Cannon, *Governor Reagan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 211-214.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

before, but the Evil Empire speech marked his decision to fight the movement from the bully pulpit. Reagan's salvos included calling the Nuclear Freeze "a dangerous fraud... that is merely the illusion of peace." He repeated his mantra, "We must find peace through strength." The president argued that a freeze in nuclear production was not desirable because the Soviets could not be trusted. "I would agree to a Freeze if only we could Freeze the Soviets' global desires.... A Freeze would reward the Soviet Union for its enormous and unparalleled military buildup."<sup>292</sup> Reagan's final verbal volley contained the signature line:

So, in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware of the temptation of pride – the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an *evil empire* [italics added], to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.<sup>293</sup>

Administration pragmatists disliked Reagan's stridency. No moderates outside of the White House staff had a chance to challenge the content prior to its delivery. George Shultz's State Department did not see the speech in advance since domestic policy addresses were not subject to review by Foggy Bottom.<sup>294</sup> Dolan learned from the

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>294</sup> Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York: Random House 1995), 527; George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 266-267; The address was reviewed by the Justice Department, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Education Department, but not by the State Department. "Cabinet Affairs Staffing Memorandum," folder 5, Series I: White House Office of Speechwriting: Research Office Records, Mar. 5, 1983, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

Westminster speech that diplomats would censor his anticommunist polemics, but slipping foreign policy into a domestic policy speech circumvented their oversight.

Reagan argued that the Freeze amounted to a cynical lowest common denominator and challenged Americans to support efforts to improve upon a mere nuclear weapons freeze. “I ask you to resist the attempts of those who would have you withhold your support for our efforts, this administration’s efforts, to keep America strong and free, while we negotiate real and verifiable reductions in the world’s nuclear arsenals and one day, with God’s help, their total elimination.” Reagan’s argument also revolved around neutralizing Nuclear Freeze proponents by strengthening the tie between God and the administration’s efforts to “keep America strong and free.”<sup>295</sup> His morally inspired blow at the Soviet system reiterated his condemnations of communism within the address.

The president used polemical rhetoric toward the Soviets at many points. Reagan prayed “for the salvation of all those who live in totalitarian darkness.” He declaimed against the Soviets for preaching “the supremacy of the state.” Reagan concluded by hearkening back to the Westminster speech in saying that “that communism is another sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.” With that statement rhetorical rearmament peaked. The speech culminated nearly forty years of speaking against Soviet communism that began when Reagan testified against Hollywood communists. His anticommunist polemics developed as a corporate spokesperson for General Electric, emerged as a political phenomenon during the 1964

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<sup>295</sup> “Draft of ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals,’” p. 1-17, folder 1, Series I: White House Office of Speechwriting: Research Office Records, Mar. 5, 1983, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

Goldwater presidential campaign, and remained consistent between leaving the California governorship and winning the presidency in 1980. As Reagan strode off the convention stage toward a Florida Republican Party fundraising reception, the president's words rang in the ears of Freeze supporters and the Kremlin.<sup>296</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The president viewed social policy through a pragmatic lens and foreign policy through an ideological lens in his Evil Empire speech. Reagan tried to sound socially conservative enough to satisfy the NAE, while hoping not to alienate the political center. The president moderated Dolan's strident moralistic characterization of social issues, but Reagan sharpened the foreign policy rhetoric. To varying degrees, the Soviets, the Freeze, and liberal elites undermined God-fearing Americans by opposing the Reagan administration agenda. The administration bureaucratized rhetorical rearmament in NSDD-75, but popularized it in the Evil Empire speech. Their polemical condemnations of administration opponents found enshrinement in popular memory through "evil" phraseology. The president and his hawkish speechwriter produced an intellectual salvo with future repercussions for domestic politics and Cold War diplomacy.

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<sup>296</sup> Reagan added the phrase "and one day with God's help their total reduction" in his argument that the administration should handle arms control rather than the Freeze movement. Folder 1, Series I: White House Office of Speechwriting: Research Office Records, Mar. 5, 1983, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1981-1989, Reagan Library, p. 4-5.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

## MIXED REVIEWS ON THE EVENING NEWS

The Evil Empire speech epitomized rhetorical rearmament. It addressed the right wing desire for a harder line against the Kremlin. Conversely, Reagan faced strident criticism for this tactic in the mainstream news media. Rebukes of the speech caused tremendous concern in an administration whose top officials spent “up to a third of their time dealing with the mass media.”<sup>297</sup> The fourth estate not only offered criticism, but amplified denunciations of rhetorical rearmament from Democrats, religious leaders, Soviet leadership, and even some factions of the NAE, all of which took a political toll. Moreover, the divided NAE failed to unite behind peace through strength. During the early 1980s, the dominant form of news media were the three major broadcast news networks and to a lesser extent national newspapers and newsmagazines. This fact made their adverse reaction to Reagan’s words a major political problem.

The network evening newscasts characterized the address as a work of political propaganda that appealed to evangelical Christians. ABC judged the speech an appeal to a base constituency for active support of continued increases in military spending. NBC called the day’s religious rhetoric a means of diverting attention from the passage of the Nuclear Freeze Resolution by the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee. CBS focused on the implications of Reagan’s moralistic “evil empire” rhetoric for re-freezing the Cold War. At best television news reports called the address “skillful,” at worst they labeled it among the most undiplomatic language of the Cold War. Meanwhile, mainstream print media reports derisively called the president “the Right Reverend Reagan,” and his

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<sup>297</sup> Lawrence Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 254.

rhetoric “chauvinistic” and “primitive.”<sup>298</sup> The mainstream news media ensured that “evil empire” became a political problem for Reagan. The phrases became a phenomenon that framed discussions of Soviet policy throughout the Reagan administration.

Media reaction to the address accounted for one of several ominous signs facing the administration. Public opinion surveys in the months leading up the speech showed that a majority of Americans disapproved of the administration’s foreign policy. By January 1983, sixty-six percent of Americans disliked Reagan’s handling of arms control; while fifty-seven percent worried the president would lead the nation into a nuclear war.<sup>299</sup> Reagan needed political momentum to counteract the bad press, low poll numbers, and the Nuclear Freeze Resolution working its way through the House Foreign Affairs Committee. A February 1983 Gallup poll found thirty-seven percent of Americans approved of Reagan’s handling of the presidency, while fifty-four percent disapproved.<sup>300</sup> That same survey found Americans thought defense spending was too high by a margin of forty-five percent to fourteen percent who thought it was too low, while thirty-three percent who thought it was “just right.”<sup>301</sup> An early March 1983 Gallup Poll showed Reagan trailing Former Vice President Walter Mondale forty-seven percent to forty-one percent in a theoretical election matchup.<sup>302</sup> Reagan’s political

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<sup>298</sup> Hugh Sidey. “The Right Rev. Ronald Reagan.” *Time*, Mar. 21, 1983; “Abroad At Home; Onward, Christian Soldiers.” *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 1983.

<sup>299</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 191.

<sup>300</sup> *The Gallup Poll Public Opinion, 1935-1997*. CD-ROM Edition (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000), 8.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

momentum had stalled. The White House looked vulnerable to the popular anti-nuclear movement.

By assigning the NAE address to hard-line speechwriter Anthony Dolan, moderates such as Michael Deaver understood that during this period of political misfortune Reagan needed to shore up support among conservatives.<sup>303</sup> To attain further defense spending increases during difficult economic times, Reagan needed his political base squarely beneath him. With some conservatives believing he had compromised his principles after the June 1982 Westminster Speech, the president could not appear soft on social issues or conciliatory toward the Soviets. For example, the 1982 tax increase signaled a moderate streak that many conservatives found disconcerting.<sup>304</sup> Some conservatives feared Reagan had gone “squishy” because of the lull in his anti-Soviet polemics from June 1982 to March 1983. They wanted him to present the same hard line as he had during his first year in office.<sup>305</sup> Reagan’s remarks before the NAE signaled sensitivity to his conservative political base on domestic and foreign policy matters.

Despite the negative public and media perception of Reagan after the address, his oratory galvanized supporters.<sup>306</sup> As opinion-makers in New York and Washington denounced his “evil empire” polemics, the conservative news media defended Reagan’s remarks. The battle over interpreting Reagan’s address raged throughout March and

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<sup>303</sup> W. Elliot Brownlee, “Revisiting the ‘Reagan Revolution.’” *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies* W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham, eds. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 3-8.

<sup>304</sup> Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 155-156.

<sup>305</sup> Examples of Reagan sounding diplomatic if not squishy toward the Soviets between June 1982 and March 1983 appear in the following articles: “The New Pitch,” *New York Times*, Jun. 13, 1982; “U.S. Sending Bush To Europe To Meet The Allies On Arms,” *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1983; “President Urges Soviet to Agree To Missile Curb,” *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1983.

<sup>306</sup> Fitzgerald, *Way Out There In The Blue*, 191.

April 1983. Though his political stature did not rise, the Evil Empire speech reintroduced Reagan's conservative credentials on the Right. The president needed to secure this constituency before the inevitable move to the middle for the 1984 presidential election. There would be a time for moderation, after communists and conservatives understood Reagan had not gone "squishy" on the Soviets.

### **The Focus on "Evil Empire" in Network News and Beyond**

Network newscasts viewed the president's message with a collective arched eyebrow, intimating chauvinism and aggression in its use of religious symbolism. On *ABC World News Tonight*, Anchor Frank Reynolds called Reagan's speech "the coldest of Cold War rhetoric." Reporter Sam Donaldson commented that the president "in a skillful blend of religion and politics denounced communism and the Soviet Union." Donaldson's report highlighted the administration's peace through strength strategy by showing Reagan saying, "Simple minded appeasement or wishful thinking about our adversaries is folly." The pictures also featured a band playing "Onward, Christian Soldiers" as the president walked onto the stage smiling and waving.<sup>307</sup>

The story picked up on rhetorical rearmament by tying the speech with the government's release of *Soviet Military Power 1983*, a Defense Department propaganda book claiming the United States had fallen behind militarily. In the book, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger called for increases in the size of "our defense forces and our deterrent capabilities...Ours is a formidable task, made more difficult by a decade of

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<sup>307</sup> *World News Tonight with Frank Reynolds* March 8, 1983. 5:32:20 pm, Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN.



our neglect coupled with two decades of massive Soviet increases.”<sup>308</sup> The Defense Department made no allowances for the Freeze movement by arguing that Congress should approve defense-spending increases at the rate prescribed by the Reagan administration. Donaldson summarized the book’s message as: “Just vote all the money the president wants for defense.” The most telling aspect of Donaldson’s piece was its broadcast placement. Reagan’s speech did not lead the newscast; instead, ABC featured the passage of the Nuclear Freeze Resolution by the House Foreign Affairs Committee.<sup>309</sup> The story’s position demonstrated Reagan’s most pressing foreign policy problem, neutralizing the popular rhetoric appeal of the Freeze in order to negotiate from a position of strength.

The next evening, ABC News demonstrated the clear linkage between rhetorical and military rearmament. *Soviet Military Power 1983* was the lead piece on *ABC World News Tonight with Frank Reynolds*. Reporter John McWethy’s story contained sketches and photos of cutting-edge Soviet military equipment from the newly released book. The piece featured Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger’s promotion of the book in a live satellite broadcast to European allies. Echoing Reagan’s words from the previous day, Weinberger said the Soviets sought world domination through “satellite killer” and anti-ballistic missiles for which the U.S had no defense. ABC featured an opposing view

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<sup>308</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *Soviet Military Power 1983* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983).

<sup>309</sup> *ABC World News Tonight with Frank Reynolds* March 8, 1983. 5:32:20 pm, Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN.

from Captain James Bush, U.S. Navy Retired.<sup>310</sup> Such statements epitomized the skeptical treatment rhetorical rearmament faced in the mainstream news media.

The media offensives of Weinberger and Reagan overlapped on purpose. The president's rhetorical rearmament coincided with further calls for military rearmament. Both manners of rearmament exemplified the calls of NSDD-75, the January 1983 White House plan to promote higher defense spending through a public relations campaign.<sup>311</sup> Reagan used his sales skills to promote his belief in a larger military, while the mainstream media questioned his plan every step of the way.

NBC News also led with the passage of the Nuclear Freeze Resolution rather than the Evil Empire speech. When NBC did discuss the address, reporter Chris Wallace introduced it by saying, "'Onward, Christian Soldiers' was today's theme as the president launched a new offensive against the Freeze movement." NBC featured Reagan's religious rhetoric by giving center stage to his denunciation of the Soviets as "the focus of evil in the modern world." With a crowd of cheering evangelicals as the backdrop, Reagan trumpeted America's moral superiority with evangelical fervor.<sup>312</sup>

The report turned farcical, however, in framing the president's trip to Orlando. Prior to his speech, Reagan watched a show featuring Mark Twain and Ben Franklin robots deliberating on American history. He also spoke in front of Spaceship Earth at Epcot Center about the value of video games, remarking that "children are being well trained by technology, even by video games." The president furthermore noted that

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<sup>310</sup> *ABC World New Tonight with Frank Reynolds* March 9, 1983 5:30 pm Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN.

<sup>311</sup> Robert McFarlane, *Special Trust* (New York: Cadell and Davies, 1994), 374.

<sup>312</sup> *NBC Nightly News with Roger Mudd and Tom Brokaw*, March 8, 1983 5:32 pm, Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN.

many in the Air Force believed video games acted as good training for future pilots. By describing Reagan's trip in a cartoonish manner, NBC cast the president's polemical attack on the Soviets as a flight of whimsy equaled in absurdity by arguing robots or educational video games.<sup>313</sup>

Only *The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather* took the Evil Empire speech seriously enough to lead with it. Rather called the address "the chilliest language of the Cold War." Playing up Reagan's aggressiveness, CBS featured the president's denunciation of "appeasement" and the Soviet Union as "the focus of evil in the modern world." Of the three major networks, only CBS played the historic "evil empire" sound bite. In contrast to the promise of arms reduction by the Freeze, reporter Bill Plante's story highlighted Reagan's pronouncement that "a freeze now would be a dangerous fraud," and his willingness to agree to a freeze "if only we could freeze the Soviet's global desires." Similar to the ABC report, Plante's story noted that Reagan had urged the evangelicals to preach against the Freeze. Plante tied the release of *Soviet Military Power 1983* to the speech, implying that Reagan's bellicose rhetoric was calculated to gain his defense budget's passage against a challenge by Freeze activists and the Democratic Party. Circumstantial evidence supports Plante's assertion.<sup>314</sup> This report also contributed to the scorn Reagan supporters heaped upon *The CBS Evening News* for being tough on the president and their perception of Dan Rather as a liberal.

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> *The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather* March 8, 1983 5:30 pm, Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN. The author found no hard evidence that the release of *Soviet Military Power* was purposely scheduled for release in early March 1983, but circumstantial evidence favors such an assertion. The National Security Council's NSDD-75 from January 1983 called for a more aggressive propaganda fight with the Soviets than had previously existed. The administration knew in advance that the House of Representatives would vote on a nuclear freeze resolution during the March 7-9 period. Reagan's address to the NAE for this same time had also been scheduled in December 1982.

Like the national broadcast media, mainstream journalists panned Reagan's address. Adam Clymer of *The New York Times* described Reagan's speech as forging common ground on social issues between evangelicals divided by opposing positions on the Nuclear Freeze. He implied that a consensus on social issues could be parlayed into support for the president's hawkish anti-Nuclear Freeze position. With the politically vital Religious Right disgruntled by Reagan's lackluster support for its conservative social agenda, the president began by calling for a school prayer amendment and parental notification prior to the distribution of contraceptives. While these proposals had little chance of passage in Congress, Reagan understood their importance to his audience. He also saw that sixty-four percent of churchgoers backed a Nuclear Freeze resolution, almost even with the seventy percent of non-churchgoers who supported it.<sup>315</sup> These daunting poll numbers revealed supporters of the president's domestic agenda disapproved of his foreign policy. The issues valued by social conservatives comprised a majority of the address out of political necessity. Reagan attempted to use their agreement on social issues to reorient the foreign policy worldview of evangelicals prior to his 1984 reelection campaign.

Clymer's colleague, *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis, skewered rhetorical rearmament in the president's speech for its "chauvinistic" use of religion. Lewis interpreted Reagan's thinking as, "belief in God should make Americans join him in opposing a nuclear freeze and pressing a vast buildup in U.S. weapons." Lewis argued that the president used "sectarian religiosity to sell a political program" the columnist called "primitive." Lewis continued, "He was purporting to apply religious concepts to

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<sup>315</sup> "Reagan in the Pulpit," *New York Times*, Mar. 9, 1983.

the contentious technical particulars of arms programs.”<sup>316</sup> Lewis framed the speech as a cynical use of religion for political purposes.

Eminent historian Henry Steele Commager called the Evil Empire speech “the worst [speech] by any US president.”<sup>317</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. denounced rhetorical rearmament in the *Wall Street Journal*. He recoiled at the perceived apocalyptic tone of the speech. He believed that Reagan did not allow for the possibility of co-existence or compromise. Schlesinger contended that the president’s speech summoned “the true believer to a *jihad*, a crusade of extermination against the infidel.” He argued that using religious terms the president had alienated secular Americans from the possibility of a new Cold War consensus against communism. Schlesinger asserted Reagan’s notion that he represented the will of God demonstrated “an estrangement from God” that theologian Reinhold Niebuhr called “the universality of the corruption which results from undue self-regard.” He also quoted Niebuhr’s warning regarding “the depth of evil to which individuals and communities may sink, especially when they try to play the role of God to history.” Schlesinger concluded that Reagan’s words possessed vanity and blindness to the will of God that could erode at the strength of the nation.<sup>318</sup>

George Kennan, a primary architect of containment, used the words of Christian ethicist John M. Swamly, Jr. in his criticism of the moralistic and Manichean rhetoric of the Evil Empire speech. He contended that the only way to characterize the Soviets as the focus of evil and the Americans as the focus of good in the world would be only to

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<sup>316</sup> “Abroad At Home; Onward, Christian Soldiers,” *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 1983.

<sup>317</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 1, Folder 1, “Inquiry.” *USA Today*, Nov. 9, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>318</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983 “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, “Pretension in the Presidential Pulpit,” *Wall Street Journal* Mar. 17, 1983. Reagan Library.

recognize Soviet wrongdoing and hold the United States blameless. Just as the Soviets had intervened in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, Americans sought control over the governments of Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Vietnam. Kennan correctly asserted that the address did not discuss Cold War wrongdoing. He further critiqued the utility of using moral arguments on nation states by questioning whether American use of the atomic bomb versus Soviet abstention did not give the Soviets moral authority. He concluded “We cannot, however, speak of huge conglomerates of power as moral or immoral in the same way one speaks of individuals.”<sup>319</sup>

At best, rhetorical rearmament received mixed reviews in the major newsmagazines, thus endangering Reagan’s attempts to sell his policies. Hugh Sidey of *Time* said, “His fiery sermon mixed statecraft and religion. He made politicians from Moscow to Washington sore... and marched holier than thou into the forbidden swamps of abortion and teen-age sex.... The President applied brimstone, aiming sulfurous blasts at the Soviet Union.”<sup>320</sup> *Newsweek* sought the president’s motivations for such rhetoric. It deduced that congressional attacks on Reagan’s defense budget prompted the release of *Soviet Military Power 1983*. The magazine claimed increased tensions in Central America and pressure on the administration to compromise with the Soviets on the number of nuclear missiles in Europe spurred the president’s words. *Newsweek* reiterated the conclusions of the nightly news reporters by calling the speech part of a new defense budget public relations campaign. The article also maintained that Reagan’s speech had failed to achieve its primary goal. The NAE remained divided over whether or not to

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<sup>319</sup> “The Myth of Soviet Intentions” John M. Swomley, Jr. in *What about the Russians?* Dale W. Brown, Ed. (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1984), 65-72.

<sup>320</sup> Hugh Sidey, “The Right Rev. Ronald Reagan,” *Time* Mar. 21, 1983.

support a Freeze resolution.<sup>321</sup> The president's inability to convert opinion leaders to the anti-Nuclear Freeze position hindered his ability to justify a hard line to the broader public.

The liberal, hawkish intelligentsia of *The New Republic* also disapproved of the address. "The speech left friends and foes around the world with the impression that the President of the United States was contemplating holy war.... The President was not affable in the pulpit; he was apocalyptic," the magazine maintained. The editors called Reagan's discussion of social issues "an orgy of cheap shots." In focusing on his domestic policy pronouncements and opinions it called the president's rhetoric "deeply divisive" and stated that "the moral and sociological reality of this country refutes his tidy and tendentious distinctions."<sup>322</sup>

The *Orlando Sentinel* interviewed NAE president Arthur Gay, who admitted to the organization's deep divisions over the Nuclear Freeze issue. Yet Gay praised Reagan as "honest and sincere," saying: "He means what he says. I don't think he's just being the politician." The article also quoted Robert Dugan regarding Reagan's position on social issues. "I think he's extremely committed to these things," Dugan declared. "I'm not so certain that all of his top advisers in Washington are equally committed – in fact I know some of them wish some of these issues, like school prayer and abortion, would just go away."<sup>323</sup> This assertion jabbed at Deaver and the pragmatists within Reagan's inner circle. Dugan was now making public his private lobbying for Reagan to take more

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<sup>321</sup> Michael Reese, "Return of the Cold Warrior?" *Newsweek* Mar. 21, 1983.

<sup>322</sup> "Reverend Reagan," *The New Republic* Apr. 4, 1983.

<sup>323</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, "Orlando Speech" Reaction File, Series 6, Folder 1, "President: stand up to evil empire." *Orlando Sentinel*, Mar. 9, 1983; "Applause and 'amens' abound with president at the pulpit." *Orlando Sentinel*, Mar. 9, 1983, Reagan Library.

prominent socially conservative stands on issues. Dugan seemed emboldened by the political necessity of Reagan's move to solidify his base.

### **“Evil Empire” Supporters Strike Back**

The wordsmith responsible for exacerbating political and diplomatic tensions received the credit and the blame for rhetorical rearmament from the *Washington Post*. The paper ran a feature on Anthony Dolan's authorship of the Evil Empire speech. Colleagues anonymously credited him as “the wild-eyed, mean dog you use when you don't want them wondering what you said.” Meanwhile, Dolan's influence unnerved moderates. White House Director of Communications David Gergen suppressed his discontent with the address, telling the *Washington Post* the president was merely talking to his political base. “He knew when he gave that speech to the evangelicals it would draw fire from the left and some sophisticated observers. The president feels it's very important from time to time for him to talk in terms of fundamentals and base, core beliefs.”<sup>324</sup> Gergen privately admitted feeling blind-sided by the address.<sup>325</sup> Dolan and the hawks had crafted this fiery sermon without his consent and Gergen believed it was a mistake. Yet, the White House Communications Director publicly supported the ideological bent of the address.

In contrast to Gergen's lukewarm backing, the *Washington Times* demonstrated strident support for rhetorical rearmament by attacking the mainstream news media for allegedly holding a negative opinion of administration defense policy. A pattern emerged in the conservative press of using mockery and humor to denounce political opponents

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<sup>324</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 1, Folder 5, *Washington Post* Mar. 29, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>325</sup> “Remembering Ronald Reagan.” [www.nae.net](http://www.nae.net) (accessed 7 Feb. 2005).



and to undermine the so-called liberal media by highlighting their alleged hypocrisy. Conservative columnists and news outlets tended to parse the words of liberal counterparts, and attacked any perceived inconsistencies or biases. Conservative media conceded the popularity of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and CBS News by treating them as the news media of record. Their minority status and obvious political agenda freed them from any pretense of objectivity. It also led to blistering attacks on “liberal” news organizations and a resolute defense of Reagan aimed at stemming the tide of negative public opinion.

In this time of low poll numbers for the president, conservative pundit William F. Buckley, Jr. led the counteroffensive of Reagan defenders in the *National Review*. He addressed the president’s main critics and then compared the embattled Reagan of the Cold War to the embattled Lincoln of the Civil War. Buckley challenged Hugh Sidey’s assertion that Reagan rendered America blameless in all matters. Buckley also illustrated his disagreement with Anthony Lewis’s claim that Reagan believed God favored the United States over all nations through an ice cream analogy. “The notion, propagated by Anthony Lewis, that Reagan was in effect telling us that God prefers chocolate ice cream over tutti-frutti is, well, nutti,” he declared. Buckley equated living under communism to living in slavery. He declared that both presidents fought against slavery: “Reagan said that the survival of the Union for which Lincoln fought depends significantly on our being strong.”<sup>326</sup> Defending the words of his protégé Dolan through attacks on liberal commentators demonstrated a move to counteract the negative mainstream news media consensus taking hold around the speech.

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<sup>326</sup> William F. Buckley, “Reagan at Orlando,” *National Review* Apr. 15, 1983.

In an emblematic defense of the Evil Empire speech, the *Washington Times* used irreverence to defend Reagan stating, “The president – good heavens – publicly proclaimed his religious faith.” The piece mocked the perceived elitism of *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis by claiming that, “The *Times* columnist is partial to the word ‘simplistic’ – have one on us, Mr. Lewis.... It is a curiosity worth mentioning in this context, too, that Anthony Lewis was not alarmed or offended by the loud leap into the nuclear debate by the Roman Catholic archbishops.”<sup>327</sup> This sort of dismissive rhetoric was the primary tool for the *Washington Times* in dealing with liberal criticism of rhetorical rearmament.

Glorifying the politically wounded president appeared to be the primary mission of the newspaper. Perhaps the most strident defense of the president and denunciation of his political opponents came from the Anthony Dolan of his day, former Nixon speechwriter Patrick J. Buchanan.<sup>328</sup> Writing in the *Washington Times* he opined that Reagan “almost alone of modern presidents” had the presence to give “one of those ringing addresses.” Buchanan reiterated one of the newspaper’s editorial themes: the audience loved the speech, while “the press loathed it” by “contemptuously referring to Reagan’s ‘Cold War rhetoric.’” He argued that Reagan faced the same dilemma as every Cold War president in talking about Moscow. A president must speak in terms of political equality between the superpowers, yet “never allow the American people to forget that the struggle between East and West – because it is at bottom a moral and

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<sup>327</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 6, Folder 1, “Reagan’s Transgression.” *Washington Times* Mar. 14, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>328</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983 “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 1, Folder 5, “Writers breathe fire into Reagan’s speeches.” *Dayton Journal-Herald*, Mar. 29, 1983, Reagan Library.

philosophical and religious struggle.” The address had a specific purpose, to bolster the moral arguments for fighting the Cold War because “the American people will not long sustain with economic sacrifice and surely not with the blood of their sons, a struggle they do not recognize as between good and evil.” Reagan could not have laid out his policy any better himself. In praising Buchanan’s “good words,” he called the column “superb!”<sup>329</sup> Buchanan painted a visionary picture of the president by reiterating why America continued fighting the Cold War.

Other conservative columnists, such as Jeffrey Hart, an English professor at Dartmouth College, not only promoted the idea of news media bias, but forcefully defended Reagan’s rhetoric. He presented examples of “aggressive impulses” that made the USSR “an evil empire” such as “the crushing of religious freedom wherever Soviet power has prevailed.” The columnist summarized his laudatory view of Reagan’s remarks, “What Reagan did in Orlando was tell the simple unpleasant truth about the Soviet system, refusing to entertain any pleasing illusions about just who it is we are negotiating with.”<sup>330</sup>

In a companion column, Smith Hempstone, columnist and editor for the *Washington Times*, criticized Anthony Lewis, the *Washington Post*, and other news outlets unwilling to cheerlead for the president. He complimented Reagan for daring “to speak the truth.” Hempstone called the Cold War “as much a struggle between

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<sup>329</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983 “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 6, Folder 1, *Washington Times*, “Secular City,” Patrick Buchanan, Mar. 18, 1983. For Reagan’s response to Buchanan, see Reagan to Buchanan, Mar. 17, 1983, folder 3, Box SP 722 - SP 730, WHORM: Subject File Ronald Reagan Personal Correspondence, Reagan Library.

<sup>330</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983 “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 1, Folder 1, *Washington Times*, “Telling the simple truth about the Soviets,” Jeffrey Hart, Mar. 23, 1983. Reagan Library.

totalitarianism and democracy as between atheism and religion.” Many conservative thinkers used the dichotomy between Soviet atheism and American religiosity to fit their arguments. By stating that throughout its history U.S. leaders had invoked God in a political context, these commentators implied that God sided with America in disputes with the atheistic Soviet Union. Since Washington acted virtuously and Moscow promoted evil, “compromise or accommodation with the Soviet Union is impossible...because there are fundamental differences between the two that can be blurred but not eliminated.”<sup>331</sup> Such commentaries infused the Cold War with a sense of moral purpose. They argued that America monopolized moral authority in ideological skirmishes with the Soviets. Retracing the rhetorical and military battle lines of the Cold War energized conservatives and worried the general public. Subsequent editorials echoed the same themes that appeared in these opinion pieces during the immediate aftermath of the Evil Empire speech. The address reaffirmed the conservative media’s role as foot-soldiers for the president’s foreign policy. Reagan had allayed the fears of those vocal conservative allies who were concerned that the president had become too accommodating toward the Kremlin.<sup>332</sup> Reagan’s remarks helped him regain the enthusiastic support from conservatives. Certainly, the continued popularity of the Freeze coupled with the negative reaction to his polemics remained serious concerns.

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<sup>331</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983 “Orlando Speech” Reaction File , Series 1, Folder 1, “Reagan, the press and that old time religion,” Smith Hempstone, Mar. 23, 1983. Reagan Library.

<sup>332</sup> Dolan and Reagan received many supportive letters that are cited subsequently. Dolan’s letters can be found in Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, Personal Correspondence Series 4, Folders 1-5, while letters supportive of Reagan are located in WHORM: Subject File Ronald Reagan Personal Correspondence, Reagan Library.

Most important, however, was that his anti-communist oratory had mollified conservative critics and shored up his political base.

### **The World Tonight: Europe Recoils at “Evil Empire.”**

Rather than considering the hopeful possibility that Reagan might be setting up serious arms-control talks by scaring the Soviets to the negotiating table, European allies believed cynicism inspired his remarks. Observers in the Western European news media argued that the victory of conservative Helmut Kohl and his Christian Democrats in the recent West German elections created the impetus for the president’s rhetorical rearmament. Kohl’s election proved that West Germany possessed a silent majority of citizens favoring the chancellor’s support for the NATO deployment of intermediate range nuclear missiles or Euromissiles on the continent.<sup>333</sup> Many in the Western European news media believed the speech acted as justification for this provocative action toward the Warsaw Pact. This tangible result demonstrated the connection between the Evil Empire speech and Defense Secretary Weinberger’s implicit promotion of the missile deployments during his live satellite hookup to NATO allies announcing *Soviet Military Power 1983*.

Aside from rearmament, the harsh rhetoric of the address troubled many of Washington’s European friends. As Britain’s *Guardian* noted, Reagan had “veered sharply from his recent, more temperate comments,” while Spain’s *El Pais* ran the alarmist headline: “Reagan Unsheathes Sword of War.” Although many French newspapers condemned Reagan’s “violent diatribe,” the socialist *Le Matin* speculated

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<sup>333</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present*, Vol. 3 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 148.

that the president had to raise his tone “before negotiating seriously.”<sup>334</sup> Perhaps the French socialist reaction best encapsulates the European hope—the minority among press accounts—that pragmatism might trump ideology in Reagan’s actions.

On the other side of the iron curtain, Poland’s *Rzeczpospolita* presented a surprisingly cogent analysis. It asserted that the media blitz by the administration could be understood “in the context of the campaign being conducted [by the Reagan Administration] to oppose the mounting wave of social protest against nuclear arms and the ever more numerous demands for a US – USSR nuclear Freeze.”<sup>335</sup> Polish commentator Jan Gadomski contended that Reagan’s “crusade against this evil” meant that all “arms freezes” were “equivalent to abetting evil.”<sup>336</sup> Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Moscow reacted in a predictably petulant manner, attacking the administration for thinking only in terms of “confrontation and bellicose, lunatic anti-Communism.”<sup>337</sup> TASS, the Soviet news agency, reported that Andropov responded to Reagan by accusing the president of “‘imprudent distortions’ of Soviet policy” and lying about Soviet military intentions.<sup>338</sup> The polemics had been sharpened. Reagan had Moscow’s undivided attention and apprehension that his words signaled confrontation rather than a roundabout route to diplomacy.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 6, Folder 1.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> “Polish Comment on President Reagan’s ‘Modern Crusade.’” Warsaw home service 1800 GMT, Mar. 9, 1983, Excerpts from commentary by Jan Gadomski: *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Mar. 14, 1983.

<sup>337</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 6, Folder 1, “Soviet Rebutts ‘Focus of Evil’ Speech.” *New York Times* Mar. 18, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>338</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 1, Folder 1, “United States Information Agency: Selected Quotations From Soviet Media On The Reagan Administration and U.S. Foreign Policy,” Feb. 22, 1984, Reagan Library.

<sup>339</sup> Fitzgerald, *Way Out There In The Blue*, 229.

One year after the address, the administration worried enough about the repercussions of the Evil Empire speech to commission Charles Z. Wick, the director of the United States Information Agency (USIA), to research continued Soviet reaction. His report did not uncover new insights, but did reaffirm that Reagan's remarks deeply troubled the Kremlin. Yet, Zwick concluded his report by reassuring and commending the president for understanding the occasional necessity "to call a spade a spade."<sup>340</sup> Perhaps this report was executed as a part of Reagan's shrewd plan to make 1984 "a year of opportunities for peace."<sup>341</sup> Regardless of whether the report contributed to the turn toward a pragmatic foreign policy, the study showed that the speech opened a festering wound in super power diplomacy.

### **Conclusion: A Legacy of Mixed Reviews**

The reaction of mainstream news media to the Evil Empire speech cemented impressions of Reagan as a religious chauvinist and ardent Cold Warrior that would persist for the duration of his presidency. The distress caused by the president's muscular polemics only reinforced the most unfavorable caricatures of the president as a reckless and belligerent cowboy. Arguments for the Freeze remained strong in the aftermath of the address. While playing to his base won cheers from the conservative news media, the administration failed to shift public opinion toward the peace through strength camp. In Europe, Reagan's words only perpetuated the strong opposition to his foreign policy. While a pragmatic reassertion of American power after the perceived weakness of the

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<sup>340</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, "Orlando Speech" Reaction File, Series 1, Folder 1, "United States Information Agency: Research Regarding U.S. – Soviet Relations Following The Speech In Orlando, FL," Mar. 22, 1984, Reagan Library.

<sup>341</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 449.

Carter years seemed reasonable, the stridency of Reagan's words created more problems for the president. The phrase "evil empire" became the lens through which Soviet policy was viewed for the rest of Reagan's presidency.



CHAPTER SIX:  
CHRISTIAN AND CONSERVATIVE REACTION TO  
THE EVIL EMPIRE SPEECH

Reaction to the Evil Empire speech among religious organizations varied widely. Mainline and liberal religious groups recoiled at Reagan's Manichean Cold War worldview, while conservative Christians enthused over the president's long-overdue stand for his beliefs. Their excitement was surpassed only by conservative Cold Warriors who had their faith in Reagan's conservatism renewed by rhetorical rearmament. Criticism emanated outside avowedly conservative faith communities for the president's fire and brimstone address. Aside from Robert Dugan's cheerleading on the pages of *NAE Washington Insight*, the mainline Christian press panned the speech. Meanwhile, with many in their fold holding contradictory opinions on the arms race, NAE leadership inaugurated the Peace, Freedom and Security Studies program in the wake of the address. This series of informative meetings sought to institutionalize organizational support for peace through strength. The president's appeal to conservative Christians on social issues and their shared evangelical Americanism outlasted the heated arms control controversy of the moment. The diverse reaction demonstrated, however, that all Christians were not singing from the same song-book regarding Reagan's moralistic foreign policy.

**Reagan Seeks Evangelical Support and the Freeze Pushes Back**

Evangelicals had counted themselves as ardent anticommunists since World War II. The Reverend Billy Graham preached against "godless communists" in the late 1940s

and early to mid 1950s. Graham, who shied away from partisan pronouncements, moved from condemning communism to engaging citizens of communist nations as his ministry progressed. While he mobilized evangelicals in the 1950s through warning them of an insidious and evil communist threat, by the Vietnam era Graham had tempered his anti-communist pronouncements. During détente, Graham was careful not to alienate communist governments as he changed his focus from condemning communism to preaching to the people behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>342</sup>

As Graham became more devoted to preaching and less interested in politics during the late 1970s, a new generation of conservative Christians found their political voice. Their opposition in the late 1970s to the Panama Canal Treaty, which would give the Canal Zone back to Panama in the year 2000, demonstrated the growing foreign policy engagement of these newly politicized religious voters.<sup>343</sup> In a similar vein, the Reverend Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority in 1979 with a distinct conservative political agenda. The politicization of evangelicals was facilitated by secular conservatives realizing that conservative Christians represented an untapped font of political power.<sup>344</sup> The Moral Majority, the Christian Voice, and Religious Roundtable aligned in 1979 to form the New Christian Right. These groups published “Morality Report Cards” on legislatures, supported the nascent Christian Broadcasting Network, and organized caucuses of politicized Christians. Candidate Reagan addressed one such

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<sup>342</sup> William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 101-167, 475-487.

<sup>343</sup> Adam Clymer, *Drawing the Line at the Big Ditch* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2008), 53-56.

<sup>344</sup> David Snowball, *Continuity and Change in the Rhetoric of the Moral Majority* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 51-52.

purportedly nonpartisan conference, the National Affairs Briefing in August 1980, telling the audience, “I know you cannot endorse me, but I endorse you!”<sup>345</sup> These political evangelicals contributed to Reagan’s 1980 landslide victory. Thus, the president reasonably assumed that he could rely on evangelicals in his time of political need.

As the president spoke before the NAE, Reagan needed his evangelical allies more than ever to support peace through strength. The theme of the 41<sup>st</sup> annual NAE convention, “Change Your World,” was based on the words of Jesus Christ and the Old Testament prophet Amos. It also reflected the Reagan administration’s new tone.<sup>346</sup> No longer content with merely “changing their world” through domestic social reform, Reagan offered a foreign policy catering to the evangelical worldview. The Evil Empire speech presented a coherent international relations position that complemented their domestic policy orientation. Reagan breathed life into the NAE’s theme in his landmark address. Though the speech contributed to already strained Cold War relations, Reagan promoted evangelical politicization in a manner supportive of his foreign policy. Peace through Strength vied with the Nuclear Freeze movement for evangelical allegiance.

The Nuclear Freeze so divided the NAE that it could not pass a resolution on the issue despite Reagan’s personal lobbying. Some evangelical theologians argued that the president’s remarks distorted the word of God to serve the president’s political purposes. Evangelicals for Social Action, a liberal faction within the NAE, took umbrage at the president’s condemnations of the Soviet Union and the Nuclear Freeze. This dissent

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>346</sup> “Change Your World: Orlando ‘83” (NAE Brochure), folder 1, Series I: White House Office of Speechwriting, Reagan Library.

supported Dugan's estimate that opponents of peace through strength represented one-quarter of NAE members.<sup>347</sup>

Numerous ministers publicly criticized the divisive tone of the address and the theological justification for Reagan's foreign policy. Leaders of the American Lutheran Church and the Southern Baptist Convention decried Reagan's use of religious language to characterize political tensions between Moscow and Washington. "The American people need to realize that we and the Russians, if not one in love, are at least one in sin," declared the Lutherans. The president faced another conspicuous moral challenge as America's most revered minister, Billy Graham, continued his vocal support for the Nuclear Freeze movement.<sup>348</sup>

Perceptions of the president's attempted politicization of believers differed widely across the political and religious spectrums. On the Left, Reagan received criticism for shaping the address to fit his audience while not comprehending that his words touched a larger world. Many liberals claimed that had Reagan understood the power of his words, he would have moderated his tone.<sup>349</sup> The Left, however, underestimated the intellect and political skills of the president. The administration miscalculated on the message it presented moderate social conservatives within and without the evangelical movement. Instead, the president's appeal based on social issues was overshadowed by his anti-Soviet polemics.

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<sup>347</sup> "Divided Evangelicals Avoid a Policy Stand on Nuclear Freeze," *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 1983.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> David D. Newsom, "No Mixing Moral Absolutes and Diplomacy," *Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 23, 1983.

The administration received an immediate boost on the Evangelical Right as Robert Dugan praised Reagan for holding to his convictions and speaking his mind. Dugan stated in a personal letter to Dolan “that there will be increased evangelical support for his administration’s policies, flowing from the grassroots, as a result of his address.”<sup>350</sup> In the April 1983 edition of *NAE Washington Insight* Dugan opined, “We applaud the President for his political courage. There is no constitutional requirement that he hide his light under a bushel.” He criticized Anthony Lewis of *The New York Times* and others in the news media for criticizing Reagan’s rhetoric. Dugan called Reagan’s discussion of evil versus righteousness a tenet of Judeo-Christian heritage and the “bedrock of political freedom.” He also commended Reagan for translating his religious faith into political positions and called this mixing of religion and politics “something we’ve been trying to get evangelicals to do.”<sup>351</sup> The NAE executive’s praise for the president removed any pretense of nonpartisanship the organization possessed prior to opening a legislative affairs office.

Acting as a presidential apologist, Dugan indirectly addressed critics’ claims that Reagan’s speech was rife with blatant political calculations by instead noting the “gratifying” nature of the president’s discussion of abortion, school prayer, and teenage sexual activity. In lauding Reagan’s “asking for” rather than assuming evangelical support in his political battle against the Nuclear Freeze movement, Dugan overlooked the majority of NAE members who supported the Nuclear Freeze Resolution. He was

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<sup>350</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, Personal Correspondence Series IV: folder 2, Mar. 22, 1983, “Letter from Robert Dugan,” Reagan Library.

<sup>351</sup> Evil Empire Speech: Reaction File, Correspondence between Dugan and Dolan, correspondence between Dugan and Morton Blackwell, and Apr. 1983 *NAE Washington Insight*, Presidential Speechwriting File: Series 1, folder 2, Reagan Library.

concerned with promoting the linkage between domestic and foreign policy in the address instead of healing the schism triggered by the Freeze.<sup>352</sup>

Rather than heal the NAE's divisions, Dugan worked closely with the administration to advance Reagan's foreign policy agenda. Ingratiating himself to Dolan, Dugan called Reagan's address "outstanding" and impugned the news media for being "ill-equipped to handle the President's deep personal commitments." He also revealed an alleged grass-roots counterrevolution to the Nuclear Freeze movement. According to Dugan, NAE congregations across the country were ordering videotapes of the Evil Empire speech for their congregations. Christian TV stations and televangelists played the address and offered free audiocassettes upon request. In Dugan's mind, this manner of distributing the speech furthered support for rhetorical rearmament by eliminating the "the secular media [']s" filter.<sup>353</sup>

In this struggle for the soul of the NAE, Dugan assessed the power of the president's words. Stirred by Reagan's oration, the NAE commissioned its first ever Gallup Poll to determine where its membership stood on the Freeze. Countering the conventional wisdom of Dugan's earlier assessment, NAE members favored the Freeze by approximately the same three to one margin as the general public. The survey, which was conducted nine weeks after the speech, showed that seventy-seven percent of evangelicals supported "an immediate and verifiable Nuclear Freeze." Two contradictory responses within the poll, however, may explain Reagan's rebounding approval ratings following his March remarks to the NAE. Though the Freeze purportedly had

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid.; "Poll Shows Evangelicals Support Nuclear Freeze," *The Washington Post*, Jul. 8, 1983.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

momentum, the poll revealed that fifty-six percent of the public and sixty-one percent of evangelicals supported “the way President Reagan is dealing with the nuclear arms situation.” While forty-two percent of the public and forty-nine percent of evangelicals believed the Soviets had an advantage in the nuclear arms race, a mere nineteen percent of the public and twenty-one percent of evangelicals believed the United States led the arms race.<sup>354</sup> A greater percentage of evangelicals also tended to be undecided about how Reagan was dealing with the nuclear arms issue with thirty-three percent undecided versus twenty-three percent of the general public.<sup>355</sup> Public opinion had a contradictory interpretation of the arms race as Americans simultaneously supported the Nuclear Freeze and Reagan’s arms policies.

Evangelicals concurred with peace through strength even as they disagreed with the president’s position on the Nuclear Freeze. Their belief that the Kremlin possessed nuclear superiority signaled agreement with Reagan’s call for nuclear strength. While wide support for the Freeze existed among evangelicals, it did not run deep. By a margin of eighty-two to eighteen percent evangelicals did not favor a unilateral freeze and ninety-three percent of evangelicals did not believe the Soviets would agree to on-site inspections. The evangelicals’ position on a unilateral Freeze and their fear of the Soviets reinforced Dugan’s assertion that the NAE supported peace through strength.<sup>356</sup> The facts do not necessarily lead to Dugan’s conclusion. NAE members held contradictory opinions on the arms race. They supported the idea of a nuclear freeze,

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<sup>354</sup> Poll Shows Evangelicals Support Nuclear Freeze,” *Washington Post*, Jul. 8, 1983.

<sup>355</sup> *Christianity Today*, Aug. 5, 1983.

<sup>356</sup> NAE Office of Public Affairs: NAE/Gallup Poll. Morton Blackwell Files: Nuclear Freeze, folder 1, Jul. 5, 1983 and *NAE Washington Insight*, July 1983, Reagan Library.

while concurrently sharing Reagan's opinion that the Soviets were inherently untrustworthy. The diversity of opinion within the organization on this issue demonstrated that evangelicals were not a political monolith

### **The Christian Press and Religious Critics of "Evil Empire"**

Mainline and progressive Christian periodicals cast a wary eye toward the tactics of rhetorical rearmament, in a manner similar to the secular news media. *Christianity Today*, a magazine catering to evangelicals, argued that the NAE was more heterogeneous than most people believed. "The 3.5 million member group includes pacifist churches such as Mennonites and Brethren in its fold and remains committed to operating by consensus." Unity in Christ, not political activity, oriented the NAE's mission according to the magazine. Pacifists comprised one quarter of NAE members, a fact that made some NAE organizers uneasy about presidential aides insisting on using "Onward, Christian Soldiers" as Reagan's recessionary and "perpetuating a militant stereotype."<sup>357</sup> The periodical declared that the Christian reputation of the organization had been compromised for political gain.

*Commonweal*, a progressive Catholic magazine, went one step further by criticizing the presidential preaching as divisive. The editors exposed the Scriptural ignorance of the mainstream news media and the president. For instance, the periodical scolded *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis for his use of the phrase "sectarian religiosity" in attacking Reagan. The editors demonstrated that Reagan only made one reference to Scripture, while the balance of his speech dealt with the vague "Judeo-

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<sup>357</sup> Booth Spring, "Reagan Courts Evangelical Clout Against Nuclear Freeze," *Christianity Today*, Apr. 8, 1983.



Christian tradition.” They argued that Reagan alienated secular Americans from the mainline religious community. The editorial board contended that “secularists have frequently maintained some of these values more determinedly than Christians. The *truth* is that secularists and churchpeople [sic], rather than holding radically different value systems, have been all too apt to live by exactly the same lights.” Even challenging the Christian spirit of Reagan’s message, the article noted, “The president saw very little but good in America’s own heart. He called the evangelicals to do anything but repent.”<sup>358</sup> This tactic displayed Reagan’s political genius for cultivating support. While Jimmy Carter had called on Americans to recover from the national “crisis of spirit,” Reagan rallied citizens by stressing the evil within the enemy and the good within America.

James M. Wall continued the divisiveness theme in *Christian Century*, an intellectual, mainline Protestant magazine. He stated that Reagan’s speech divided the nation between believers and non-believers. The president’s religious chauvinism qualified only conservatives as believers. While Wall agreed with an unnamed Reagan aide who called the speech “only rhetoric,” he opined that “religious language of this sort satisfies the already convinced, horrifies the mainline religious leaders, and is ignored by everyone else.” Wall believed Reagan could get away with these words because the majority of people did not take him seriously while those who did were prepared to “join him in his war against what he calls ‘an evil empire.’” He even attacked the president’s credentials as a Christian. This criticism was potentially serious with Reagan struggling to present himself as the genuine article to evangelical Christians. Wall believed that Reagan “appeared to have no interest in American religion as embodied in mainline

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<sup>358</sup> “Presidential Pulpit.” *Commonweal*, Mar. 25, 1983.

Protestant, Roman Catholic or Jewish groups.”<sup>359</sup> This accusation proved difficult to overcome considering Reagan’s divisive rhetoric and spotty church attendance.

The secular news media did not put as much stress on the religious chauvinism that stimulated and offended the religious press. In the eyes of the mainstream news media, the Soviet Union emerged as the centerpiece of the speech. The popular aversion to Reagan’s moralistic condemnation of the Soviet Union shaped public opinion. Gallup polling data showed that for the first time during Reagan’s presidency more people disapproved than approved of his handling of U.S.-Soviet relations in the speech’s aftermath. Polls revealed that thirty-seven percent of Americans supported Reagan’s Soviet policy while forty-one percent disapproved.<sup>360</sup> Mainline Christian publications perhaps felt a stronger call to denounce the use of the presidential pulpit for political fear mongering than did other groups.

In addition to condemnations in the Christian press, the Reagan administration received critical letters. Among these letters, a group of Lutheran ministers argued that Reagan spoke as though only one evil existed in the world by denouncing “Communism as ‘the focus of evil in the modern world.’” Rather, the Lutherans argued that “the devil is our foe and he appears in many forms” and that Reagan “fails to see the potential for the same evil in his own Administration. He would do well to heed his own warning “to beware [of] the temptation of pride.”<sup>361</sup> The tension between Reagan and mainline Protestants surfaced again during spring 1983 as he declined the United Methodist

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<sup>359</sup> James M. Wall, “Mr. Reagan Speaks Only to ‘Believers,” *Christian Century*, Mar. 1983.

<sup>360</sup> The Gallup Poll Public Opinion, 1935-1997. The CD-ROM Edition (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000), 90.

<sup>361</sup> “Letter from Lutheran pastors to Edwin Meese,” White House Office of Record Management, Mar. 14, 1983.

Church's invitation to speak at the convention celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church in America. The administration seemed unwilling to challenge the notion among mainline Protestants that Reagan only reached out to evangelicals.<sup>362</sup>

Along with condemnations of Reagan's anti-Nuclear Freeze polemics by traditional Protestant churches, the Catholic bishops finally approved their long-awaited pastoral letter supporting the Freeze. The letter criticized Reagan administration missteps, such as open discussion of winnable nuclear war: "There should be a clear public resistance to the rhetoric of 'winnable' nuclear wars, or unrealistic expectations of 'surviving' nuclear exchanges and strategies of 'protracted nuclear war.'" The letter prescribed a freeze in nuclear weapons production calling on Catholic "support for immediate, bilateral, verifiable agreements to halt the testing, production and deployment of new nuclear weapons systems."<sup>363</sup>

Some prominent Catholic intellectuals went even farther by implicitly criticizing Reagan's words. Francis X. Meehan cited Jesus' command: "'Do not resist evil'... suggesting that we oppose evil but we do not 'withstand the man who does evil'... Otherwise you will be drawn into the dialectical game; you will have to build another power to oppose the first one, and so forth and so on."<sup>364</sup> The epistle went beyond proposing a Freeze, however, calling for a halt to the "testing, production and deployment" of new nuclear weapons. According to one parishioner it "removed the

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<sup>362</sup> "Memorandum for the President from Jim Cicconi," James Cicconi Files: Memos to Staff, (Jan-June 1983), folder 8. Reagan Library.

<sup>363</sup> "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response."  
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0883.asp> (accessed Feb. 6, 2010).

<sup>364</sup> "Nonviolence: A Case for a Development of Doctrine." Francis X. Meehan in *The Catholic Bishops and Nuclear War*. ed. Judith A. Dwyer, S.S.J. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1984), 100-101.

stigma from the antinuclear movement. It's no longer possible to say the freeze movement is Communist-inspired."<sup>365</sup> The Freeze as a mainstream movement was gaining momentum. It passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 221 to 203 in May 1983 after a contentious and drawn-out debate.<sup>366</sup> It gained a new advocate as well, when William E. Colby, former CIA Director during the Nixon and Ford administrations, began working for the Nuclear Freeze movement. Inspired by his Catholic faith and perhaps Catholic guilt, he began advocating the Freeze among church groups, in newspaper columns, and on the speaking circuit.<sup>367</sup>

These examples reinforced the Nuclear Freeze movement's contention that it was growing larger and more diverse throughout 1983. Freeze proponents agreed that the primary reason for the galvanized peace movement was Ronald Reagan. His rhetorical rearmament led "people who hadn't believed nuclear war was thinkable...to worry."<sup>368</sup> In trying to fight the Freeze rather than letting its inherent infeasibility slowly destroy the resolution, Reagan had energized and increased his opposition. The president was doing a better job politicizing his opponents than inspiring his allies to win one for the Gipper.

### **Rallying Around the Gipper: Rhetorical Rearmament and the Grassroots**

While the Reagan administration's nuclear policies did not gain traction with the mainline Christian community, the president scored political points among secular and Christian conservatives. "Evil Empire" speechwriter Anthony Dolan kept track of news media reaction to the address well into 1984. He noted both the positive and negative

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<sup>365</sup> "Sub Workers, After Mass, Reflect on Bishops' Letter," *New York Times*, May 9, 1983.

<sup>366</sup> "Who Won on Freeze?" *New York Times*, May 6, 1983.

<sup>367</sup> "Ex-C.I.A. Head Now Works for a Nuclear Freeze," *New York Times*, Jun. 14, 1983.

<sup>368</sup> "Diverse Antiwar Movement Cites Gains," *New York Times*, Jul. 18, 1983.

responses from the media, Moscow, and the Freeze movement. Aside from the supportive right-wing press, Dolan received many encouraging messages from his conservative acquaintances.

For instance, Nelson Smith of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, a conservative think-tank, called the speech “terrific.” He noted that Dan Rather reported “with a quizzical tone and arched eyebrow” when Reagan called the Kremlin “the focus of evil in the modern world.” Smith called Rather’s reporting “simply a case of ‘there he goes again!’” He asserted that if more people could listen to the speech without the filter of the mainstream news media, “the great majority of Americans would cheer.”<sup>369</sup> In addition, Frederick C. Schwarz, chair of the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, expressed “a surge of pride and exaltation” upon reading the speech.<sup>370</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., Dolan’s mentor and *National Review* publisher, wrote, “My God, RR’s speechwriters are certainly looking after the country!”<sup>371</sup> Another acquaintance summed up the essence of the Evil Empire speech for conservatives: “The important thing... for us and for the people of this nation certainly must be to ‘Let Reagan Be Reagan.’ Need we say more?”<sup>372</sup> Rhetorical Rearmament garnered strong support from conservative opinion leaders hungering for the renewed foreign policy clarity.

Conservative responses to the address demonstrate that Reagan understood hostility to the address cut two ways. For example, Gregory A. Fossedal, founder of the

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<sup>369</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, Personal Correspondence Series IV: folder 1, Mar. 9, 1983, “Letter from Nelson Smith,” Reagan Library.

<sup>370</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, Personal Correspondence Series IV: folder 5, Mar. 24, 1983, “Letter from Frederick C. Schwarz,” Reagan Library.

<sup>371</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, Personal Correspondence Series IV: folder 1, Personal Correspondence Series 4, Folder 1, Mar. 10, 1983, “Letter from William F. Buckley,” Reagan Library.

<sup>372</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, Personal Correspondence Series IV: folder 1, Mar. 17, 1983 “Letter from Tim K. Pagel,” Reagan Library.

*Dartmouth Review* and an editorial writer for the *Wall Street Journal* inferred that Reagan's remarks comprised part of "a populist foreign policy" that sent "an occasional democratic cluster bomb over the Berlin Wall."<sup>373</sup> Plaudits for the speech also came from the Archbishop of the Greek Catholic Church of the USA for his "mighty sermon, based on the spiritual and moral principles on which our great nation was built."<sup>374</sup> In a presidential thank-you letter to a *Washington Times* reporter, Reagan mused "there are a lot of people in the media who are very 'broad-minded' except when it comes to tolerating people with religious convictions.... Nowadays if one uses words like God and Prayer from the 'pulpit' the alarm bells go off."<sup>375</sup> He asserted in a letter to Pat Buchanan that he was "not sorry at all that I ruffled some feathers."<sup>376</sup> These letters demonstrated the president's decision to give the address and stand by his words led conservatives to reinforce and echo his viewpoint. Reagan would not entertain the notion that he had alienated the Kremlin and caused domestic unease. The president demonstrated his understanding that persecution by the news media played well with the conservative intelligentsia and his base.

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<sup>373</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, Personal Correspondence Series IV: folder 4, Apr. 25, 1983, "Letter from Paul Ceruzzi," Reagan Library.

<sup>374</sup> Ronald Reagan Personal Correspondence Sp. 729, Folder 3, Mar. 10, 1983, "Letter from Archbishop Joseph Tawil," Reagan Library.

<sup>375</sup> "Draft Reagan letter to Buchanan." Mar. 15, 1983., folder 3, Box SP 722 - SP 730, WHORM: Subject File, Ronald Reagan Personal Correspondence Reagan Library. Emphasis in original. Reagan deemed it necessary to alter the words of whoever originally typed this note to Buchanan. Reagan must have felt that the original draft's references to "Darth Vader minions in the media elite," "Pat 'Luke Skywalker' Buchanan," and the almost-correct use of the Jedi benediction "May the Force go with you" were a bit too clever in responding to what some in the news media called "The 'Darth Vader' Speech."

<sup>376</sup> "Reagan Letter, Mar. 17, 1983," folder 3, Box SP 722 - SP 730, WHORM: Subject File, Ronald Reagan Personal Correspondence Mar. 17, 1983, Reagan Library.

### **The Future of Peace through Strength within the NAE**

The NAE claimed to be searching for its foreign policy voice as a means of preventing the organization from becoming “susceptible to external political pressures from both the left and the right.” Regardless, the NAE was far more concerned about its left flank.<sup>377</sup> The fruits of the organization’s efforts to develop its own national security position produced *Guidelines: Peace, Freedom and Security Studies: A Program of the National Association of Evangelicals*. The international relations policy statement called for evangelical leadership in “supporting religious liberty, promoting the security of free societies and encouraging progress toward the nonviolent resolution of international conflict.”<sup>378</sup> This seemingly innocuous statement amounted to tacit endorsement of Reagan’s foreign policy. While the Peace Freedom and Security Studies (PFSS) program claimed their primary goal was “common ground” between supporters of “peace and disarmament” and advocates of “security and liberty,” their indirect promotion of peace through strength aligned the NAE with the administration.<sup>379</sup>

NAE leaders drafted their policy statement in a purportedly bipartisan manner. The document criticized shortcomings on both ends of the political spectrum. The NAE’s Executive Committee’s agreement that nations squelching religious liberty should be vigorously opposed amounted to a stand against totalitarianism. By finding its

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<sup>377</sup> “Evangelicals and Nuclear Debate,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 1, 1984.

<sup>378</sup> National Association of Evangelicals. *Guidelines: Peace Freedom, and Security Studies: A Program of the National Association of Evangelicals*. (Wheaton, IL, Mar. 1989), p. 3. This document presents only one view, the institutional perspective of the conservative NAE leadership. The author attempted to find documents chronicling the debates within NAE congregations facilitated by the Peace, Freedom, and Security Studies (PFSS) program. According to the author’s interview with Robert Dugan, these sessions were spirited. The few documents that deal with PFSS in the NAE archives do not touch on these debates. According to the archivist of the NAE collection at Wheaton College, an abundance of unprocessed NAE documents remain in the organization’s Washington DC office.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

political voice, the NAE denounced the persecution of believers in the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua.<sup>380</sup> This choice of repressive regimes, all at the top of the president's list, implied the NAE's intellectual alliance with the Reagan administration. Even as the NAE presented a veneer of independence, Dugan forged intellectual support for peace through strength behind the scenes.

The executive committee claimed evangelicals could not remain mute as the nuclear threat loomed, tyrannical governments schemed, and innocents died. Arguing that naïve peace movements disregarded the “well-being of ... religious communities” behind communism's veil, the NAE accused liberal Christians of becoming “the instrument of political activists particularly on the left.”<sup>381</sup> Conspicuously criticizing American religious leaders for supporting engagement with the Soviet Union, the NAE noted that, “It is shameful when religious exchange programs which falsify the plight of controlled or persecuted churches in the Soviet Union are celebrated as contributions to progress toward peace.”<sup>382</sup> In addition, NAE leaders denounced the idea that the Soviet Union could not change from within. They believed that liberal church leaders had lost faith in the possibility of a Soviet religious revival.

As a counterweight to the NAE Executive Committee's blistering rebuke of the Religious Left, however, the committee criticized conservative Christians' support for repressive Central American governments and failure to aid deprived Third World nations.<sup>383</sup> While the NAE assiduously maintained a veneer of objectivity, it was

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.



responding to the Freeze movement. Noting that “few American religious leaders work on both alternatives to war and the defense of democratic values,” the NAE created a foreign policy niche as an arbiter of both “peace and freedom.”<sup>384</sup> While the NAE Executive Committee urged religious leaders to “witness against violence” and “the evil of war,” evangelicals were called to “witness to the world” through Christian values and Western democracy.<sup>385</sup>

Merging politics with religion by framing peace through strength as church doctrine, the NAE claimed anticommunism was “Biblically inspired.” Rebuking political apathy, the NAE claimed, “Christians are called to be involved in a significant way with the welfare of the general society.”<sup>386</sup> As politically engaged anticommunists, the NAE contended democracy ensured Christian dignity. Indeed, the NAE cited a statement in *Proverbs* saying that Christians are required by faith to attempt to rectify perceived injustices and suffering in the world or face the judgment of God. As democracy spread, the NAE argued that tyranny and sin would be restrained and justice promoted. Thus, if American Christians supported these virtues, they would be effectively responding to the Kremlin’s persecution of Soviet Christians.<sup>387</sup> Crusading against Soviet persecution reflected the politicization of the NAE power structure through support for “evil empire” rhetoric, while overlooking the Biblical value of peacemaking.

Asserting that Christians should alleviate the world’s injustice and suffering by political engagement, Dugan protégé Brian O’Connell called religious involvement in

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 16.

peace issues “long on enthusiasm and short on thoughtful analysis.”<sup>388</sup> He criticized liberal church organizations for denouncing an American foreign policy that they failed to understand. The PFSS condemned dissent as “irresponsible” and divisive. His voice could also be heard disparaging the peace movement for “one-sided church stances...dressed up in scriptural, theological, and moral warrants (all too often presented as if these are the *only* legitimate “Christian” positions).”<sup>389</sup> Dugan’s derision of “both sides” devolved into manifest attacks on liberal positions, the Nuclear Freeze movement, and implicit support of the Reagan administration.

Doing away with any pretense of neutrality, the PFSS impugned the axiom that “truth is always between two extremes.” Reflecting Reagan’s “evil empire” rhetoric, Dugan argued that an American society enamored with pluralism and tolerance had refuted the “the sovereignty of truth.” In this mindset, both superpowers were equally “evil” and at fault for the Cold War.<sup>390</sup> Dugan believed that those who found both sides half wrong and half right had forgotten the lessons of Moscow’s totalitarian history, which according to Reagan meant that Freeze proponents had succumbed to “the temptation of pride...to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire.”<sup>391</sup>

The PFSS not only ignored innumerable Biblical references to peace, but found a passage from Jeremiah 6:14 to criticize the Freeze movement, “Peace, peace, they say,

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 20; “Email from Heather Gonzalez, Association Director, National Association of Evangelicals,” Feb.10, 2010.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.; Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

when there is no peace.” Claiming the Freeze only destabilized the world, Dugan countered, “May it never be said of us that we cried ‘peace, peace,’ when in fact we had only in the name of ‘peace’ set the stage for war and suffering.”<sup>392</sup> In addition, the white paper argued that peace among all governments should be the goal of the Nuclear Freeze movement. He accused the Freeze supporters of only protesting America’s use of military power. Dugan believed that if liberal Christians quit singling out the Reagan administration, then the NAE could work with them.<sup>393</sup>

Calling for an understanding of the variety of threats posed by communist governments, NAE leaders advocated a broader peace movement that included a realistic assessment of the Soviet Union. The executive committee proposed strong rhetoric that promoted changing the Soviet Union into an open and peaceful society that would reconcile with the United States. In pursuit of this tactic, *Guidelines* argued that Washington should attempt to move Moscow toward positive societal change.<sup>394</sup> Not coincidentally, this belief in the Kremlin’s evolution through non-violent coercion was a bedrock principle of Reagan’s rhetorical rearmament. The NAE policy of positive engagement mirrored the president’s belief that the Soviet Union would collapse under the weight of its moral bankruptcy and bureaucratic ineptitude.<sup>395</sup> The manifesto’s publication made it hard to tell where the NAE worldview began and administration foreign policy ended.

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<sup>392</sup> National Association of Evangelicals. *Guidelines: Peace Freedom, and Security Studies: A Program of the National Association of Evangelicals*. (Wheaton, IL, Mar. 1989), p. 21.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>395</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 759.

The Peace, Freedom and Security Studies program proposed a bold set of internationalist objectives to facilitate evangelical foreign policy engagement. First, the NAE would urge its standard bearers to develop programs, internships, and new training seminars dealing with matters of international peace, freedom, and security. The organization called for affiliated colleges and seminaries to teach students about foreign relations. Second, the NAE would establish a resource center dealing with national security issues. The center would distribute materials in churches and evangelical publications discussing foreign policy. It would also fund a touring lecture series on foreign policy issues that would go to NAE churches, colleges, and seminaries. Third, the NAE would increase its media presence by producing articles, reports, and programs dealing with international freedom, peace, and security.<sup>396</sup> The organization was developing intellectual and spiritual leaders to further the NAE's de facto support of the peace through strength foreign policy agenda.

### **Conclusion**

President Reagan's use of the Evil Empire speech to help politicize the NAE through the Evil Empire speech remains historically significant. Almost as remarkable was the fact that a foreign policy debate existed within the NAE between the Freeze and the peace through strength factions. At first glance, the NAE appeared to be a staunchly conservative organization. Spirited dissent from Billy Graham down to the evangelical masses supporting the Freeze, however, demonstrated the organization's divergence of opinions. The ideal of a mutual, verifiable Freeze took hold among Americans of all

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<sup>396</sup> National Association of Evangelicals. *Guidelines: Peace Freedom, and Security Studies: A Program of the National Association of Evangelicals*. Wheaton, IL, March 1989, p, 30-31.

religious and political persuasions. Reagan's counterproposal of continued peace through strength met with skepticism and moral denunciations in large segments of the Christian community. Pragmatic appeals by the administration on social issues coupled with contradictory opinions on arms control by many evangelicals helped peace through strength proponents within the NAE prevail over Freeze supporters.

The intellectual underpinnings of PFSS helped solidify support for Reagan's foreign policy among conservative evangelicals. The president's politicization of conservative Christians through rhetorical rearmament tied support for school prayer, opposition to abortion, homosexual rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment to continually larger defense budgets. For consumption by his dispirited conservative supporters of all stripes, Reagan erected a dichotomous relationship between his virtuous policies and the benign and malignant "evil" of his opponents. This reasoning was rejected by many members of his base, as evidenced by the strong evangelical support for the Freeze; however, over time Reagan's politicization of the NAE created institutional support for his once-unpopular foreign policy. Reagan mobilized his conservative, religious supporters to assail the Nuclear Freeze movement's moral arguments.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

## THE RHETORICAL FREEZE, 1983-1985

The Evil Empire speech painted President Reagan as a confrontational leader. The address caused concern both among American citizens and the Kremlin. With his reelection campaign looming, Reagan had to both quickly move away from this image and remain tough on the Soviet Union. The motivation for the president's increasingly pragmatic actions during this 1983-1985 time period can be explained in two ways. First, Reagan responded to heightened geopolitical tensions during 1983. He initiated a "rhetorical freeze," which meant to further escalation of the rhetorical stakes with Moscow while concurrently retracting none of his previous anticommunist declarations. The president's ideological hatred of communism did not change, but he tried not to exacerbate tensions. Second, as Cold War foreign policy emerged as perhaps the only thing that could prevent his reelection, Reagan accentuated his pragmatic side. The increased Cold War tensions of 1983, Reagan's 1984 reelection campaign, and the arrival of a new reform-minded Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1985 combined to contribute to Reagan's emphasis on pragmatic rhetoric over ideological confrontation.

Reagan had attempted to win domestic support for his peace through strength foreign policy in the Evil Empire speech. The tag-line "evil empire" was meant primarily for a domestic audience, but reverberated in Moscow. The Soviets validated the president's words by looking like "an evil empire" as Soviet air defenses shot down Korean Airlines Flight (KAL) 007 on September 1, 1983 after it drifted into Soviet airspace. The Soviets preposterously claimed that the civilian airliner was on a U.S.

intelligence mission and refused to accept responsibility.<sup>397</sup> Reagan's warnings about the "aggressive impulses of an evil empire" suddenly seemed more realistic than polemical.<sup>398</sup> The KAL tragedy helped justify rhetorical rearmament, but also sparked public concern about Reagan's reaction to the provocation.<sup>399</sup> The president did nothing to ally the fears of a jittery public by condemning the incident as a "massacre...an act of barbarism" and "part of their normal procedure."<sup>400</sup> Reagan, however, attempted to appeal to both sides of the peace through strength debate by saying: "This attack was not just against ourselves or the Republic of Korea. This was the Soviet Union against the world and the moral precepts which guide human relations among people everywhere."<sup>401</sup>

### **Soviet Reaction**

Private perceptions of the president's polemics in the Kremlin revealed a nervous and concerned leadership with Soviet intelligence on higher alert during Reagan's presidency than at any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.<sup>402</sup> The Soviet leadership had been shaken by Reagan's "evil empire" oratory. General Secretary Yuri Andropov publicly dismissed Reagan's rhetorical rearmament: "We are realists enough not to pay attention to rhetoric." He suggested. "If Reagan...put forward at least one sensible, suitable proposal we would forgive him his—how to put it mildly—groundless

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<sup>397</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 228.

<sup>398</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41023>. (Apr. 5, 2010).

<sup>399</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 448.

<sup>400</sup> Morris, *Dutch*, 492-493.

<sup>401</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41788>. (accessed Apr. 5, 2010).

<sup>402</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 524.

statement.”<sup>403</sup> In private, Andropov worried that Reagan had not fully considered the side effects of confrontation in the nuclear age. Andropov hoped that the president was simply playing politics, but did not have a clear sense of Reagan. He ordered Ambassador Dobrynin to be vigilant, but also to look for signs that Reagan was ready to improve relations.<sup>404</sup>

The Soviet response to the president’s polemical address was only as consistent as the Soviet leadership. Between 1983 and 1985, the Soviet Union witnessed the death of two old-guard general secretaries, each of whom approached Reagan’s oratory from a traditional communist perspective. Yuri Andropov expressed his willingness to go beyond previous promises of limiting nuclear warheads in the European theatre to reducing the entire Soviet nuclear arsenal. Conversely, he described U.S. defense and foreign policy as “the root of evil perpetuated in the world, the evil which threatens the very existence of mankind.”<sup>405</sup> Andropov’s heir apparent, Konstantin Chernenko, urged a political counter-offensive to match the Reagan “crusade” against communism.<sup>406</sup> Moscow’s leading American expert, Georgi A. Arbatov, expressed pessimism by calling the address “medievalism” replete with religious hypocrisy.<sup>407</sup> *Pravda* called the address

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<sup>403</sup> Y.U. Andropov, *Speeches, Articles, Interviews* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1984), 236.

<sup>404</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 532.

<sup>405</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 3, Folder 3, “Soviets Offer to Cut Warheads.” Dusko Doder. *Washington Post* May 4, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>406</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 1, Folder 2, “Fight Reagan ‘Crusade,’ Soviet Aide Says.” John F. Burns. *New York Times*, Jun. 15, 1983, Reagan Library.

<sup>407</sup> Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts (NAE), 1983, “Orlando Speech” Reaction File, Series 6, Folder 1, “Soviet Rebuts ‘Focus of Evil’ Speech.” John F. Burns, *New York Times* Mar. 18, 1983, Reagan Library.



evidence that Reagan “can only think in terms of confrontation and bellicose, lunatic anticommunism.”<sup>408</sup>

Meanwhile, Reagan’s rhetoric confused Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin. In February 1983, he became the first senior Soviet official to meet with President Reagan, less than a month before the Evil Empire speech. They had a cordial discussion, leading Dobrynin to believe in the possibility of rapprochement. The president even signaled the possibility of a thaw in relations. Dobrynin determined after the address that Reagan had not intended for the Evil Empire speech to derail US-Soviet relations again. Secretary of State George Shultz backed up the ambassador’s assertion by noting that neither he nor anyone else in the foreign policy establishment outside of the White House staff had reviewed the speech prior to its delivery. The state department did not expect a notable foreign policy address at that place or time. The speech illustrated for Dobrynin the paradox between Reagan’s private cordiality and his public hostility. He believed the president was a “contradiction between words and deeds that greatly angered Moscow, the more so because Reagan himself never seemed to see it.... Such incompatibilities could coexist in perfect harmony, but Moscow regarded such behavior at times as a sign of deliberate duplicity and hostility.”<sup>409</sup>

While Andropov publicly dismissed Reagan’s words as bluster and showmanship, privately the general secretary pondered Reagan’s bellicose rhetoric. He wondered if Reagan was “just playing his game and being a hypocrite.” Andropov questioned whether the president “realize[d] that for all our ideological disagreements, you just

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<sup>408</sup> “Reagan Orlando Speech Reflects U.S. ‘Militarism.’” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts: USSR International Affairs: United States & Canada*, Mar. 9, 1983.

<sup>409</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 527.

cannot bring about a confrontation in the nuclear age?” The general secretary resolved that, “We should keep on persistently working with Reagan. We should be vigilant, because he is unpredictable. At the same time we ought not to ignore any signs of his readiness to improve our relations.”<sup>410</sup> Andropov’s reaction affirmed the notion that Reagan’s strong anti-Soviet rhetoric worried Moscow at the highest levels. A combination of fear and pragmatism contributed to Andropov and Dobrynin seeking negotiations. Indeed, in 1982 while heading the KGB, Andropov believed Reagan was preparing for war. Following the address, Andropov feared a surprise nuclear attack from the United States.<sup>411</sup> The international fiasco caused by Reagan’s words alarmed the Kremlin and caused a degree of nuclear panic unseen since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

### **From Words to Deeds, the Tensions of 1983**

As the KAL-007 incident unfolded, leaders of the Nuclear Freeze movement held a retreat in hopes of creating a strategy to increase the movement’s power. The Soviet shoot-down of KAL 007, however, fatally damaged their push to pass the Nuclear Freeze Resolution in the Senate. The Freeze movement’s leaders forged ahead by pressuring moderate senators, but they were losing political capital in post-KAL Washington.<sup>412</sup> The Freeze supporters’ slim chance of passing the resolution in the Republican-controlled Senate vanished. The argument for a freeze relied on the erstwhile conventional wisdom that both sides in the Cold War would act peacefully. The KAL incident had challenged that notion. The Freeze movement also had to deal with lessened national discontent—a factor in its rise to prominence—owing to a rebounding economy. More important, by

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 532.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 522-23.

<sup>412</sup> “Pushing for a Nuclear Freeze,” *New York Times*, Sept. 6, 1983.

late 1983 the Nuclear Freeze movement began losing political fuel as Reagan started tempering his anti-Soviet remarks. The president's actions along with the turning tide of superpower relations neutralized the Freeze movement.

Observers reevaluated rhetorical rearmament in light of the KAL incident. Reagan critic Tom Wicker called the president's initial reaction "restrained and farsighted."<sup>413</sup> This support for a hawkish line convinced administration aides that the KAL downing gave Reagan the upper hand over the Kremlin.<sup>414</sup> Indeed, Leslie Gelb, an assistant secretary of state in the Carter administration, suggested that the administration possessed a new sense of "realism" with Reagan willing to grant the Soviets economic concessions despite the KAL incident. Unnamed administration officials promoted Reagan as a newly-ordained pragmatist out to forge stronger superpower relations to stave off political weakness.<sup>415</sup> Furthering his earlier assertion of Reagan's nascent pragmatism, Gelb praised the president for his "restrained and cautious" reaction to the KAL downing.<sup>416</sup> Perhaps his critics rather than Reagan had changed their view of the Kremlin. After the KAL tragedy, a hard line now appeared pragmatic.

By the end of October 1983, the Republican-led Senate Foreign Relations Committee quietly defeated the Nuclear Freeze Resolution. An attempt to attach the resolution as an amendment to a debt ceiling bill suffered a bipartisan defeat by a margin of fifty-eight to forty votes.<sup>417</sup> The movement's loss of momentum allowed Senators to

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<sup>413</sup> "Tough But Restrained," *New York Times*, Sept. 5, 1983.

<sup>414</sup> "Reagan Rides the Crest of an Anti-Soviet Wave," *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1983.

<sup>415</sup> "Arms and the Man," *New York Times*, Oct. 9, 1983.

<sup>416</sup> "Reagan, Power and the World," *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 1983.

<sup>417</sup> Daniel Wirls, *Buildup: The Politics of Defense in the Reagan Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 112.

dispose of the Freeze without a high-profile debate such as the one staged in the House. Prominent Democrats continued expending political capital by promoting the Freeze, however. The Nuclear Freeze remained popular, but peace through strength had gained adherents over the course of the year. The 1982 midterm elections, which occurred a time when the administration was weak on numerous fronts, demonstrated that people could favor the Freeze and still not vote based on that issue. Democratic National Committee Chair Charles T. Manatt nevertheless predicted the Freeze would “play a major role” in the 1984 Presidential election.<sup>418</sup>

Although the Freeze failed to gain as much tangible political power as its leaders had hoped, the phenomenon demonstrated American apprehension of rhetorical rearmament. Another event that caused a critical reevaluation of administration diplomacy was the president’s October 1983 viewing of the ABC made-for-TV movie *The Day After*. The story of devastation wrought upon Lawrence, Kansas by nuclear war with Russia led Reagan to renew efforts at superpower diplomacy. The president asserted in his diary that, “We have to do all that we can to have a deterrent and to see there is never a nuclear war.”<sup>419</sup>

A third event that pushed Reagan closer to realizing the need for renewed superpower diplomacy was Able Archer 83 in November 1983. This NATO military exercise that included testing nuclear-release procedures also called for radio silence and a shifting of codes and frequencies for mock-nuclear alerts. The maneuver was more expansive and involved higher level officials than previous exercises, causing the already

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<sup>418</sup> “Democrats Urge Steps To Prevent Nuclear Warfare,” *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1983.

<sup>419</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 585.

jittery Soviets to suspect an imminent nuclear attack. Moscow had always believed that a nuclear assault would happen under the auspices of a military exercise. Coupled with Reagan's harsh condemnation of the Kremlin's September 1983 shoot-down of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, Able Archer 83 seemed a serious threat. Fortunately, Deputy National Security Advisor Robert MacFarlane realized that the initial plan to involve the president, vice president, and Joint Chiefs of Staff in the exercise might be unnecessarily provocative. With Washington unaware that the Soviets were operating at a level of heightened nuclear readiness, only during later secret meetings did the administration realize MacFarlane's prescience.<sup>420</sup>

Looking back, *The Day After* seems all the more poignant when placed in context with the downing of KAL Flight 007, the nuclear tensions of Able Archer 83, and the continued political agitation of the Nuclear Freeze movement.<sup>421</sup> These events convinced Reagan that his administration needed to work to lessen the risk of a nuclear showdown.<sup>422</sup> Just as rhetorical rearmament appeared necessary to the president a year earlier, a rhetorical freeze was the order of the day by 1984. While Reagan did not withdraw past denunciations or stop attacking the Soviets on familiar themes, he stopped adding to tensions.<sup>423</sup>

The president's realization did not improve superpower diplomacy in the short-term, however. U.S.-Soviet relations reached new lows in late 1983 when back channel

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<sup>420</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 229; "Soviets, fearing Western attack, prepared for worst in '83." Bruce Kennedy, CNN Interactive. <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/coldwar/episodes/22/spotlight/> (accessed Nov. 10, 2003).

<sup>421</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 229.

<sup>422</sup> Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal*, 141, 153-154.

<sup>423</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 584-85.

negotiations stalled. The Soviets subsequently pulled out of the Geneva arms control talks in early December to protest the American deployment of intermediate range nuclear weapons to West Germany and Italy. Soviet negotiators called the United States “bent on world domination” and ready to “launch a decapitating nuclear first strike.”<sup>424</sup> The dynamics of superpower relations were changing, with Reagan seeking rapprochement and the Soviets blustering.

### **Reagan Decides on a Rhetorical Freeze**

The Soviet walk-out of the Geneva arms control talks in early December to protest the American deployment of intermediate range nuclear weapons in Western Europe coupled with the KAL shoot-down helped move the public closer to Reagan’s position. His job approval rating crept up to forty-seven percent with only a forty-three percent disapproval rating. To the president, the Kremlin remained an aggressive superpower that neither engaged in honest negotiations, nor possessed a moral compass capable of distinguishing between civilian and military targets.<sup>425</sup> Vindicated by the Soviet’s tarnished international image, and with an eye on the upcoming presidential election, Reagan’s closest advisor began pushing for a softened tone toward Moscow. Indeed, Nancy Reagan sensed the public’s nuclear fear and apprehension toward her husband’s diplomacy. Improved U.S.–Soviet relations became Mrs. Reagan’s special issue in her role as the voice for rapprochement within the administration. Though

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<sup>424</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 230.

<sup>425</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, 441; The Gallup Poll Public Opinion, 1935-1997. The CD-ROM Edition (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000), 217.

Nancy Reagan claimed that, “If Ronnie hadn’t wanted to do it, he wouldn’t have done it,” her role proved pivotal.<sup>426</sup>

The president slowly came to realize that the Kremlin feared he would launch an aggressive nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. “Many people at the top of the Soviet hierarchy were genuinely afraid of America and Americans,” he wrote about their attitude in November 1983. “Perhaps this shouldn’t have surprised me, but it did.” The president came to understand the Kremlin’s deep apprehension of his polemics and America’s rapidly growing nuclear arsenal. “Many Soviet officials feared us not only as adversaries but as potential aggressors who might hurl nuclear weapons at them in a first strike,” he wrote. “Because of this... they aimed a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons at us.”<sup>427</sup> Furthermore, the president concluded the Kremlin was “so paranoid about being attacked that without being in any way soft on them we ought to tell them no one here has any intention of doing anything like that.”<sup>428</sup>

The peace offensive spurred by Mrs. Reagan and embraced by her husband came at a time when administration pragmatists began gaining influence while the hawks started moving out of Reagan’s inner circle. National Security Advisor William Clark became Secretary of the Interior and senior White House aide Ed Meese was appointed Attorney General. The moderate Jack Matlock replaced the virulent anticommunist Richard Pipes as the Soviet expert on the National Security Council. Pragmatists such as Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver, new National Security Advisor Robert

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<sup>426</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, 508-509.

<sup>427</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 588-589.

<sup>428</sup> Brinkley, ed. *The Reagan Diaries*, 199.

McFarlane, Secretary of State George Shultz, and the First Lady encouraged Reagan to follow his political instincts to soften his rhetoric and pursue diplomacy.<sup>429</sup>

McFarlane warned that the KAL disaster was a humiliating and serious foreign policy blow for the Kremlin. As such, McFarlane urged restraint. While he saw Reagan as a “hardline confrontationalist,” McFarlane believed the president’s mindset at the end of 1983 boded well for engagement with the Soviets. McFarlane’s authorship of the talking points for Reagan’s December 13, 1983 interview with *Time*, titled, “Your commitment to solving problems with the Soviet Union,” signaled the president’s pursuit of rapprochement. McFarlane also wrote what became the president’s “stock speech” for U.S.-Soviet relations. His “Realism, Strength, and Dialogue” speech (or R, S&D speech), became administration policy and signaled the beginning of the end of rhetorical rearmament.<sup>430</sup>

Reagan’s ensuing rhetorical freeze eased tensions. The RS&D speech established the administration’s new diplomatic line. To McFarlane, realism meant recognizing both nations disagreed on almost every political principle and that the two political systems probably never would converge. Like the president, the new national security advisor believed strength was the only virtue the Soviets respected and therefore U.S. defenses had to be built up to give the Kremlin incentive to negotiate. While realism and strength were not new principles, dialogue was a novel concept that signaled an opportunity for

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<sup>429</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 510.

<sup>430</sup> McFarlane, *A Special Trust*, 295.



improved relations. Through promoting dialogue Reagan demonstrated that his understanding that he must negotiate with the Soviets.<sup>431</sup>

The president delivered the McFarlane-inspired speech from the Oval Office on January 16, 1984.<sup>432</sup> Striking a new tone for 1984 in his internationally televised address, Reagan called for “constructive cooperation” between superpowers and labeled it “a year of opportunities for peace.”<sup>433</sup> While abandoning his “standard threat speech,” the president continued to insist on dealing with the Soviet military peril through more defense spending. Indeed, the president said America was in “its strongest position in years” because its “restored deterrence” was making the world a safer place.<sup>434</sup> This reality, Reagan believed, allowed American diplomats to negotiate on par with the Soviets.<sup>435</sup> Through the RS&D speech Reagan maintained the substance of defense spending increases while infusing the symbolism of a newly diplomatic style. In promoting the rhetorical freeze, Reagan was becoming the peace and prosperity candidate administration pragmatists hoped would emerge.

Reagan’s “evil empire” rhetoric seemed more reasonable in light of Soviet foreign policy blunders such as the KAL 007 downing and walking out of the Geneva arms control talks in late 1983. He was winning the war of words, thereby making the rhetorical freeze possible in 1984. The public was slow, however, to pick up on Reagan’s change of course. A Gallup Poll, taken just prior to his “Year of Peace” speech, revealed that Americans felt the greatest threat of war since Vietnam. Reagan’s belligerent words

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 294-295.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 510.

<sup>434</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 235.

<sup>435</sup> “Evil Empire...Come In, Evil Empire,” *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1984.

escalated tensions to such a degree that the public disapproved of his foreign policy by a margin of forty-nine to thirty-eight percent.<sup>436</sup>

### **News Media Reevaluations in Wake of Cold War Confrontation**

As the administration began changing its tone during fall and winter 1983-84, astute media observers sensed Reagan's peace offensive. Just prior to the "Year of Peace" speech, James Reston and other *New York Times* journalists began seeing the president as a compromiser willing to negotiate with the Soviets. For instance, Reston acknowledged that Reagan "slips into his hellfire religion once in a while" but stated "he is no longer a prisoner to his past anti-Communist pronouncements." He saw the president's openness to diplomacy as electoral politics, but also noted the effect McFarlane and Shultz had in convincing the president that his Soviet policy was ineffective and needed some alterations.<sup>437</sup>

After his Year of Peace speech, the *New York Times* opinion page began to consider the possibility that Reagan had changed tactics toward the Soviets. The newspaper stated that Reagan had "minimized" his blunt language. The piece surmised that Reagan saw the political pitfalls of continuing to use bellicose rhetoric to frame the arms race; therefore, he decided to highlight agreements and similarities.<sup>438</sup> Noting the stylistic rather than substantive change in foreign policy, Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale accused the president of dealing with "the politics of the problem instead of the problem itself."<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 510.

<sup>437</sup> "Reagan's Gentler Melody," *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 1984.

<sup>438</sup> "Evil Empire...Come In, Evil Empire," *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1984.

<sup>439</sup> "Reagan's Address: Trying a New Tactic," *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1984.

Echoing Mondale's partisan assertions, the conservative standard bearer of the *New York Times* opinion page, William Safire, noted Reagan's campaign-inspired attempt "get right with peace." He wryly viewed Vice President Bush's visit with new Soviet Premier Constantine Chernenko shortly after Andropov's February 1984 death as a sign of Reagan's drive for reelection. In contrast to 1983, when Reagan was "heaving rotten tomatoes at the Evil Empire," Safire noted the president's cheerleading of the Chernenko-Bush meeting, calling it "very fruitful."<sup>440</sup> Safire saw Reagan as a "split screen candidate" who was attempting to assuage the conservatives in his party by being "Mr. Tough Guy" and the centrists as "Mr. Nice Guy." "Mr. Tough Guy" stressed his strong opposition to communism, while "Mr. Nice Guy's" theme was "what evil empire?" He promised the centrists a summit to "get acquainted" with the new general secretary, renewed arms control efforts, and a reduction in the rate of defense spending increases. Safire presciently predicted an introductory summit, but it occurred only after Chernenko's death.<sup>441</sup>

The news media were slow to accept the rhetorical freeze during an election year. Though the president had changed his anti-Soviet rhetoric, he continued dealing with the political baggage of "evil empire" during the 1984 presidential campaign. Television news brought the issue back into public consciousness. Starting with the first anniversary of the Evil Empire speech, it reminded viewers of rhetorical rearmament. Reagan's speech to the 1984 Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in

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<sup>440</sup> "Campaign Diplomacy," William Safire, *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 1984. Safire is referring to the February 1984 meeting between Vice President Bush and new general secretary, Konstantin Chernenko during Bush's trip to the funeral of Yuri Andropov.

<sup>441</sup> "Split Screen Candidate," *New York Times*. Mar. 9, 1984.

Columbus, Ohio symbolized his ascendant pragmatism. Rather than castigating the Soviets as “evil,” Reagan prayed for the Kremlin’s spiritual transformation. Though the news media recognized the revisions in Reagan’s rhetoric, it stressed “evil empire” as political shorthand for his true anti-Soviet ideology.<sup>442</sup>

As Reagan highlighted his religious nature, the news media reported on the president’s church attendance. Following Reagan’s March 1984 NAE address, the president’s Christmas-Easter church-going habits came to light. Since Reagan’s November 1983 visit with American troops near the Demilitarized Zone in South Korea, he had not attended public services. The president had not visited a Washington D.C. church in nine months, since June 1983. Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill noted the disparity between Reagan’s words and deeds, “There’s a man that doesn’t go to church and he talks about prayer.”<sup>443</sup> Reagan spokesperson Larry Speakes explained his absence as a form of altruism, saying the president did not wish to inconvenience fellow parishioners by subjecting them to metal detectors upon entering church. Speakes noted that Reagan worshiped actively but privately. Ironically, progressive sects of Christianity accepted Reagan’s “private worship” more easily than traditional organizations like the NAE that stressed regular church attendance. The hypocrisy in Reagan’s behavior was lost on the administration. Speakes claimed the president was not trying to make moralist an issue even while campaigning on the issue during the NAE address.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> *The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather*, Mar. 6, 1984 5:36:20 pm. *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, Mar. 6, 1984, 5:30 pm.

<sup>443</sup> “President Skips Church For Parishioners’ Sakes,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 8, 1984.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*; Outline: National Association of Evangelicals: Mar. 6, 1984. Series I: Richard G. Darman Subject Files, Office of Speechwriting and Research, folder 1, Feb. 13, 1984 and Feb. 16, 1984; John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39602>. (accessed Apr. 5, 2010).

### **Reagan's 1984 NAE Address: Praying for the "Evil Empire"**

Reagan's NAE speech in 1984 is important because the president learned the lessons of the 1983 address by promoting a more conciliatory and diplomatic election year message. His discussion of the Soviet Union lacked show-stopping polemics. Rather, the president piously intoned: "We must never stop praying that the leaders, like so many of their own people, might come to know the liberating nature of faith in God."<sup>445</sup> Instead allowing foreign policy to complicate the narrative, the 1984 address hinged on social issues. Believing that the 1980 election marked a turning point when America began triumphing over "liberal attitudes" by "regaining its religious and moral bearings," Reagan solidified his base by again pronouncing his support for school prayer and his opposition to abortion.<sup>446</sup> He paid lip-service to social issues, and even more shrewdly the president did not take the opportunity build on his evil empire rhetoric of the previous year.

Aside from discussing religion in public life, Reagan congratulated himself for instilling American foreign policy with "new firmness and direction" and continuing to "tell the truth" about the Soviet Union. While Reagan did not renounce previous anti-Soviet statements, he also did not spew forth unpopular invective against Moscow. Electioneering and the negative reaction to the 1983 speech imbued the 1984 NAE address with caution. The three week period prior to the speech consisted of vetting and formulating the president's address. No less than nine people contributed to an outline

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<sup>445</sup> "Reagan Sees U.S. Regaining 'Moral Bearings,'" *New York Times*, Mar. 7, 1984; "Excerpts From President's Address," *New York Times*, Mar. 7, 1984. Outline: National Association of Evangelicals: Mar. 6, 1984. Series I: Richard G. Darman Subject Files, Office of Speechwriting and Research, folder 1, Feb. 13, 1984 and Feb. 16, 1984, Reagan Library.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

for the 1984 NAE address, including Dolan, the president, and chief of staff James Baker.<sup>447</sup> By contrast, Dolan had drafted much of the 1983 speech alone during the week before the NAE convention.<sup>448</sup> While reasserting the religious and social aspects of the Evil Empire speech, Reagan avoided controversial foreign policy pronouncements. Instead, he concentrated on the social issues that energized the president's religious base.

Reagan's NAE address in 1984 resonated in domestic politics rather than foreign policy. He shied away from the polemics of 1983 by focusing on popular evangelical issues such as passing a constitutional amendment allowing school prayer. The NAE resolved to endorse a voluntary school prayer amendment and supported "equal access" to public high schools for religious student groups. This resolution coincided with a Senate debate over a constitutional amendment allowing school prayer. While the resolution accommodated the administration's push for a school prayer amendment, NAE President Arthur Gay attempted to stop the growing impression of policy coordination between the administration and the NAE. Gay pointed to the formal disagreement some delegates had in 1983 with Reagan's opposition to the Nuclear Freeze. The preponderance of evidence suggests that the administration and Dugan did coordinate their political maneuverings, especially on foreign policy.<sup>449</sup>

While the school prayer amendment proved popular among the NAE, some members viewed it with skepticism. For instance, Reverend Arthur Gish, an antinuclear activist from Athens, Ohio, noted: "I'm not impressed by people acknowledging God. I

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> Dated drafts of the Evil Empire Speech are located in folder 6, Series I: Presidential Records, Anthony Dolan Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Reagan Library.

<sup>449</sup> "Evangelicals Back Reagan, But Reject Political Label," *Washington Post*, Mar. 10, 1984. "Strongest Effort Yet to Put Organized Prayer in Schools," *New York Times*, Mar. 8, 1984.

really think we are being used ... that this is a smoke screen to divert us from critical issues in this country, and I wish we would not fall into that trap.”<sup>450</sup> Schisms between Christians over their political leanings characterized the debate over the Freeze. Finding agreement among a large group such as the NAE proved difficult. Despite a continuing lack of consensus over politics, Reagan’s new tone made the convention notable.

The television news media were ready for further rhetorical fireworks. Instead, the story became the calculating tone of the president. For example, Bill Plante’s report on *The CBS Evening News* concluded, “This year’s rhetoric to the same group was much more restrained.” Reagan’s re-election campaign had targeted the NAE because two-thirds of its members had voted for him in 1980 after a majority voted for Carter in 1976.<sup>451</sup> On NBC, reporter Chris Wallace declared the president was “preacher today” by again supporting a constitutional amendment requiring school prayer. Wallace sensed benevolence in Reagan’s rhetorical freeze: “A year ago he told this group the Soviet Union is the Evil Empire. Today he said he’d not only negotiate with Godless Communists, he’d pray for them.” The report then cut to Reagan saying, “We will never stop praying that the leaders, like so many of their own people, might come to know the liberating nature of faith in God.”<sup>452</sup> The president was intent upon keeping this swing constituency in his column

### **The Reelection Campaign and the Freeze**

The television news media also rehashed Reagan’s “evil empire” rhetoric after his address to the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 24,

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> *The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather*, Mar. 6, 1984 5:36:20 pm.

<sup>452</sup> *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, Mar. 6. 1984. 5:30 pm.

1984. In attendance that day was Soviet Foreign Secretary Andrei Gromyko.

Throughout 1984, Reagan had softened his tone and tried to build bridges with the Kremlin. His rhetorical freeze proved domestically effective, with the notable exceptions the news media, liberal Democrats, and Walter Mondale. In this first address before a senior Soviet official, Reagan declared for an international audience that 1984 was a “year of peace.” The news media tempered his peace overtures by reprising “evil empire.” Tom Brokaw noted on *NBC Nightly News* that “eighteen months ago the president described the Soviet Union as “an evil empire that would end up on the ash heap of history.” Chris Wallace reported with surprise regarding Reagan’s “moderate and conciliatory” words for the Soviets. Wallace’s report showed the president break into a folksy observation about how closely together the Soviet and American ambassadors sat in the General Assembly. The president affably stated, “There’s every reason we should do all that’s possible to shorten that distance.”<sup>453</sup> ABC’s “Issues ‘84” report with Richard Threlkeld made a point of mentioning that Reagan shook hands with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko “for a full twenty-three seconds.” Threlkeld called the president’s UN speech the equivalent of giving the Soviet Union “a verbal bear hug.”<sup>454</sup>

Reagan proposed an exchange of nuclear inspectors and five year military plans as well as consultations about regional problems between the Kremlin and Washington. Rather than seeking rapprochement out of necessity, Reagan wanted better relations simply because, “We’ve gotta live in this world together.” Also, according to Wallace,

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<sup>453</sup> *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, Sept. 24, 1984. 5:30 pm.

<sup>454</sup> *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*, Sept. 28, 1984 5:36 pm.



administration officials said, “The U.S. now has military strength to bargain with.”<sup>455</sup>

The White House believed the rebuilt military was strong enough to trade away some pieces in hopes of gaining Moscow’s good will.

Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale shared the mainstream news media’s skepticism, but emphasized Reagan’s oratory for different reasons. He questioned the consistency and sincerity of Reagan’s conciliatory address to the United Nations. Calling his shift in rhetoric a “deathbed conversion” done for political gains, Mondale claimed the president’s diplomatic overture would cease after the election. The Democratic nominee questioned Reagan’s commitment to arms control, saying that he had gone from “extend[ing] the arms race into the heavens” to seeking arms control agreements. Reminding voters of the president’s war-like rhetoric, Mondale repeated rhetorical rearmament’s highlights, “Gone is the talk of nuclear warning shots. Gone is winnable nuclear war. Gone is the evil empire.”<sup>456</sup> Out of the desperation caused by anemic poll numbers, Mondale demanded the president account for his rhetorical shift. On September 30, Mondale called for a presidential press conference to account for Reagan’s failed Soviet policy and explain whether he still considered the Soviet Union “an evil empire.”<sup>457</sup> Arguing that the president had a credibility gap, Mondale claimed Reagan either believed his “evil empire” rhetoric or could not be trusted.

Faced with the contradictions between ideological “evil empire” rhetoric and his more pragmatic 1984 speeches, the question of consistency came during a debate with Mondale. Reagan defended rhetorical rearmament: “I retract nothing that I have said. I

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<sup>455</sup> *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, Sept. 24, 1984. 5:30 pm.

<sup>456</sup> “Mondale Paints Shift by Reagan As Not Sincere,” *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 1984.

<sup>457</sup> “Mondale Steps Up Attack On Reagan,” *New York Times*, Oct. 1, 1984.

believe that many of the things they have done are evil in any concept of morality that we have.” He also, however, espoused the pragmatism of 1984: “I also recognize that as the two great superpowers in the world, we have to live with each other.... I suggested that, certainly, it was to their common interest, along with ours, to avoid conflict in an attempt to save the world and remove the nuclear weapons.” Reagan concluded his answer by putting a positive spin on his earlier approach, “I just thought when I came into office it was time that there was some realistic talk to and about the Soviet Union. And we did get their attention.”<sup>458</sup>

The president’s remarks demonstrated the divergent ways he dealt with the Soviet Union during his first term. Reagan embraced “evil empire” while simultaneously casting himself as the peace candidate. The quotation illustrates the combination of hawkish views with ascendant pragmatism in the administration’s Soviet policy. Reagan’s remarks displayed an increasingly diplomatic tone. He acknowledged that “we have to live with each other,” the essence of his newfound Soviet policy.<sup>459</sup> Despite Reagan’s inconsistency, the American people did not find a fatal flaw in his reasoning. The president won re-election in a landslide. While foreign policy had the potential to lose the election for Reagan, the economic recovery won the election for him.<sup>460</sup>

Reagan’s pragmatic tenor toward the Kremlin did, however, have the added advantage of helping to neutralize the Nuclear Freeze movement. While the Freeze had peaked by 1982-1983, it remained a well financed and heavily publicized movement

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<sup>458</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39296>.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 434-435, 453.

through the 1984 presidential election. The reelection of the Freeze's primary political target, President Reagan, more than any other single event rendered the Freeze irrelevant. The president's new and popular diplomatic tone allowed him to co-opt the intellectual underpinnings of the Freeze, and move toward arms control on his own terms. Leaders of the Freeze argue that they deserve retroactive credit for arms control and Reagan's rapprochement with Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>461</sup> Yet, arms control had been one of Reagan's primary goals dating back to his days as an actor.<sup>462</sup> By rearming the United States militarily and rhetorically, Reagan believed he could negotiate the peace provided by arms control through increased military strength. Ironically, political pragmatism did more damage to the Nuclear Freeze movement than did confrontation.

### **Reagan Embraces Pragmatic Diplomacy**

Reagan's chances to add substance to his rhetorical freeze came on March 9, 1985 when Konstantin Chernenko died and was replaced by the reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>463</sup> At Chernenko's funeral, Vice President Bush delivered an invitation from Reagan to Gorbachev asking for a summit in Washington. Gorbachev accepted the invitation, but insisted that the meeting occur at a neutral setting. By July, plans solidified for Gorbachev and Reagan to meet at Geneva in November.<sup>464</sup>

In preparation, Reagan earnestly studied weekly briefings prepared by NSC Soviet expert Jack Matlock dealing with: Gorbachev's personality, Soviet ties to Eastern

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<sup>461</sup> Two works that argue for a greater role for the anti-nuclear movement than the facts support are David Cortright's *Peace Works* and Lawrence Wittner's *The Struggle Against the Bomb*, Vol. 3.

<sup>462</sup> Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, ix-xi.

<sup>463</sup> Jack F. Matlock, Jr. *Autopsy on an Empire* (New York: Random House, 1995), 86-89; McFarlane, *Special Trust*, 301.

<sup>464</sup> Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 287.

Europe, the Soviet/Russian view of their place in the world, the Soviet's image of the United States, and the respective roles of the communist party, the military, and the KGB. Matlock stressed the importance of making progress on ending the bilateral urge to fight Third World proxy wars, increasing people-to-people exchanges, and laying the ground work for discussing arms control in future summits. Describing Reagan's thorough preparation, McFarlane said the president "became a near-Russophile over the course of the next six months, studying each paper thoroughly and waiting eagerly for the next."<sup>465</sup>

As the summit approached, McFarlane was in charge of launching a media blitz directed at European allies, Congress, and the American people to elucidate the new direction of Soviet policy. Reagan's role in this campaign consisted of giving speeches explaining his rhetorical freeze in hopes of bolstering his political position. A successful meeting with the new reform-minded Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze further encouraged the president. Yet, as he moved toward rapprochement, Reagan refused to yield any moral ground to the Kremlin. In an address to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1985, he kept the Soviets off balance by emphasizing the ongoing global conflict against communist aggression in El Salvador, the Horn of Africa, and Southeast Asia.<sup>466</sup>

Even as McFarlane helped redirect administration foreign policy, the mainstream news media dismissed Reagan's rapprochement as insincere. Instead of seeing the change, *The New York Times* pointed to a "hyperbole gap" between Reagan's words and actions as his second term commenced. Calling the Evil Empire speech "legendary" in

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<sup>465</sup> McFarlane, *Special Trust*, 307-308.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid, 312-314.

1985, opinion-makers such as *New York Times* reporters Mark Green and Tony Kaye used the address to demonstrate the incongruity between Reagan's denunciations of the Soviets and the enthusiastic rhetoric regarding his upcoming summit meeting with Gorbachev.

The article proposed that two "President Reagans" existed, one a moderate "President Mondale" and the other a polemical "President Buchanan," a reference to the former Nixon speechwriter, conservative pundit, and former Reagan operative Patrick Buchanan. It predicted that "President Buchanan" would win.<sup>467</sup> In an August 24 interview, the sway of a "President Buchanan" was apparent as the November summit drew near. Reagan denounced Moscow for having an "expansionist program" designed to create a one-world communist state. Despite the president's undiplomatic assertion, he showed an understanding of the Soviet mentality absent in earlier denunciations. He offered the possibility that Soviet expansionism resulted from "their fears and suspicions that the rest of us in the world mean them harm."<sup>468</sup> Matlock's tutorials forced the president to reassess the reasons for "evil" within the Soviet empire.

In Moscow and Washington, a renewed emphasis on negotiations existed in part because of Reagan's polemics. The Kremlin—with its first healthy leader in years—was eager to engage the United States. After appraising the military reaction to rhetorical rearmament as, "intense preparation...for a state of war," Soviet politicians appeared anxious for talks. Moreover, among some parts of Gorbachev's youthful cadre, the "evil empire" moniker represented an appropriate punishment for Soviet aggression in

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<sup>467</sup> "Mr. Reagan's Slippery Words," *New York Times*, Jul. 7, 1985.

<sup>468</sup> "President Hoping To End 'Suspicious' At Summit Parley," *New York Times*, Aug. 25, 1985.

Afghanistan. Many in the younger generation “felt that we deserved it.”<sup>469</sup> Soviet Foreign Ministry official Sergei Tarasenko contended that upon taking power Gorbachev’s government assessed worldwide perceptions of the Soviet Union as “poor.” Repairing Moscow’s international image became one of the first tasks of Gorbachev’s regime “so the Soviet Union wouldn’t be viewed as ‘the evil empire.’”<sup>470</sup> Regardless of the reason, Reagan’s words helped compel the Soviet power structure to act.

Gorbachev and Reagan strived for good superpower relations for their own political reasons, but both leaders downplayed such considerations by raising the trite goal of world peace as an impetus for their meeting. In a letter to Reagan from September 1985, Gorbachev assessed both super powers as cognizant of the necessity to coexist because of the catastrophe that would ensue from military confrontation: “Judging by what you have said, Mr. President, you also regard a military conflict between the USSR and USA as inadmissible.”<sup>471</sup>

Gorbachev’s words fit his conciliatory approach, while Reagan’s response to this letter proved more surprising considering his heritage as a Cold Warrior. The president spoke pragmatically: “You suggested in your letter that we might reach an understanding on the inadmissibility of nuclear war...it is indeed my view that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Furthermore, the president endorsed the rhetorical freeze as he asserted: “I believe it is most important to give the most careful considerations to our words. Experience of the past has been that overly vague or rhetorical language has led to expectations which, given the competitive aspect of our

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<sup>469</sup> Thomas Nichols, *Winning the World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 175.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>471</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 624.

relationship to which you referred in your letter, cannot be sustained.”<sup>472</sup> In disowning reckless oratory for rational diplomacy, the president offered peace within a realistic framework.

Leading up to the summit, Gorbachev began a charm offensive directed at world public opinion. In August, three months prior to the summit, Gorbachev gave an extended and frank interview to *Time*. The general secretary also greeted a delegation of United States senators in Moscow during September.<sup>473</sup> In October, he visited America’s often obstinate ally France and addressed the French Parliament.<sup>474</sup> Gorbachev’s tour showed him as more sophisticated, media savvy, and earnest than past Soviet leaders.

Meanwhile, Reagan moved to reconcile his ideology and pragmatism. When asked in October by Ted Koppel of ABC News whether or not he still considered the Soviet Union an “evil empire,” the president declared that the downing of KAL 007 and the Soviets’ repeated calls for communist world domination had proven his assessment correct.<sup>475</sup> During a White House interview session with Western European journalists just prior to the November summit, Reagan said: “Yes, I used the term the “evil empire”... yet I have a few quotes of my own that they have said; one in which they even called us ‘cannibals.’ So, I think both of us have stopped that language, thinking that we’ll get farther at the meetings if we come together to try and eliminate the need for such talk.”<sup>476</sup> Reagan implied during the interview that he now adhered to a rhetorical

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid, 629-630.

<sup>473</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 288.

<sup>474</sup> Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Mandate for Peace* (New York: Richardson and Steirman, 1987), 93.

<sup>475</sup> “The Elusive Lenin,” *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 1985.

<sup>476</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38044>. (accessed Apr. 5, 2010).

freeze in his anti-Soviet polemics. Rhetorical rearmament had served its purpose by spurring the Kremlin to temper attacks and come to the bargaining table. The summit concluded a period of intense rhetorical confrontation from 1979 to 1985, and marked the beginning of a constructive dialogue.

The new tone of the Geneva Summit exceeded Reagan's expectations. He would later call the meeting the pinnacle of his presidency. As a result of the president's pragmatism, civil discourse developed between the leaders. Reagan's moderate oratory notwithstanding, the summit occurred in part because rhetorical rearmament created an environment that necessitated a meeting. The summit achieved minor substantive results. The superpowers agreed on a series of cultural exchanges, and a joint statement calling for the acceleration of arms control talks and a resolution that a nuclear war must never be fought.<sup>477</sup> More important, Gorbachev and Reagan liked each other. The personal chemistry between the two men boded well for the future of arms control and superpower relations owing to Reagan's strong reliance on personal experiences in forming his opinions.<sup>478</sup> The president followed up on the promise of pragmatism in his 1984 reelection campaign by agreeing to a summit meeting that turned his words into actions.

### **Conclusion**

The Evil Empire speech helped define the campaign rhetoric of his reelection bid. By increasing Cold War tensions, Reagan had exacerbated his major political weakness in the eyes of voters, his bellicose image. A rhetorical freeze improved the president's chances of reelection by addressing his biggest liability. Reagan's speech to the NAE in

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<sup>477</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There In the Blue*, 306, 313 and 477.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid*, 313.



1984 best exemplifies his new rhetorical freeze. Reagan courted this group with a discussion of their agreement on social issues, but most important for the broader national audience, he spoke charitably of the Soviet Union. The moralistic foreign policy rhetoric of his address to the NAE in 1983 had been replaced by the restrained and compassionate words of 1984.

The time from fall 1983 to autumn 1985 demonstrates Reagan's skill as a politician in maneuvering away from his image from unpopular Cold Warrior to that of a pragmatic statesman. The president followed up on the promise of pragmatism in his 1984 reelection campaign by agreeing to a summit meeting that turned his words into actions. Along the way, not only did the KAL shoot-down and Gorbachev's ascension work in the president's favor, but he used these events to his advantage in casting himself as a man of peace. The words and deeds of 1983 on both sides of the Iron Curtain helped compelled a return to summitry. Reagan's success over this period of time resulted from learning from his earlier political miscalculation, calibrating his reelection bid to the theme of peace, and his willingness to grab the olive branch offered by Gorbachev.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: TOWARD RHETORICAL DISARMAMENT

The trend toward diplomacy in Ronald Reagan's second term helped lower Cold War tensions. With many domestic and international observers continued to view him as an unreconstructed ideologue, the president's first term rhetorical rearmament turned into a blessing. His anticommunist bona fides allowed him to negotiate more freely with Moscow than a lesser Cold Warrior. The president did not move in a straight line toward diplomacy and reconciliation with Moscow, however. Throughout his second term, he continued firing occasional rhetorical shots at the Kremlin. Reagan's hatred for communism remained unchanged. The president did finally disavow rhetorical rearmament during his visit to Red Square. Reagan possessed a partner in Mikhail Gorbachev who wanted reform the Soviet Union. Attempting to keep the reforms flowing, he helped Gorbachev domestically by discarding "evil empire" phraseology. The president provided political cover for both sides to continue discussions about how to end the Cold War.

The domestic political situation was relatively amenable to Reagan's diplomacy. The opposition of religious conservatives to improving relations with the Soviet Union was more hyperbole than reality. Changing tactics toward Moscow held the possibility of causing an evangelical revolt against administration foreign policy. Yet, Reagan counted the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) as a group supportive of his foreign policy thanks to their coordination sparked by the Evil Empire speech. Conservatives within the NAE had signed on to Reagan administration foreign policy by 1986 at the

conclusion of the Peace, Freedom, and Security Studies process, their program to draft a foreign policy position. The NAE leadership had shifted their focus to the culture wars. Meanwhile, televangelist presidential candidate Pat Robertson failed to resonate in the evangelical heartland of the South against Vice President Bush during the 1988 GOP primaries. Most religious conservatives remained silent as conservatives such as Jessie Helms, George Will, Paul Weyrich, and Richard Viguerie railed against Reagan's diplomacy.

The president demonstrated a willingness to change tactics toward the Soviet Union. Reagan had wanted to talk with his Soviet counterpart dating back to Brezhnev, but only on his terms. Gorbachev's ascent to power and determination to engage Reagan, coupled with the president's reciprocated warmth toward the Soviet leader altered the dynamics of the Cold War. In addition, Gorbachev was willing to negotiate on Reagan's terms, with the exception of their disagreement over the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), Reagan's plan to put a missile shield in outer space. The president trusted his personal chemistry with the general secretary more than his ideological wariness of the Soviet system. Reagan's positive personal experiences with Gorbachev laid the groundwork for arms control and the symbolic end of Cold War tensions.

President Reagan did not know during his first term that he would have an opportunity to help end the Cold War. Such a scenario seemed improbable, even to the optimistic Reagan. He took steps in his first term to bind together his conservative electoral coalition, which allowed greater leeway to act pragmatically in his second term. Reagan may have been the only person in the United States who could have set in motion

the end of the Cold War. Anyone else would have had to face the opposition of Ronald Reagan. The president's warm personal relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev was integral to ending the Cold War. Connecting with Gorbachev helped convince the president he should speak in a new way about the Soviet Union, in the process defusing over forty years of tensions.

### **Costarring with a Russian Errol Flynn**

Reagan had always been skeptical of the Kremlin and unwilling to consider the potential benefits of détente. The president did, however, correspond with his Soviet counterparts. After surviving the attempt on his life in March 1981, Reagan reached out to General Secretary Brezhnev.<sup>479</sup> Neither side could rise above polemics, thus dooming any potential talks. Brezhnev died in November 1982. He was replaced by long-time KGB chief, Yuri Andropov, who was already running the Kremlin behind the scenes owing to Brezhnev's failing health. Andropov facilitated the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, placing him in the Politburo as the heir-apparent. Andropov was considered a reformer among many in the West during his brief fifteen month reign. He succumbed to kidney disease in February 1984. His replacement, the frail Konstantin Chernenko, was in worse health than his predecessor. Chernenko was a Brezhnev lieutenant wary of reform. He lasted a mere thirteen months in office. By the time of Chernenko's death on March 10, 1985, Mikhail Sergevich Gorbachev had maneuvered into the role of successor.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> "Ronald Reagan letter to Leonid Brezhnev" Apr. 24, 1981, Presidential Handwriting File, Reagan Library.

<sup>480</sup> Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 272-278.

Gorbachev's ascent to power was rapid. His acclaim in the Western media came even faster as he sought to improve superpower relations during his first months in office. Reagan was suited to costar in this geopolitical drama with a media darling. He famously stated that he had co-starred with Errol Flynn, an actor whose star outshined his own. The point of the quip was that ego would not get in the way of diplomatic progress. He was more than willing to share the stage. Reagan, like any good actor, worried about personal chemistry. For the president, the personal was political. Experience shaped his opinion of an issue, idea, or leader. Gorbachev was the sort of engaging leader with whom Reagan could connect. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously told the president in late 1984 that Gorbachev was a man with whom the West could do business.<sup>481</sup> Reagan agreed, "There was warmth in his face and his style, not the coldness bordering on hatred I'd seen in most senior Soviet officials I'd met until then."<sup>482</sup> Reagan would have difficulty finding evil in Gorbachev. This positive personal experience allowed him to work with Gorbachev, although his ideological anticommunism remained intact.<sup>483</sup>

The president had not changed his mind about the Soviet system. Before leaving for his first summit in November 1985, Gregory Fossedal, an advisor and *Wall Street Journal* editorialist, gave Reagan a Darth Vader action figure, which he called a "special model of Mikhail Gorbachev." The gift alluded to critics branding the Evil Empire

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<sup>481</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: Harper Collins 1993), p. 459-462. She discusses her impression that Gorbachev was a different kind of Soviet leader; Geoffrey Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty* (London: MacMillan 1994), 317, 358-360. Thatcher's foreign secretary argues that her endorsement of Gorbachev helped prompt Reagan to abandon "evil empire" rhetoric; John O'Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2006), 84-85.

<sup>482</sup> Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 635.

<sup>483</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 673.

speech as the “Darth Vader” speech and SDI as “Star Wars.” He responded: “You know they really are an evil empire.” Fossedal replied that he was glad to hear the president say so again. Reagan declared: “Well, I’ve never had any regrets or retractions about that.”<sup>484</sup> Moreover, a *Newsweek* poll prior to the summit found that fifty-three percent of Americans agreed with Reagan’s characterization of the Soviet Union as an evil empire.<sup>485</sup> The American people and their president were on guard going into the Geneva summit.

The most significant development of this first summit was the flowering personal relationship between the two leaders. Reagan began seeing Gorbachev like his domestic political foe, House Speaker Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill (D-MA), as a friendly rival. The president personally connected with him. Of supreme importance for Reagan, Gorbachev “could tell jokes about himself and even about his country, and I grew to like him more.”<sup>486</sup> As the president cultivated the personal relationship that would improve diplomacy, his hawkish speechwriters worried that Reagan had not taken a public stand denouncing Gorbachev for human rights abuses. Reagan cut three personal condemnations of Gorbachev out of his closing comments on the Geneva summit, remarks crafted by speechwriters Pat Buchanan and Peggy Noonan. He told Buchanan: “Pat, this has been a good meeting. I think I can work with this guy. I can’t just keep poking him in the eye.”<sup>487</sup> The tension between concern over Reagan’s diplomatic

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<sup>484</sup> *Washington Post* “Thunder on the Right; Journalist Gregory Fossedal, ‘Star Wars’ and the Conservative Call to Arms,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 22, 1985.

<sup>485</sup> “Newsweek Poll Respondents Favor Arms Treaty,” *Associated Press*, Nov. 16, 1985.

<sup>486</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 639.

<sup>487</sup> Richard Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 446.

impulses and the political popularity of those instincts would strain relations with some conservatives.<sup>488</sup>

The summit was a triumph of pragmatic conservatism and a boon to Reagan's personal popularity. Press reports praised the president's performance for acting diplomatically, while standing firm on the American agenda such as protecting SDI. A poll by Richard Wirthlin showed that eighty-three percent of people who watched his congressional address about the summit approved of Reagan's performance. Both conservatives and moderates agreed that the president had performed well. Reagan succeeded in part because rhetorical rearmament compelled Gorbachev to seek a meeting. By virtue of connecting with Gorbachev, nuclear tensions decreased. No substantive agreement emerged, but Reagan and Gorbachev bonded in a way that boded well for world peace.<sup>489</sup>

The leaders met again for a hastily-called mini-summit in Reykjavik, Iceland in October 1986. Gorbachev's primary goal was to make the United States abide by the Anti-Ballistic Weapons Treaty of 1972, which would mean confining SDI to the laboratory. Reagan meanwhile hoped to cut the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), where the Soviets held a distinct advantage. Shultz presented the president with a compromise plan calling for compliance with the ABM treaty for ten more years. During the first five years of proposed plan, strategic nuclear weapons would be reduced fifty percent. The treaty would be renewed for another five years if all ballistic missiles had been eliminated by the end of year five. Gorbachev found the

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<sup>488</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 676-677.

<sup>489</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 307-308, 313.

details imprecise and instead proposed eliminating all nuclear weapons by the year 2000. Reagan liked the idea, but balked at Gorbachev's continued insistence that SDI be confined to the laboratory as part of any deal. Negotiations broke down on this point. The president believed SDI would benefit all peoples and was planning on sharing the technology. Reagan never saw the missile shield as offensive, while Gorbachev could not stop thinking of the military advantage the United States would gain if SDI became operational.<sup>490</sup> Despite the president's idealistic impulses, he managed to look tough at the negotiating table by walking out over SDI. He would make no deal to limit SDI research to the laboratory. Yet, discussing the abolition of nuclear weapons had the potential to sour conservatives on Reagan.

The American people felt more confidence in Reagan's superpower diplomacy than at any time in his presidency after he returned from Reykjavik. For the first time, a majority of Americans believed he and Gorbachev would reach a nuclear arms control agreement. Moreover, seventy-two percent of Americans now thought Reagan was successfully handling Soviet relations, a number that jumped eleven points since the summit. Conversely, the seeds of doubt sown among skeptics of diplomacy began to grow.<sup>491</sup> By almost bargaining away the entire American nuclear arsenal, Reagan drew the ire of foreign policy realists, including Nixon and Kissinger. Kissinger believed Reagan's spontaneous willingness to attempt nuclear abolition undermined the Western alliance. Margaret Thatcher felt like she and other European allies suddenly had no firm

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<sup>490</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 685-692.

<sup>491</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 692.



footing with the president.<sup>492</sup> Nixon and Kissinger teamed up to defend the existing Cold War order while attempting to undermine what they saw as destabilizing diplomacy.<sup>493</sup>

Nixon and Kissinger made their doubts public in an April 1987 joint op-ed column published in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post* in which they cautioned against making an arms control deal for the sake of a deal. They characterized Gorbachev as a rival with whom Reagan would have trouble matching wits. These détente-era leaders believed the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty, which would eliminate all intermediate range nuclear weapons in Europe, was the “wrong kind of deal” and could create the “most profound crisis” in the history of the NATO alliance. They claimed that the Kremlin needed to continue to fear a strategic nuclear war in Europe. Removal of the intermediate nuclear forces would reopen the gap in deterrence between east and west. The former president and former secretary of state took aim at Reagan’s hope for nuclear abolition: “Any Western leader who indulges in the Soviets’ disingenuous fantasies of a nuclear-free world courts unimaginable perils.” They worried that Reagan was endorsing a “false peace.”<sup>494</sup>

Nixon had been warning Reagan privately about Gorbachev for some time. In a memo from 1986, he asserted that Gorbachev used a stiletto knife in negotiations and “beneath that velvet glove he always wears there is a steel fist.” Nixon called Gorbachev a “superb actor” who was a better liar than most diplomats. Chief of Staff Howard Baker worried that Nixon’s opposition might make Gorbachev less likely to continue

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<sup>492</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 353-354; Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 471-472.

<sup>493</sup> James Mann. *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Viking 2009), 48-49.

<sup>494</sup> *National Review* “A Real Peace.” Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. May 22, 1987. *National Review* republished the Nixon/Kissinger editorial after it ran in the Apr. 26, 1987 *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*.

negotiations. Nixon believed that statement was a ploy to get Nixon and Kissinger to back down from their criticism. The former president thought that Gorbachev needed arms control agreements more than the Americans did. He needed to focus resources on his reform agenda. Nixon wanted a tough deal for Moscow that would be palatable to conservative hawks. The former president argued that “failing to reach an agreement because of adherence to principle would be helpful rather than harmful,” noting that scenario had made Reagan more popular after Reykjavik. Nixon asserted privately that Shultz had sold the INF Treaty to Reagan and Baker.<sup>495</sup> He worried about the “euphoria” created by the imminent agreement. In a handwritten note to Reagan after the December 1987 Washington Summit, Nixon warned: “Just remember, Rome wasn’t built in a day and it takes more than three days to civilize Moscow.” Nixon admitted that he might be “overly suspicious” of Moscow’s intentions, but retained his reservations regarding “the negotiating crowd.”<sup>496</sup>

Domestic conservative concern grew over Reagan’s pragmatism toward the Kremlin as the 1988 presidential election approached. By 1986, potential Republican presidential candidates worried that Reagan had softened. One leading candidate, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, asserted that the president was rekindling the “dangerous myth” of détente. Dark horse candidate Jack Kemp called on the president to be true to his anticommunist principles: “Mr. President, hold fast to your magnificent vision and

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<sup>495</sup> 1986-April 1987. Box 1. Post-presidential Correspondence with Ronald W. Reagan (1974-1993). Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

<sup>496</sup> April 1987-1988. Box 1. Post-presidential Correspondence with Ronald W. Reagan (1974-1993). Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation.

your realism about the Soviet empire.”<sup>497</sup> Conservative opinion maker William F. Buckley, Jr., noted concern on the Right that Gorbachev was “pushing Reagan around.” The publisher agreed with diplomacy skeptics that détente wrongly presupposed that the Soviets no longer desired to conquer the world. He argued that SDI created a military technology gap Gorbachev knew he could not close. The West would gain nuclear superiority, while the Warsaw Pact faced permanent nuclear inferiority.<sup>498</sup> As long as SDI remained intact, Buckley allowed that Reagan might strengthen the American position in negotiations.

If Reykjavik was the idealistic summit, then the December 1987 Washington D.C. meeting was the substance summit. Both sides agreed to the zero option proposed by Reagan administration hardliners in 1981 to eliminate all intermediate range nuclear forces in Europe, but under the auspices of the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty. The Soviets acceded to the inspections that American conservatives had long considered the major hurdle to arms control. Conservatives had to assent or face the charge of hypocrisy.<sup>499</sup>

### **Reagan Keeps Conservatives Onboard**

Hardliners had to defend themselves against the double edged sword of the Iran-Contra scandal, uncovered in November 1986. The administration had illegally sold arms to Iran, thus circumventing U.S. sanctions put in place after November 1979 when Iranian students took American hostages at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Those arms sales comprised part of secret negotiations with supposedly moderate elements within

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<sup>497</sup> “The Summit and the GOP in ’88,” *Newsweek*, Oct. 20, 1986.

<sup>498</sup> “Slouching Toward Reykjavik-II,” *National Review*, Nov. 7, 1986.

<sup>499</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 694.

Iran to free American hostages in Lebanon held by terrorist allies of Iran. This action broke the administration policy against negotiating with terrorists and U.S. law. The second part of the scandal further revealed the pragmatic side of Reagan's character. The profits from these illegal arms sales were funneled to the rightist Nicaraguan Contras to fund their war against the ruling Sandinista regime. The administration ignored a congressional ban on military aid to the Contras. Exposure of the scandal weakened administration conservatives. Acting with presidential approval, administration hawks sold weapons to U.S. enemies and broke the law to fund a shady ally. The subsequent departure of many ideologues implicated in the Iran Contra Affair during late 1986 and early 1987 strengthened the hand of moderates.

Reagan did not move in an unalterably pragmatic manner after the hawks had their wings clipped. He continued to deride the Soviet system. Despite the fast pace of negotiations in his second term, Reagan the anticommunist crusader endured. With the Soviets still stinging from the Evil Empire speech four years earlier, the president offered further ideological oratory on June 12, 1987.<sup>500</sup> Reagan's address before the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin called on Gorbachev to speed up the pace of reform by opening the communist bloc. In the most famous speech of his second term, Reagan implored: "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"<sup>501</sup> This bastion of

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<sup>500</sup> "Mix of Militarism and Theology Still Flourishing in USA," *BCC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Vladislav Kozyakov. Mar. 7, 1987.

<sup>501</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34392>. (Apr. 5, 2010)

confrontational anticommunism complicated the job of administration pragmatists since Reagan's speeches often turned into policy.<sup>502</sup> Moderates monitored Reagan's continued affinity for the words of Anthony Dolan and other hawkish speechwriters. Unlike the Evil Empire speech aftermath, Reagan's actions diverged from these words. He was moving in a direction at odds with his ideological speechwriting staff.

Movement conservatives found the late 1980s a disconcerting time. Their hero was proceeding too fast for their liking on arms control agreements. Conservative ideology inherently distrusted superpower arms control treaties, even though two-thirds of the missiles slated to be destroyed by the INF Treaty sat behind the Iron Curtain. Although Reagan led the fight against the SALT II Treaty ratification in 1979, he had supported the zero option since 1981. New Right leader Paul Weyrich took a shorter view, blaming Reagan's pragmatism on Iran-Contra: "Reagan is a weakened president, weakened in spirit as well as clout, and not in a position to make judgments about Gorbachev at this time." Weyrich exemplified a figure on the far right who did not believe Reagan ran his own administration. Despite presidential support for an INF style treaty for six years, Weyrich worried that Reagan was surrendering to pragmatists.<sup>503</sup>

Direct mail virtuoso Richard Viguerie declared: "Conservatives will file for divorce and never reconcile again." In words that sounded like the preamble to legal separation, Viguerie said: "The great conservative dream was that Ronald Reagan, in his last two years, not having to worry about the election or any further aspirations, would set the stage for the conservative revolution." He concluded that "on the contrary, we have

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<sup>502</sup> "Presidential Speechwriters: Lost for Words," *The Economist*, Jul. 12, 1986.

<sup>503</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 439; Richard Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 446.

Ronald Reagan who, freed from all constraints, is endangering what he has already accomplished and behaving in a way that will have a harmful effect on the future. It's ironic."<sup>504</sup> Reagan, however, continued his tough rhetoric toward Moscow. On the eve of the Washington Summit, Reagan declared in his weekly radio address that the Soviets were "adversaries of all who believe in human liberty" for their involvement in Third World conflicts.<sup>505</sup>

Howard Phillips of the Conservative Caucus called the president "a useful idiot for Soviet propaganda" and worried about "creeping Nancyism" by the president to satisfy his moderate wife. Reagan's friend George Will of the *Washington Post* believed the president had expedited the nation's "intellectual disarmament" and said December 8, 1987, the date the INF Treaty was signed, would be remembered "as the day the Cold War was lost."<sup>506</sup> Observers on the far right saw the focus of power resting with the puppet masters not the president, although the zero option had been a tenet of his presidency since the first year. Reagan was acting consistently and according to his own script. Conservative critics started to rely on the erroneous liberal critique that Reagan governed as a mouthpiece of his advisors rather than as an independent actor.

The president demonstrated his continued independence by undermining administration diplomacy. As the State Department finished negotiating the INF Treaty in August 1987, he called on Moscow to give up "imperial adventures" in Afghanistan and Nicaragua. Reagan reiterated his demand that Gorbachev tear down the Berlin Wall

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<sup>504</sup> "Soviets Hint at Major Shift in Military Policy," *Washington Post*, Nov. 30, 1987.

<sup>505</sup> <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=33741&st=&st1=> (accessed Apr. 5, 2010); "Reagan Rhetoric Woos the Right," *Times of London* Nov. 30, 1987.

<sup>506</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 439; Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination*, 446.

and called for free elections in Eastern Europe. He also restated the administration's "new approach to Soviet adventurism. We have said that America has a moral obligation to stand with those brave souls who fight for freedom and against Soviet-sponsored oppression in their homelands."<sup>507</sup> Reagan ignored the détente era roots of the INF Treaty and highlighted his stylistic differences with détente backers. While his rhetoric remained free of détente-era phraseology, his policy moved closer to the disarmament goals of détente.

Writing in the pages of *NAE Washington Insight*, Robert Dugan appeared less interested in foreign policy by the late Reagan years than he had been during the 1982-1983 period. He was concerned with the culture wars. Dugan's newsletter focused on the failed nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court in 1987, a belief that AIDS education was a stalking horse for gay rights, and that the federal government should fund religious educational institutions. Dugan also viewed himself as a power player in the 1988 presidential race, particularly the Republican primaries. His words also betrayed some jealousy toward the high-profile Christian conservatism of Pat Robertson and Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell.<sup>508</sup>

His criticism of the president's relationship with Gorbachev was qualified and secondary to discussions of the culture wars. Dugan cited unsubstantiated rumors in the December 1987 issue of *NAE Washington Insight* that Reagan would be willing to limit SDI testing to further treaty negotiations. He expressed hope that the administration would advocate religious liberty in the Soviet Union. Dugan called for "skeptical

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<sup>507</sup> "Reagan Presses Soviets to End 'Imperial Adventures,'" *United Press International*, Aug. 29, 1987.

<sup>508</sup> *NAE Washington Insight*. Nov. 1987 Vol. 9, No. 11; Dec. 1987 Vol. 9, No. 12; Jan. 1988 Vol. 10, No. 1.

optimism” when evaluating glasnost. Most gratifying for Dugan, he reported that Konstantin Kharchev, Chair of the Council on Religious Affairs, distributed the NAE position paper on foreign policy titled *Guidelines: Peace Freedom and Security Studies* “to Kremlin leaders, apparently to buttress his contention that the West links human rights to international agreements.”<sup>509</sup> The next month Dugan offered the administration a mild rebuke for “disappointingly” refusing “to link human rights directly to the negotiations” on arms control.<sup>510</sup>

On the eve of the Moscow Summit, Dugan expressed relief that talks had broken down between the superpowers regarding eliminating fifty percent of long-range nuclear weapons. He hoped that as a result, Reagan would focus instead on “human rights issues—especially religious liberty.” Dugan, however, was also taken with Gorbachev’s “remarkable statements about harsh Soviet treatment of religion.”<sup>511</sup> He was optimistic that Gorbachev was taking steps to endorse religious liberty. On balance, Dugan continued to support and trust his president.

William F. Buckley, Jr. flatly opposed the INF Treaty and expressed disappointment with Reagan: “I simply couldn’t understand his enthusiasm for a treaty that minimized the number of weapons but wasn’t tied into the larger question of whether Europe was really more safe or less safe than before.” Reagan invited Buckley to the White House for a conversation, but did not change his mind. The president saw that

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<sup>509</sup> *NAE Washington Insight*, Dec. 1987 Vol. 9, No. 12, p.2. After that statement, Dugan plugged the booklet “(For a copy of our PFSS Guidelines, now literally being read by Soviet leaders, send \$1 to our Washington office.)”

<sup>510</sup> *NAE Washington Insight*, Jan. 1988 Vol. 10, No. 1. p. 1 He furthermore bragged about being at the White House for Gorbachev’s arrival. Dugan was not too critical to be star struck.

<sup>511</sup> *NAE Washington Insight*, Jun., 1988 Vol. 10, No. 6, p. 4.



some conservatives could not reconcile themselves to an end of the Cold War. Reagan's impeccable anticommunist credentials marginalized the criticism of Buckley, Weyrich, and others.<sup>512</sup>

A December 1987 poll by Democratic pollsters found that Americans endorsed the INF Treaty and Reagan's defense buildup as a necessary precursor to arms control. The survey found 74 percent of Republicans and 69 percent of Democrats favored the treaty, while by a margin of 69 percent to 27 percent respondents believed the arms buildup was necessary.<sup>513</sup> A January 1988 poll showed that 59 percent of Americans believed the INF treaty was in the national interest because of Reagan's endorsement. Moreover, Americans supported the treaty by an overwhelming 79 percent to 17 percent margin.<sup>514</sup> Adding to conservatives' worry, a September 1987 Gallup poll showed Gorbachev with a 54 percent approval rating versus Reagan's 49 percent approval rating.<sup>515</sup> These poll numbers gave conservatives cause for concern that the popular momentum toward further arms control agreements was unstoppable.

Some right-wing groups fought the treaty with a letter writing campaign, propaganda mailings, and newspaper advertisements comparing Reagan to "gullible British prime minster" Neville Chamberlain, the symbol of appeasement toward Hitler prior to World War II. Senators Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Steven Symms (R-ID) attempted to pass amendments that would tie the INF treaty to Soviet compliance with previously broken treaties. With the support of erstwhile zero option proponent Richard

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<sup>512</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 699-700.

<sup>513</sup> "Soviets Hint at Major Shift in Military Policy," *Washington Post*, Nov. 30, 1987.

<sup>514</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 699-700.

<sup>515</sup> FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 427.

Perle, Helms claimed the treaty contained loopholes allowing Moscow to maintain a “secret force” of SS-20 missiles after ratification. Reagan, however, remained more popular with conservatives than Helms or other New Right activists. Their accusations and objections did not find favor with a base that trusted the president. Helms’ May 1988 filibuster failed and the treaty passed 93-5 on May 27, 1988, two days before Reagan arrived in the Evil Empire.<sup>516</sup>

Notable discontent nevertheless existed among Republican politicians over the INF Treaty. Republican presidential hopefuls Pat Robertson, Jack Kemp, Alexander Haig, and Pierre DuPont IV opposed treaty ratification. Kemp summed up the enduring Republican fear of summitry: “We need to resist the inevitable temptation of succumbing, once again, to summit fever.”<sup>517</sup> Vice President Bush and Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole supported the pact.<sup>518</sup> Although Dole called on Reagan to retract his assertion that INF Treaty critics held an uninformed acceptance of war’s inevitability.<sup>519</sup> The Kansas senator sought a sympathetic hearing from Republican primary voters who believed by a margin of 48 percent to 28 percent that the INF Treaty would benefit the Soviet Union over the United States.<sup>520</sup> Regardless, Republicans supported the treaty. Reagan did such an excellent job cultivating his political base that attacks on the president’s diplomacy failed. He remained popular with movement conservatives to the point that primary

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<sup>516</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 700-701.

<sup>517</sup> “Arms Pact has Major Effect on Presidential Race,” *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1987.

<sup>518</sup> Dole is referred to as “Majority Leader” earlier in this chapter when is discussing an episode in 1986 and “Minority Leader” at this point in 1987 because Republicans lost their Senate majority in the 1986 midterm elections.

<sup>519</sup> “Reagan Confronted by Dole on Statement about Conservatives,” *Associated Press* Dec. 4, 1987.

<sup>520</sup> “Arms Pact Has Major Effect on Presidential Race,” *New York Times* Dec. 6, 1987.

candidates only offered circumspect critiques of Reagan's foreign policy, but never Reagan the leader.

The president had integrated conservative evangelicals into his political coalition so completely that they opted out of the identity politics that would lead them to support one of their own, conservative televangelist Pat Robertson. Instead Reagan's heir-apparent, moderate Vice President Bush gained their backing. Reagan's popularity with the base was reinforced with his conservative opponents' failure to launch an effective challenge to the president's neo-détente diplomacy, eliminating an entire class of nuclear weapons and discussing with Gorbachev the abolition of nuclear weapons. He continued to insist privately among conservatives that the Soviet Union was an evil empire. That term helped give him the political latitude to forge a friendly relationship with Gorbachev.

Conservative concern over Reagan's diplomacy continued in some quarters. Jerry Falwell's *Liberty Report* worried that Gorbachev was the sole victor in the INF Treaty. According to his publication, generous Soviet concessions served the political purpose of demonstrating Moscow's peaceful impulses. The Kremlin created a mood of overconfidence in Western Europe according to analysis by his newsletter. *Liberty Report* asserted that NATO nations had been "duped into believing that the Soviet leadership has reformed and now wants only peace." Such a lack of vigilance would put the West "at the mercy of the 'evil empire.'"<sup>521</sup> While Falwell published his discontent with Reagan administration foreign policy, it was more of a disagreement inside the

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<sup>521</sup> "The Reagan-Gorbachev Summit: Who Won?" *The Liberty Report*, Feb. 1988.

family than a challenge to Reagan's leadership. It was not in Falwell's political interest to stridently challenge the president

### **“Another Time, Another Era”: Rhetorical Disarmament**

Ronald Reagan's April 21, 1988 speech in Springfield, Massachusetts heartened restive conservatives and angered Mikhail Gorbachev. It acted as a valedictory for rhetorical rearmament and the hawkish speechwriting office: “We spoke plainly and bluntly... We said communism was bad.” The president declared: “A Soviet Union that oppresses its own people...that continues to suppress free expression and religious worship... such a Soviet Union can never have truly normal relations with the United States.”<sup>522</sup> Reagan's rehash of old polemics angered the general secretary and imperiled the forthcoming Moscow Summit. Gorbachev asked Shultz if he could expect these sorts of attacks during the president's May visit. As with the Evil Empire speech, Shultz had not seen the address in advance. A lower-level State Department official had made a few changes and returned the address without passing it up the hierarchy since it did not seem particularly noteworthy.<sup>523</sup> Despite Gorbachev's anger, these boilerplate condemnations of the Soviet Union did not make news in the United States.

Gorbachev needed to protect himself from reactionaries. A month earlier in March 1988, he began receiving public criticism for his policies from antireform forces, which rallied behind a manifesto published in the newspaper of the Russian Republic titled “I Cannot Betray My Principles” by a Leningrad chemistry teacher. Gorbachev

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<sup>522</sup> John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=35716>. (Apr. 5, 2010).

<sup>523</sup> Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 284-285.

faced a Politburo struggle from reinvigorated anti-reformists. Moreover, the Nineteenth Communist Party Conference would begin in late June, a few weeks after Reagan's visit. Gorbachev's power hung in the balance during this period. He needed a successful summit that added to his prestige rather than a Reagan harangue that would undercut his authority. Gorbachev declared Reagan's words "unacceptable from a leader coming to the Soviet Union in a month's time." Shultz responded that Reagan would be looking to the future not the past, but Gorbachev declared that relations would regress if Reagan continued saying that "the Soviet Union has to earn the confidence of the United States for there to be progress in relations."<sup>524</sup> Gorbachev told Shultz "You're impossible to please. You're still operating under the assumption that there's a real threat of communist aggression. In refusing to change your stance, you disregard the fact that there won't be any aggression and objectively can't be." Gorbachev privately noted that the Shultz-led American negotiating team did not try to defend Reagan's comments.<sup>525</sup> Pragmatists would not cover for ideologues, but ideology still mattered in the Kremlin.

Once the president realized the depths of his partner's domestic political power struggle, Reagan chose to help him. The former actor hated being typecast. He objected to his first term characterization as a warmongering capitalist because it "becomes harder and harder to force any member of humanity into a straitjacket, into some rigid form in which you all expect to fit."<sup>526</sup> The president transcended this role to emerge as a

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid, 283-287.

<sup>525</sup> Anatoly S. Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 143. For Shultz's impression of the encounter see *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1096-1100.

<sup>526</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 705.

grandfatherly man of peace to his Soviet audience.<sup>527</sup> Reagan was moved by the crowds on Arbat Street and his other fleeting interactions with ordinary Muscovites.<sup>528</sup> The president's performance during the visit challenged unfavorable impressions of him, while allowing Gorbachev to regain political clout.

Reagan helped Gorbachev domestically and in the process stole the show by answering a planted question from Sam Donaldson during his impromptu stroll with Gorbachev around Red Square. "Do you still think you're in an evil empire, Mr. President?" The president responded, "No, I was talking about another time, another era."<sup>529</sup> The visual image of the quintessential Cold Warrior making that comment in Red Square dominated the television news media coverage of the summit. Without a substantive arms control agreement at this summit, the symbolism of the moment increased in importance. Reagan tried to convince realist Republicans and his conservative allies that the Cold War was ending on Western terms. Both groups remained more skeptical of Gorbachev than did Reagan. The president now had the benefit of some interaction with the Russian people, coupled with viewing Gorbachev's reformist agenda. These personal experiences made Reagan more amenable to a dramatic flourish of symbolism. He cast aside his rhetorical armaments with a pragmatic gesture beneficial to Gorbachev.

The imagery of the dominant Cold Warrior of a generation strolling about the heart of the Evil Empire was a diplomatic coup for the general secretary. White House

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<sup>527</sup> Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 298.

<sup>528</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 709; Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 613.

<sup>529</sup> "Reagan's 'Moscow Spring,'" *Newsweek Jun.* 13, 1988.

image makers opposed making that stop, worried that a picture might emerge of Reagan in front of Lenin's tomb. Shultz disagreed, telling Reagan that it would be a great moment of personal diplomacy. Reagan took his suggestion. Shultz had a reminder typed on one of Reagan's ubiquitous index cards so that the president would not forget to ask to stop there. The secretary of state remembered: "Body language and imagery told the story: a dangerous cold war era was ending."<sup>530</sup> In another sign of the times, Evil Empire speechwriter Anthony Dolan was spotted gazing at St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square as Reagan and Gorbachev starred together in the final act of the Cold War. The secretary of state joked that the archconservative Dolan was "worshipping at Lenin's tomb."<sup>531</sup> "Evil Empire" was yesterday's style. By 1988 diplomacy was fashionable.

Reagan did not mention his rhetorical disarmament in his diary or his memoir.<sup>532</sup> For Gorbachev, however, it was "one of the genuine achievements" of the Moscow Summit. It meant Reagan had renounced rhetorical rearmament. The hostile provocation of April gave way to peaceful collaboration in May. Gorbachev declared "the 40<sup>th</sup> President of the United States will go down in history for his rare perception" that Washington could work with Moscow to prevent nuclear war.<sup>533</sup> Respect and acceptance were important to Gorbachev, but he could not prevail upon the Americas to leave "peaceful coexistence" language in the joint statement.<sup>534</sup> Even if the policy looked like détente, the Reagan administration insisted that the rhetoric not echo that era too closely.

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<sup>530</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1103.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid, 1103. Shultz republishes the entire article in his memoir; "Reaganites and Lenin Worshippers," *New York Times*, Jun. 8, 1988.

<sup>532</sup> Reagan's trip to Red Square with Gorbachev receives a scant one sentence in his memoir and three sentences in his diary. Reagan, *An American Life*, 711; Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries*, 614.

<sup>533</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 457.

<sup>534</sup> Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 302-303.

Despite this small concession to confrontation, Gorbachev had gained the symbolic concession he had sought.

### **End of “Evil Empire” Overshadows Human Rights**

Reagan’s rhetorical shift on the Soviet Union mesmerized the news media, while demonstrating an example of symbolism over substance. The symbolism of Reagan renouncing “evil empire” mattered more than the substantive lack of progress on the START Treaty to reduce nuclear weapons. *Newsweek* declared, “The significance of this summit is the very idea of Reagan in Russia.” The news magazine presumed the president still believed “the empire is evil,” but his experiences with Gorbachev led him to work with the Soviets for disarmament. Reagan’s optimism and personal chemistry with Gorbachev trumped his wary anticommunist instincts.<sup>535</sup> At Nancy’s urging, the president made his own symbolic gesture while in the USSR by personalizing the issue of human rights.<sup>536</sup> Conservatives delighted to see Reagan renew support for human rights behind the Iron Curtain. The president’s attention to human rights angered Gorbachev and filled up much column space in newspapers and news magazines, but the sound bite and pictures of Reagan in Red Square endured.

International press accounts demonstrate how the potent symbolism of Reagan in Red Square overshadowed another human rights speech. The *Times of London* reported that Reagan and Gorbachev had their hands around each other’s waists in Red Square. Reagan declared during their stroll: “We have decided to talk to each other and not about

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<sup>535</sup> “Reagan in Moscow,” *Newsweek*, Jun. 6, 1988.

<sup>536</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 703-704.



each other.”<sup>537</sup> The *Sydney Morning Herald* observed that Reagan’s “evil empire” rhetoric symbolized his passé “ultra-conservative, anti-communist views.”<sup>538</sup> European editorialists applauded Reagan’s disavowal of “evil empire.” Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland called the summit “a historic watershed in European and international postwar history.” Sir Michael Howard, an Oxford University historian, stated: “It has been a brilliant performance. ... He is truly a remarkable man, and his place in history is certainly assured.” The left-leaning *Guardian* declared that “when Mr. Reagan, in another era, talks of evil empires and builds policies based on fear and mistrust, then his voters, to an extent, share that fear and mistrust, believe that the Russians are coming to get them.” Britain’s premier Labour Party newspaper continued: “Such beliefs can't easily be sustained when their front-parlor screens are filled by those same Russians (not to mention the newly converted Mr. Reagan) expressing quite other sentiments.” The leftist French daily *Liberation* asserted: “Reagan, who just several years ago could be imagined as Saint George slaying the Red Dragon of the Evil Empire, made a skillful crossing to Moscow which he was visiting for the first time.”<sup>539</sup>

In a press conference with Western journalists at the conclusion of the summit, Gorbachev basked in the afterglow of Reagan’s renunciation with the news media. “Mr. President, do you still consider the Soviet Union an evil empire? And he said 'No', and incidentally, he said that at the press conference near the Tsar Cannon in the Kremlin, in the heart of that evil empire. We take note of this.” Later, when asked about the

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<sup>537</sup> “New Friendship goes on Parade; Moscow Summit,” Michael Binyon Jun. 1, 1988.

<sup>538</sup> “Reagan No Longer Sees Russia as Evil Empire; Moscow: The Glasnost Summit.” *Sydney Morning Herald*, Jun. 2, 1988.

<sup>539</sup> “Europeans See Summit Success Despite Scant Gains,” *Associated Press*, Jun. 2, 1988.

conservative opposition to superpower cooperation, Gorbachev addressed the opposition of Soviet conservatives until the questioner clarified that his question regarded American conservatives. Gorbachev declared: “The opinion of conservatives in America will exert little influence on us.”<sup>540</sup> Events were moving too quickly for entrenched Cold Warriors on both sides.

For network evening newscasts, “evil empire” was on the tip of the tongue of even before the summit began. On May 28, reporter Sandy Gilmour concluded his report about summit preparations on *NBC Nightly News* by saying: “Tomorrow the man who called this the evil empire will have a chance to come and see for himself.”<sup>541</sup> With the summit in full swing on May 31<sup>st</sup>, Sam Donaldson reported on *ABC World News Tonight* that Reagan took back his evil empire rhetoric. “Former White House scene stager Michael Deaver could not have imagined it in his wildest dreams.” The president “completely took back his ‘evil empire’ pronouncement.” Donaldson reported that the centerpiece of his day was meant to be the speech at Moscow University, but the lead story was “smiling friendship” as demonstrated by the morning walk in Red Square and the evening dinner with Gorbachev.<sup>542</sup>

Dan Rather also broadcasted from Moscow for *The CBS Evening News*. His first sentence contained the lead story for the entire summit. “And on this bright and warm and sunlit Moscow spring day, a smiling Mikhail Gorbachev got one of the things he wanted most out of this summit, a big public rollback by Ronald Reagan of his Cold

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<sup>540</sup> “Gorbachev’s Press Conference,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Jun. 3, 1988.

<sup>541</sup> *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, May 28, 1988 5:33:20 p.m., Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN.

<sup>542</sup> *ABC World New Tonight with Peter Jennings* May 31, 1988 5:30 p.m., Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN.

Warrior ‘evil empire’ talk.” On the “surprise stroll through Red Square” Gorbachev held a toddler and Reagan shook his hand. The friction over human rights “appeared not to rub Gorbachev nearly as much today.” The pictures of smiling friendship and kissing toddlers were the enduring pictures from that day and eventually the entire summit.<sup>543</sup> The speech at Moscow University, which the administration had meant to be the keynote event, was buried beneath rhetorical disarmament.

As for the side mission of mollifying American conservatives, they found comfort in Reagan’s human rights statements in the Moscow University speech. INF Treaty opponent Senator Steve Symms stated that “if 10 percent of some of the things he said about human rights and freedom gets out to the Russian people, then, yes, the summit is a plus.” Burton Pines, senior vice president of the Heritage Foundation, commended the president for talking about human rights over and over, so much so that Gorbachev complained about it.” Former NSC member and Russian History Professor Richard Pipes called the summit “better than any summit we’ve had before” and expressed happiness that Reagan carried his human rights message to the Soviet Union. Conservatives also tempered their reactions because of scant progress on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) coupled with the end of Reagan’s term in office a mere seven months away.<sup>544</sup> Skeptics had lost this round of diplomacy to images of emerging superpower cooperation and friendship.

Reagan’s disavowal of “Evil Empire” while pledging to continue supporting human rights confused Robert Dugan. “Harmonizing these images is not easy. As for

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<sup>543</sup> *The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather* May 31, 1988 5:30 p.m., Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN.

<sup>544</sup> “Conservatives Praise President For Advocacy of Rights, Democracy,” *Washington Post*, Jun. 2, 1988.

the ‘evil empire,’ people must draw their own conclusions. What else would one call a country which has starved its own people, harshly persecuted religious believers and political opponents, or dropped explosive toys designed to attract Afghan children?”

Although Dugan remained pessimistic about the future of democratic reforms, he stressed that “our President deserves gratitude for enlarging the boundaries of the human rights discussion and for highlighting the issue even in the Soviet Union.”<sup>545</sup> He tempered respectful criticism of the president with praise. Reagan’s career anticommunism effectively inoculated him from harsh or sustained criticism of his diplomatic initiatives from this important faction of his religious base. For example, Reagan would not have faced a similar warning to the one Vice President Bush received on the eve of his general election campaign: “Evangelicals will not, for example, automatically fall into the Bush column simply because he portrays himself as the heir apparent to Ronald Reagan.”<sup>546</sup>

William F. Buckley, Jr. characterized Reagan’s renunciation of rhetorical rearmament as an old man haggard by the American news media: “Finally, worn down by this hectoring over his melodramatic excess of years gone by, Mr. Reagan said: ‘I was talking about another empire.’”<sup>547</sup> Buckley chose a literary condemnation of diplomacy: “Reagan is engaged now not in forgiveness, but in what Orwell called vaporization, Big Brother decides to change a historical or a present fact, and evidence inconvenient to the new thesis is simply made to—disappear.” Buckley concluded that “we sow only confusion when we retract the statement that it is evil to support the systematic

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<sup>545</sup> *NAE Washington Insight*, Jun., 1988 Vol. 10, No. 7, July, 1988, p. 2.

<sup>546</sup> *NAE Washington Insight*, June, 1988 Vol. 10, No. 6, June, 1988, p. 1-2.

<sup>547</sup> This quote is technically incorrect, although the essence of the quote remains unchanged.

suppression of human rights everywhere your empire reaches.”<sup>548</sup> His words indicated an understanding that Reagan’s support for human rights had been subsumed by the visuals of his disavowal of “evil empire.”

*New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis in 1983 called the Evil Empire speech “chauvinistic,” and “primitive,” and declared that the president used “sectarian religiosity to sell a political program.”<sup>549</sup> Five years later, Lewis modified his evaluation of Reagan: “When asked to explain what had happened to him or to reality since he denounced ‘the evil empire,’ he gave rather lame answers. But nobody could fail to see that he believed Mr. Gorbachev wanted real change, and that he wanted to help.” Lewis even admitted that Reagan’s four day visit might “contribute to the opening of Soviet society.”<sup>550</sup>

Another critical *New York Times* columnist, Russell Baker, sarcastically commended Reagan in 1983 for his forthrightness compared to previous Cold War presidents who spoke of peace in times of war: “Though he has kept the peace, he talks as though war is his mission. When he paints a vision of the future, he shows us the next century filled with deadly space gadgets constructed for struggle against the ‘evil empire’ of Communism.”<sup>551</sup> Baker used a different tone to describe revamped presidential diplomacy five years later: “Reagan has eliminated the dangerous opposition of that old charismatic anti-Communist Ronald Reagan by getting him off the street and into the White House. Now in Moscow, at the very heart of the Evil Empire, he is advancing his already well-established policy of—let the vile word be uttered—detente.” The lack of

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<sup>548</sup> *National Review*, “On the Right,” Jul. 8, 1988.

<sup>549</sup> “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 1983.

<sup>550</sup> “‘Profound Change in Policy.’” *New York Times* Jun. 2, 1988.

<sup>551</sup> “Observer; No More Bluebirds,” *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1983.

charismatic anticommunist leadership in the Republican Party freed Reagan to take his diplomacy in a moderate direction. Baker suggested that perhaps communists had a soft spot for negotiating with conservatives. Cold War Democratic Presidents tended to fight communist nations, while Republican Presidents talked tough but negotiated. The columnist suggested that perhaps communists and Republicans were soft on each other.<sup>552</sup>

### Conclusion

Ronald Reagan met with Gorbachev one last time as president in New York City on December 7, 1988 along with President-elect George H. W. Bush. The president had not dusted off his public polemics in the six months since his rhetorical disarmament at the Moscow Summit. Soviet policy had been a small issue in the 1988 presidential election compared to how superpower diplomacy had loomed large in 1984. The president had turned his biggest political liability in his reelection campaign into the primary positive legacy of the Reagan presidency as he prepared to leave office.

The president proved adaptable by abandoning ideological confrontation in favor of pragmatic diplomacy, once he found a partner willing to negotiate of Reagan's terms. Although Reagan made no substantive compromises to Gorbachev's diplomatic agenda, accepting Gorbachev as a diplomatic partner was a risk. Five decades of mistrust of the Soviet Union did not crumble overnight, especially on the far Right. Ronald Reagan was likely the only American leader with the requisite amount of political capital to neutralize the protests of conservatives. Perhaps most substantially, they lacked their most effective advocate against diplomacy, Reagan himself. Reagan the politician sized up the political

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<sup>552</sup> "Tough anti-Communists find détente just dandy," *St. Petersburg Times*, June 1, 1988.

situation in both nations. He had enough political good will with the Right to act as he deemed necessary with the Kremlin. The president saw that Gorbachev needed a symbolic victory to strengthen his political position. Reagan helped Gorbachev without hurting himself and in the process moved the Cold War closer to a peaceful conclusion.

## CHAPTER NINE:

## THE MEANINGS OF RONALD REAGAN AND “EVIL EMPIRE”

Ronald Reagan’s ability in life and death to capture the nation’s imagination makes his legacy particularly contested. Understanding Reagan can be confounding. Scholars and memoirists have difficulty reconciling Reagan’s public confidence and private diffidence. Writers have trouble squaring his leadership shortcomings with his inspirational worldview. His vision of evangelical Americanism, spreading virtuous American leadership and power, rose in popularity while communism fell. Historians continue arguing whether his stake in ending the Cold War resulted more luck or visionary leadership. The historical appraisal of Reagan has become more favorable in part because hagiographers have enhanced his achievements and excused his mistakes. Academic historians have been slow to write in-depth, critical examinations of his presidency.

Citizens form their historical opinions partly based on their exposure to the news media. Any brief encapsulation of the Reagan presidency on television tends to include Reagan calling the Soviet Union “an evil empire,” demanding Gorbachev tear down the Berlin Wall, and then showing the Cold War ending mere months after he left office. The print summary is similar: “Ronald Reagan came along, like the traditional Western hero, riding into town to tame the Evil Empire and Big Government, bring back



economic prosperity and usher in an era of hope, pride and confidence for the American people.”<sup>553</sup> These types of laudatory summaries proliferated after he died.

This chapter examines three ways historical memory of Reagan and the Evil Empire speech evolved. First, it studies the dynamic American memory of Reagan and “evil empire.” Second, the chapter looks at the legacy of “evil empire” in Russia primarily during the 1990s. Third, it traces the appropriations of “evil empire” in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. For Reagan enthusiasts, his legacy follows a three act narrative. He entered the political arena attacking immoral Soviet communism, faced misguided liberal criticism of his tactics as president, and found vindication by winning the Cold War. The president left office having succeeded in his goal of neutralizing communist expansion. In reality, Reagan’s recklessness in the second act remains deemphasized, while contemporary historical remembrances overemphasize his importance to the third act. The president played an important role in ending the Cold War through his diplomatic partnership with Gorbachev, but he was not the singular winner of the Cold War.

The importance of Reagan’s Evil Empire speech has increased because of not only what he said, but when he said it. Reagan made comments similar to his March 1983 condemnation of Soviet communism as “an evil empire” prior to assuming the presidency, but doing so from the bully pulpit accentuated the importance of these polemics. He delivered the speech at a time when domestic disapproval of his administration’s foreign policy was peaking. Had communism in Eastern Europe not begun collapsing the year Reagan left office and had the Soviet Union not dissolved eight

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<sup>553</sup> “Adlib; Mourning in America.” Greg B. Macabenta *Businessworld* June 9, 2004. For a discussion of the TV encapsulation of the 1980s and the Reagan presidency see Will Bunch *Tear Down This Myth* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 86.

years after the Evil Empire speech, the address might be only a footnote. Worse yet, had Reagan's belligerent tone sparked a confrontation with the Kremlin—an outside possibility in 1983—the address would be remembered as reckless. Because the Cold War ended when it did, Reagan's "evil empire" polemics became 1980s nostalgia that fit nicely into "The Age of Reagan."<sup>554</sup>

The Age of Reagan is a recent historical construction. During his eight years as president, appraisals of Reagan's tenure were largely critical. Only after leaving office did historians and memoirists begin more fondly to remember Reagan as a visionary who won the Cold War. Remembrances of the Reagan administration evolved over two periods. The first period was the most critical and the second period tends to be celebratory. This critical appraisals of the Reagan administration lasted from January 1989 through the public announcement of his Alzheimer's disease in November 1994. During this time, journalistic accounts and memoirs revealed a detached chief executive that allowed illegalities such as the Iran Contra affair. The more favorable period of evaluation from November 1994 through Reagan's death from Alzheimer's in June 2004 continues today. Many critics muted their disapproval out of respect for a man languishing in a kind of purgatory between life and death.

Reagan hagiography has generally enjoyed more scholarly success than critical analyses of America's fortieth president. Second level officials Reagan administration officials, young Reaganites, and movement conservatives continue churning out works of praise for their ideological hero. Such authors have turned him into the singular Cold

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<sup>554</sup> *The Age of Reagan* is the title of two books by authors at opposite ends of the historical perspective, conservative Steven Hayward and liberal Sean Wilentz.

War victor and slayer of the Evil Empire. Even after Reagan's June 2004 death, hagiographers remain hard at work even as academic scholars attempt to move beyond the partisan politics that surrounded the Reagan legacy. Conservative politicians, polemicists, and historians have been more active in promoting Reagan's achievements than critics have been in questioning that narrative. Criticism of Reagan has fallen so far out of favor that attempts at objectivity have suffered. Reagan's legacy, including the Evil Empire speech, remains more political than historical.

### **Early Post-Presidential Criticism**

The first round of books chronicling the Reagan presidency from journalists and former administration officials present the picture of an affable old man selling optimism over transformative policy. In 1987, Gary Wills's *Reagan's America* described a president who was neither the secret genius nor "Evil Empire" slayer that later emerged. Rather, he was a master salesman. Wills equates Reagan to the advertising manager at a large corporation, one gifted in promoting his product's best selling points. In this case, Reagan was the product.<sup>555</sup> During the rapidly changing 1980s people sought continuity and stability, products Reagan offered. In foreign policy, Reagan found the positive in the destructive potential of nuclear weapons; he credited those devices as the only true guard against the "deep scheming of the 'evil empire.'"<sup>556</sup> While Reagan's unfailing optimism was viewed as obtuse by contemporary critics, that same sense of optimism has fared better over time. The president brought a singleness and unity that 1980s culture lacked.

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<sup>555</sup> Garry Wills, *Reagan's America* (Garden City, NY: 1987), 321-324.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

Three works in particular reveal the trend toward negative appraisals of Reagan as a leader. First, Donald Regan's *For the Record* provides a unique view of president's methods. From 1981-1985, he served as Treasury Secretary and from 1985-1987 he worked as Reagan's chief of staff. Regan's memoir portrays Reagan as a diffident, disengaged leader. He revealed that Nancy Reagan planned the president's presidential schedule on the advice of a San Francisco astrologer, Joan Quigley. Regan also complained that he had never met privately with the president to discuss economic affairs. Regan's book is important because it helped establish the narrative of Reagan as a negligent chief executive. The timely publication of this book was a body blow to Reagan's esteem. Reagan's popularity had decreased since the revelations about his involvement in the Iran Contra affair in November 1986.<sup>557</sup>

Reagan's questionable priorities, as outlined by Regan, included the president's almost religious devotion to his schedule. If a meeting with a cabinet secretary seemed necessary, but was not on his schedule, Reagan did not ask for one. He kept every appointment on time, followed the stage directions for each public appearance, hewed close to the script for each day, and felt uncomfortable when he had to ad-lib. According to Regan, the president "regarded his daily schedule as being something like a shooting script in which characters came and went, scenes were rehearsed and acted out, and the plot was advanced one day at a time, and not always in sequence."<sup>558</sup> Reagan lacked knowledge of the activities of the executive departments and most of his cabinet

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<sup>557</sup> Lou Cannon, *President Reagan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 608-611.

<sup>558</sup> Donald Regan, *For the Record* (New York: Hardcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1988), 226.

secretaries were “virtual strangers” to him.<sup>559</sup> Reagan had little interest in many of those people who worked for him. He considered them mere employees. The president maintained only a few priorities, including anticommunism and lowering taxes, but he lacked any interest in governing broadly.

Second, Michael Schaller’s 1992 appraisal argued that Reagan’s presidency soared on ceremony and suffered on substance. The administration won symbolic victories and succeeded in getting Reagan’s anti-communist, anti-big government message across to the American people. During Reagan’s tenure, the United States also regained its self-esteem internationally. Overall, however, “Reagan succeeded, as few actors or politicians have, in persuading Americans to suspend their disbelief” in the face of fiscal irresponsibility, social decay, and foreign policy double standards such as Iran Contra.<sup>560</sup> Schaller’s historical critique of the Reagan administration should have been the basis for an abundance of scholarship in a similar vein. Instead, Schaller’s vigorous criticism is outside the mainstream of popular Reagan literature.

Third, Haynes Johnson’s 1991 book *Sleepwalking Through History* offers a journalistic account of Reagan’s presidency. Like Schaller and Regan, Reagan the chief executive remained uninterested in dynamic governance. He preferred to reign rather than to govern: “Reagan skimmed the waves. He did not plunge deeply beneath the surface.”<sup>561</sup> The president was not well versed on a wide range of issues. Of his two presidential heroes, Reagan was more Calvin Coolidge than FDR. He removed himself from the daily tasks of governing, creating an every man for himself mentality in the

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>560</sup> Michael Schaller, *Reckoning with Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 181.

<sup>561</sup> Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking Through History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 50.

White House. The president valued the private sector over public service. He did not expect the best people to leave their jobs to work for him in government.<sup>562</sup>

To Johnson, Reagan was a dangerously disengaged chief executive who did not take parts of his job seriously. For example, the president loathed dealing with Congress. The veteran actor had difficulty appearing to enjoy his negotiations with the legislative branch. Former Representative Lee Hamilton (D-IN) considered Reagan the most inarticulate president with whom he dealt in his long career. Johnson shows that, in person Reagan cut an entirely different persona from the dashing president seen on television. Reagan was ill-informed and uncurious. Even on national security topics such as the MX missile, Reagan would turn the meeting over to his national security team. His only contribution in this and other similar meetings was to mention a movie he had just watched.<sup>563</sup> Another critic argued that he conflated movies with facts and governed based on images rather than reality.<sup>564</sup> The president was more interested in how issues would be presented to the American people in speeches and public events than in legislative negotiations. Johnson and others demonstrate that Reagan often did not understand the details of his policy positions. Reagan's gifts lay in selling, not strategy. These historical works reveal Reagan as a president detached from his executive office, a man who approached his duties as an actor might approach a film. Certainly, Reagan was not as a typical politician in power.

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 303-304.

<sup>564</sup> Michael Paul Rogin *Ronald Reagan The Movie* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1987), 1-3, 296-297.

These treatments of Reagan did not resonate over time, however. He has emerged unscathed by criticism in popular imagination because the powerful and heroic images from his presidency endure as the specifics fade to memory. Reagan's reputation as the "Teflon President" continued in post-presidential remembrances of the man.<sup>565</sup> The president was the most important myth maker "in the myths of the eighties... He invented himself."<sup>566</sup> In recent years, many historians have failed to grapple with Reagan's failures with the same vigor as admirers celebrate his accomplishments.

Reagan enhanced his image as a Cold War victor with the help of his "evil empire" phraseology. In 1992, during his final speech to a Republican National Convention, Reagan cultivated the myth of the Evil Empire speech: "We stood tall and proclaimed that communism was destined for the ash heap of history. We never heard so much ridicule from our liberal friends. The only thing that got them more upset was two simple words: 'Evil Empire.'" Reagan concluded with a signature optimistic flourish, "But we knew then what the liberal Democrat leaders just couldn't figure out: the sky would not fall if America restored her strength and resolve. The sky would not fall if an American president spoke the truth. The only thing that would fall was the Berlin Wall."<sup>567</sup> Here exists an example of Reagan promoting the emerging conservative narrative regarding the end of the Cold War and his own presidency.

Reagan did not invent the idea that he deserved credit for toppling the Berlin Wall. Conservative commentators insisted Reagan should receive credit for winning the Cold War. Columnist George Will joined the debate before the Berlin Wall was even

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<sup>565</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>567</sup> "President Reagan: In His Own Words," *US Fed News*, Jun. 10, 2004.

dismantled. On the last day of the 1980s, he praised Reagan for doing “more than anyone to end the Cold War” by shattering the “détente mentality” and talking the United States back to a confrontational Cold War stance to end the conflict.<sup>568</sup> This piece presaged the popular notion during the “period of reevaluation,” which argued that Pope John Paul II, and Margaret Thatcher served as the “actors” who ended the Cold War.<sup>569</sup> Conversely, William Odom, a senior military and intelligence official in the Carter and Reagan administrations, promoted the orthodox liberal view that presidents of both parties contributed to winning the Cold War through the continuity of containment.<sup>570</sup> This generous reading of history faced unrelenting criticism from conservatives who reserved the laurels of victory for Reagan. Reducing superpower tensions with the eventual hope of ending the Cold War was a goal of every American president. Reagan seized that opportunity, but doing so had not been possible before Gorbachev came to power.

### **Reevaluating Reagan**

The Evil Empire speech is remembered as a rhetorical high point for Ronald Reagan. Some historians, hagiographers, and memoir writers among the so-called Reagan victory school such as Peter Schweizer, Jay Winik, Peggy Noonan, and Michael Deaver see the phrases “focus of evil in the modern world” and “evil empire” as brave utterances of a visionary president.<sup>571</sup> They argue that the Evil Empire speech shook the

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<sup>568</sup> “The Pope Lit the Fuse,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 31, 1989.

<sup>569</sup> John Lewis Gaddis. *The Cold War* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005); John O’Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2006).

<sup>570</sup> “Who Really Won the Cold War; Credit Where Credit is Due—on both sides,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 19, 1992.

<sup>571</sup> “Remembering Ronald Reagan.”

<http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=editor.page&pageID=36&idCategory=1> (accessed 16 May 2005); Michael K. Deaver, *A Different Drummer* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 116; Peter Schweizer, *Reagan’s War* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 190.



Kremlin to its core.<sup>572</sup> A corollary inference of the Reagan victory school is that his words received a ringing endorsement from the American people as the president was subsequently reelected by a landslide.<sup>573</sup> Thus, his “evil empire” rhetoric must have been a popular, powerful, and prescient attack on the moral failings of the Soviet system. The Evil Empire speech did shake the Kremlin to its core, but not for the reasons the Reagan victory school offers. Moscow worried that Reagan posed a genuine nuclear threat toward the Warsaw Pact. His disavowal of détente and embrace of rhetorical rearmament created domestic political unease.

In late 1997, the promotion of Reagan’s legacy intensified. Conservative activist Grover Norquist formed the Reagan Legacy Project in an attempt to name a public building after the 40<sup>th</sup> president in every American county. It even sought to put him on U.S. currency.<sup>574</sup> In an ironic twist, a president who opposed big government, who broke the air traffic controllers strike in 1981 had a federal building and an airport in Washington, D.C. named after him.

As GOP political fortunes ebbed with the 1992 and 1996 presidential election results, nostalgia for Reagan’s leadership grew. Reagan myth-building developed among conservatives as a reaction to the Clinton presidency. Bill Clinton was the first Democratic president to win reelection since FDR in 1996. The United States was an economic juggernaut in the late 1990s and Americans embraced his moderate left-of-

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<sup>572</sup> Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King* (New York: Viking Press, 2001), 213-214.

<sup>573</sup> Jay Winik, *On the Brink* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 313.

<sup>574</sup> Will Bunch, “How Republicans created the myth of Ronald Reagan.” *Salon* Feb. 2, 2009. [http://74.125.93.132/search?q=cache:77R74ZJypCMJ:www.salon.com/books/excerpt/2009/02/02/ronald\\_reagan/+reagan+legacy+project&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a](http://74.125.93.132/search?q=cache:77R74ZJypCMJ:www.salon.com/books/excerpt/2009/02/02/ronald_reagan/+reagan+legacy+project&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a) (accessed December 15, 2009).

center leadership. Conservatives had little success attacking his record of peace and prosperity. Clinton's reelection honeymoon ended in January 1998 with the revelation of his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. The Clinton impeachment further bolstered Reagan's memory among conservatives. They promoted the Reagan presidency as a more moral time than Clinton era debauchery without mentioning that Reagan was the first divorcee to serve as president.

Reagan admirers had carte blanche during this period because public sympathy for the fight the ailing former president waged against Alzheimer's. Into that growing sense of admiration for the Reagan family's brave fight against the disease, Dinesh D'Souza's praised Reagan for demonstrating "how an ordinary man became an extraordinary leader." This interpretation was at odds with Haynes Johnson's account of a president "sleepwalking through history."<sup>575</sup> Languishing in mental purgatory, Reagan became immune to criticism during these years. Attacking a sick man would be publicly condemned. Critics held their fire. By the time criticism was again allowable after Reagan's death, admiration was the dominant view of the man and his presidency.

The Evil Empire speech emerged as one of the primary icons of Reagan hagiography. Former Reagan hand Peter Hannaford reconstructed a triumphant image of 1983, the most controversial year of the Reagan presidency, around the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Reagan's Evil Empire and SDI speeches in 1998: "1983 was a Year of Living Boldly for Mr. Reagan's Cold War strategy. For him there was no moral equivalency between representative democracy and Soviet totalitarianism, and he said so." Reagan's former employee continued: "His policy initiatives that year... steadily increased the pressure on

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<sup>575</sup> "Reagan Reborn: Nostalgic Republicans make a myth out of the Gipper," *Independent*, Dec. 11, 1997.

the Kremlin. It wasn't until the first Gorbachev summit two years later that the end-game was to begin.”<sup>576</sup> This gauzy mischaracterization of the events during that pivotal year ignores the diplomatic tension with Moscow and domestic discontent over administration foreign policy. Hannaford’s remembrance exemplified the conservative consensus regarding Reagan that eventually turned into the mainstream news media consensus on this period.

A trend toward literary hagiography emerged after Reagan’s Alzheimer’s diagnosis. For example, in 2002 Peter Schweizer painted the picture of the Evil Empire speech supplying spiritual succor to Gulag prisoners and Soviet dissidents. “Natan Sharansky remembers feeling energized and emboldened; Reagan had given them hope.”<sup>577</sup> Sharansky became the primary sources for conservatives who remembered “Evil Empire” as a positive international phenomenon at the time. Former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan discussed the Evil Empire speech in her Clinton-era celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> President, *When Character Was King*. Noonan relies heavily on Sharansky. The former dissident condemned pragmatic diplomacy and credited Reagan’s ideology for inspiring revolution behind the Iron Curtain. “Pragmatism led to our suffering! Reagan was one who understood the Soviet Union is [an] evil empire and we could change it.” She concluded that telling the truth about a dictatorship pushed down the Berlin Wall. “He refused to lie, and with his words the fall of the ugliest dictatorship

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<sup>576</sup> “Reagan’s Historic Cold War vision,” *Washington Times*, Mar. 31, 1998.

<sup>577</sup> Peter Schweizer, *Reagan’s War* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 190-191.

of human history began.”<sup>578</sup> Her account exemplifies Reagan’s almost mystical power among some conservatives.

Serial Reagan hagiographer Paul Kengor deemed Reagan “The Crusader” and the Evil Empire speech “polarizing, as was its intention: to draw a line of demarcation between the two superpowers.”<sup>579</sup> Kengor believes the president intended a divisive speech even though the facts suggest he was pandering in preparation for his undeclared reelection campaign. Regardless, his words inflamed and increased opposition to his foreign policy. The author traces arguments over the merits of the speech, but concludes his discussion with an account of Reagan cinematically brushing aside the pragmatist objections of Nancy and her friend Stuart Spencer: “It *is* an Evil Empire. It’s time to close it down.”<sup>580</sup>

Dinesh D’Souza went even further in his praise of the Evil Empire speech. He called it “the single most important speech of the Reagan presidency” for containing “what Vaclav Havel terms ‘the power of words to change history.’” The author reported that on Reagan’s visit to Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism the former president discovered that “many people had a picture of him in their homes.” Former dissidents told him that the Evil Empire speech “gave them hope, and they said to each other that America finally had a leader who clearly understood the nature of communism.”<sup>581</sup> D’Souza even asserted that had Reagan followed the pragmatic route in

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<sup>578</sup> Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King* (New York: Vikings, 2001), 213.

<sup>579</sup> Paul Kengor, *The Crusader* (New York: Regan, 2006), 173.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>581</sup> Dinesh D’Souza. *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader*. (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 135.

his first term “the Soviet empire would probably be around today.”<sup>582</sup> Furthermore,

D’Souza implied that the phrase haunted Gorbachev and influenced his actions.<sup>583</sup>

Reagan hagiography shares with the Reagan Legacy Project the belief that he sounded an anticommunist Horn of Joshua that brought down communism.<sup>584</sup> While such assertions make for soaring prose, none of these authors present compelling evidence that “evil empire” rhetoric helped win the Cold War.

In a similar vein, historian Gil Troy compared Reagan’s polemics to “the moral clarity of Harry Truman and John Kennedy.” Troy contradictorily argues for the benign reception of this rhetoric in the Kremlin, quoting Sergei Tarasenko, policy assistant to Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, who claimed the words did not worry Soviet leaders. He concludes that “Reagan’s words resonated throughout the world and would help establish the conditions for the Soviets’ collapse and the democratic euphoria that would sweep Europe at the end of the decade.”<sup>585</sup> This simple formulation dispersed outside conservative circles and became popular among public intellectuals, some academics, and the news media. There are three problems with this oversimplified narrative. First, this viewpoint gives no agency to the Soviet side. Second, it ignores the diplomatic and political complications of Reagan’s rhetoric. Finally, the interpretation also marginalizes myriad Soviet officials who publicly and privately worried about rhetorical rearmament. This narrative is more than incomplete. Intellectual historian John Patrick Diggins minimizes the negative effects of Reagan’s “evil empire”

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>584</sup> Richard Reeves, *Ronald Reagan: Triumph of the Imagination* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 489.

<sup>585</sup> Gil Troy, *Morning in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 241.

phraseology: “He was not, as his critics feared, about to embark upon an aggressive war with the Soviet Union. Instead, he wanted to deal with the power of evil by bringing its effects under control.”<sup>586</sup> Even the dean of Reagan scholars, Lou Cannon, neglected the context of the Evil Empire speech by comparing it to George W. Bush’s “Axis of Evil” speech. “Depicting the Soviets as the embodiment of evil produced snickers among the political elite, which pronounced Reagan’s views as ‘simplistic’ or ‘provocative,’ but resonated with ordinary Americans.” While the “political elite” lampooned Reagan, the aftermath of that address accounted for the only time during Reagan’s presidency when more people disapproved than approved of his Soviet policy.<sup>587</sup>

If a former president’s legacy finds the embrace of the opposition party, his historical esteem reaches new heights. For example, Senator Barack Obama praised parts of Reagan’s record in his presidential campaign book, *The Audacity of Hope*. He credited Reagan for pointing out that government had become too “cavalier” about spending taxpayer money. The senator also cited Reagan for restoring a sense of “common purpose” to Americans.<sup>588</sup> He defended Reagan’s defense spending, support for human rights behind the Iron Curtain, and “insistence that there was no easy equivalence between East and West.”<sup>589</sup> Such laudatory remarks reveal how Reagan’s legacy crosses political boundaries.

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<sup>586</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the American Experience* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 35. Diggins, incidentally, used the phrase “evil empire,” more than any other Reagan book cited in this work.

<sup>587</sup> *The Gallup Poll Public Opinion, 1935-1997*, The CD-ROM Edition (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000), 90.

<sup>588</sup> Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 32.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

Obama again co-opted the Reagan legacy in January 2008 while campaigning in conservative northern Nevada. He told the editorial board of the *Reno Gazette-Journal* that "Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that Richard Nixon did not and in a way that Bill Clinton did not. He put us on a fundamentally different path because the country was ready for it."<sup>590</sup> Obama was correct, but he was also courting conservative Democrats and independents. He signaled the new bipartisan practice of embracing Reagan. The *Gazette-Journal* editorial board declared that Obama "also demonstrates the courage to stand his ground where necessary, willing, for instance, to salute both President John Kennedy and President Ronald Reagan as agents of change in times when the country needed change."<sup>591</sup> That incident displayed the political potency of the Reagan legacy twenty years after his presidency. Reagan was emerging as a great man of political history, praiseworthy from the Left and the Right.

### **Russia Endures as "Evil Empire"**

The former Soviet empire grappled with the enduring effect of the Evil Empire speech on national self-esteem. As the Cold War drew to a close in the early 1990s, "evil empire" remained a politically poignant phrase in the former Soviet Union. Russian leaders remembered the stinging rebuke more than his actions to undermine the communist system. The tide toward Russian self-referencing as "an evil empire" crested in the early 1990s after the demise of the Soviet Union. Newly elected Russian President Boris Yeltsin felt no compunction about calling the Soviet Union "an evil empire."<sup>592</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said in 1992 that "the Soviet Union had really

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<sup>590</sup> "Edwards Attacks Obama for View of Reagan," *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 2008.

<sup>591</sup> "Las Vegas Newspapers Endorses Romney, Obama," *Associated Press*, Jan. 18, 2008.

<sup>592</sup> "Treachy sentiment from the West," *Washington Times*, Dec. 27, 1991.

been an evil empire." He compared the "mass crimes" under the Soviet dictatorship to the revelations about the Nazis at the Nuremberg Trials. Arkady Murashev, Moscow police chief and a leader in the opposition party Democratic Russia, defended Reagan: "He called us the 'Evil Empire.' So why did you in the West laugh at him? It's true."<sup>593</sup> In 1994, Alexander Solzhenitsyn took the next step in Russian self-loathing, provocatively asserting that Reagan had won the Cold War.<sup>594</sup> These examples reveal the degree to which the phrase lodged in the Russian psyche after the end of the Cold War.

Despite this criticism of the previous regime, not everyone in Russian political culture agreed. Marshal Viktor Kulikov, a former Warsaw Pact commander, remembered attempting to clarify the politics behind Reagan's phraseology to communist stalwarts: "It didn't do any good to try to explain to them it was a speech made partly for domestic purposes... Our hardliners understood just one thing - Reagan was a threat... The evil-empire speech showed us what America's real intentions were." The address demonstrated a rift between Soviet hardliners rattled by "evil empire," and pragmatic leaders who understood the broad political context of the speech. The general drew a direct line back to the origins of Reagan's anticommunism, the earliest and chilliest days of the Cold War. "Reagan was a logical extension of what had started with Truman, a concentrated effort to weaken and intimidate the Soviet Union." Despite Reagan's seemingly intractable stance, this former Soviet official conceded that any attempts to revive diplomacy were stymied by a lack of leadership in the Kremlin."<sup>595</sup> The visceral reaction against "evil empire" trumped reason. A military leader could not reason with a

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<sup>593</sup> "Sovietology that missed the mark," *Washington Times*, Sept. 17, 1992.

<sup>594</sup> "An exile's Cold War verdict," *Washington Times*, Mar. 1, 1994.

<sup>595</sup> "How Russian Helped to Elect Reagan," *Melbourne Sunday Herald Sun*, Nov. 1, 1992.



political leadership unwilling to attempt to understand the role domestic politics played in Reagan's foreign policy. Weak and obtuse Soviet leadership was as much to blame for the lack of diplomatic progress during Reagan's first term as the president's polemics.

In Russia during the 1990s, domestic voices appropriated the phrase for their own uses. In 1996, ultra-nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky called the United States "the real evil empire." He blamed "democratic traitors" for the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent move toward full independence for the Commonwealth of Independent States, the new title of the former Soviet republics.<sup>596</sup> Elements in the Russian press argued during the mid 1990s that the U.S. defense community could not do without the "evil empire." They claimed the CIA had moved from focusing on the Red Army to the Russian mafia.<sup>597</sup> Russian President Boris Yeltsin used the phrase in his 1996 reelection campaign, promising that a vote for him over his communist opponent, Gennady Zyuganov, meant continued international esteem. "We will win, in order to prevent a return to the times when Russia was regarded as 'an evil empire.'"<sup>598</sup> Retired army general Alexander Lebed, a political rival of Yeltsin, admitted in 1998 that he had considered the Soviet Union "an evil empire," but that he "worked on strengthening that evil empire." He nevertheless displayed a sense of national pride in the superpower status of the USSR as did many leaders who quibbled with Yeltsin's wholesale condemnation of Soviet communism.<sup>599</sup> Even in Russia, by the late 1990s the original meaning of "evil empire" was fading as it was appropriated for other uses.

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<sup>596</sup> "Zhirinovsky Shares Duma Nostalgia for Soviet Days," *Glasgow Herald*, Mar. 16, 1996.

<sup>597</sup> "Press Cannot Do Without Evil Empire," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Feb. 25, 1995.

<sup>598</sup> "Election win will be no return to 'evil empire': Yeltsin," *Agence France Presse*, Apr. 6, 1996.

<sup>599</sup> "Q & A: Two Men With Their Eyes on the Kremlin," *Washington Post*, Dec. 6, 1998.

Anatoly Adamishin, former Soviet deputy foreign minister, made an argument regarding Reagan's role in ending the Cold War not often heard in the United States. Instead of the U.S. view that Reagan adopted diplomatic tactics, it was Gorbachev who had maneuvered Reagan into diplomacy. Adamishin contended: "What did the phrase 'evil empire' mean? It was a license to do with the Soviet Union anything the West pleased. The 'evil empire' was outside the pale of decent people." The idea that Gorbachev dominated Reagan seems strange considering the outcome of the Cold War, but Adamishin made a reasoned case that "Gorbachev forced Reagan to give up this ideological tenet. There was a great deal of talk in the Soviet leadership that you couldn't do business with Reagan." He continued, "Gorbachev was quite right not to succumb to this talk... It was precisely under Reagan that we achieved more or less decent relations."<sup>600</sup> This theory demonstrates an attempt to give Gorbachev most of the credit for initiating the diplomacy that ended the Cold War.

Adamishin argued that the USSR fell in part because it focused too heavily on nuclear parity with the United States rather than mere sufficiency throughout the world. The author contended that every time Reagan pushed hard against Moscow, it hurt reformers like Gorbachev and enabled Kremlin hawks to take a tougher Cold War stand. For him it was Gorbachev who both ended the Cold War and kept the upper hand on Reagan throughout their negotiations.<sup>601</sup> The general secretary became an international icon during talks with Reagan, but ultimately the Soviet Union dissolved and the United States emerged as the lone superpower. Gorbachev may have won public relations

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<sup>600</sup> "'New Thinkers' Were Naïve," *Moscow News*, Aug. 4, 1999.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

victories, but the United States won the Cold War by process of elimination. As a result, the historical estimation of “evil empire” grew, while Gorbachev became the forgotten man.

Remembrances of Reagan by Russians varied greatly after his death in 2004, with plaudits from former opponents of the regime and condemnations from former communists and nationalistic Russians. Dissident scholar Andrei Zorin heard about Reagan declaring the Soviet Union “an evil empire” while listening to the forbidden BBC World Service on a shortwave radio. He risked talking to his friends on the telephone about the president’s words. “I jumped out of my chair and started calling... Of course, to us it was no surprise that the Soviet Union was such an empire, but the idea that somebody would say it from the podium, out loud, was a revelation.” Foreign policy expert Sergei Karaganov said that for most Russians, Reagan's name was associated with his “evil empire” denunciation. “At that time people were insulted, they thought it was unfair to them... It was an empty shell, so people believed he was insincere, an old-time Cold Warrior.” He continued, “Looking from the other side of the fence, knowing the emptiness of the system and seeing the leader of a powerful country lambasting the Soviet Union as a powerful threat seemed like a bad joke.”<sup>602</sup>

Other dissidents agreed. “Finally, someone gets it!” thought a Russian national studying in the United States named Cathy Young. She remembered encountering liberals offended by Reagan’s words. For example, “Malcolm Toon, US Ambassador in Moscow from 1976 to 1979, deplored ‘the awful ‘evil empire’ speech.” *New Republic* editor Hendrik Hertzberg told *The Washington Post* that “words like that frighten the

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<sup>602</sup> “Ambivalence in Former ‘Evil Empire,’” *Washington Post*, Jun. 7, 2004.

American public and antagonize the Soviets," condemning the speech as "not presidential."<sup>603</sup> An American reporter at the time in Russia, Joyce Barnathan remembered: "When he took on the 'Evil Empire' during his first term, his rhetoric made even the Russians' florid propaganda look wimpy." She concluded, "I could see the loathing -- and the fear -- that Reagan provoked... Cartoons depicted him waving a Stetson as he gleefully sat atop a ballistic missile. He may have called them the Evil Empire, but in the Soviet view, Reagan was evil incarnate."<sup>604</sup>

Soviet propaganda, however, could not effectively counteract the "evil empire" phenomenon within the country. Dissident Vladimir Bukovsky asserted that "evil empire" became a household phrase in Russia partly because Russians preferred a straightforward person, whether he was a friend or an enemy.<sup>605</sup> Yevgeny Volk, an analyst at the Moscow office of the Heritage Foundation, noted that Reagan was publicly despised in the Soviet Union. His words fueled anti-American and anti-administration propaganda. "He was portrayed as enemy No. 1 \_ the worst politician in the West."<sup>606</sup> The phraseology further entrenched the adversaries. Reagan's simple conception of the Soviet system "turned a 40-year political and economic struggle into an easier-to-understand morality play."<sup>607</sup> Dissidents took heart, the regime further demonized him, and the people feared confrontation. The public image of the president did not begin to change in the Soviet Union until Gorbachev made reforms and reached out to Reagan.

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<sup>603</sup> "A President on the Right Side of History," *Boston Globe*, Jun. 14, 2004.

<sup>604</sup> Joyce Barnathan, "The Cowboy Who Roped In Russia," *Business Week*, Jun. 21, 2004.

<sup>605</sup> "In Russia, Reagan remembered for helping bring down Soviet Union," *Associated Press*, Jun. 5, 2004.

<sup>606</sup> "Reagan's position on Soviet Union evolved over time," *Knight Ridder Washington Bureau*, Jun. 6, 2004.

<sup>607</sup> "Reagan had 'love affair with America,'" *Gannett News Service*, Jun. 6, 2004.

### Appropriating “Evil Empire”

George W. Bush liked the phrase “evil empire” and referenced it repeatedly during his national political career. It was not surprise that his “Axis of Evil” speech would evoke memories of “evil empire.”<sup>608</sup> During a presidential campaign speech in 1999 Texas Governor George W. Bush evoked Reagan in his discussion of “the hard but clear struggle against an evil empire.”<sup>609</sup> The Russian press worried that Bush’s foreign policy team did not accept the end of the Cold War, and instead embraced Reagan’s rhetorical rearmament. Indeed, many Republicans argued that Russia had reasserted itself as “an evil empire” during Clinton’s tenure.<sup>610</sup> On his way to the GOP convention in July 2000, Bush brought “evil” back to political discourse: “The evil empire may have passed, but evil still exists.”<sup>611</sup> The Republicans furthermore argued during the 2000 campaign that the Clinton-Gore team had “lost” Russia, evoking Cold War polemics of the 1950s by “failing to prevent its transformation into a new Evil Empire.”<sup>612</sup> Yeltsin’s successor, Vladimir Putin declared the idea of Russia as “an evil empire” was a thing of the past during a meeting with NATO leadership in February 2001.<sup>613</sup> He, however, accused Bush administration hawks of trying to recreate the idea.<sup>614</sup> Through all the subsequent changes in leadership, the specter of “evil empire” remained an emotional

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<sup>608</sup> David Frum, *The Right Man* (New York: Random House, 2003), 238-245; Michael Gerson, *Heroic Conservatism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 126-127.

<sup>609</sup> “Bush seeks \$20 billion in R&D for new weapons that ‘skip a generation,’” *Associated Press*, Sept. 23, 1999.

<sup>610</sup> “Snowflakes the Size of Human Heads,” *Moscow News*, July 19, 2000.

<sup>611</sup> “Bush Promises Strong Military,” *Associated Press*, July 31, 2000.

<sup>612</sup> “Snowflakes the Size of Human Heads,” *Moscow News*, July 19, 2000.

<sup>613</sup> “Putin says idea of Russia being an “evil empire” is a thing of the past,” *ITAR-TASS News Agency*, Feb. 20, 2001.

<sup>614</sup> “Analyst Comments on US PR Campaign Against Russia,” *RosBusiness Consulting Database*, Feb. 21, 2001.

flashpoint in U.S.-Russian relations. From Mikhail Gorbachev to Andrei Medvedev, Russian leaders defensively assured the United States that they did not rein over an evil empire.

In his 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush directed his evil phraseology elsewhere. He evoked Reagan in describing Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as an “axis of evil” against which the United States must stand in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice suggested adding North Korea and Iran to the axis as a means of obscuring the administration’s plan to attack Iraq.<sup>615</sup> Bush and his speechwriters conjured the Evil Empire speech, an address they considered both provocative and morally justified.<sup>616</sup> That characterization compelled the North Korea state news agency to deem the United States “an evil empire” in the wake of Bush’s comments.<sup>617</sup>

A couple of weeks after the State of the Union, Bush toured the Demilitarized Zone with South Korean President Kim Dae-jung. The South Korean president delighted Bush by comparing “axis of evil” to “evil empire” at a joint news conference. Bush interjected: “And yet, [Reagan] was then able to have constructive dialogue with Mr. Gorbachev.”<sup>618</sup> Despite that veiled allusion to diplomacy, nonaligned nations in the West’s struggle against Muslim extremist terrorism began appropriating “evil empire” rhetoric to describe American foreign policy in 2002. A piece titled “Not Axis of Evil, but Evil Empire” in Nigeria’s *Guardian Independent* asserted: “If the Arab states and

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<sup>615</sup> Robert Schlesinger, *White House Ghosts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 477-478.

<sup>616</sup> Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth*, 178.

<sup>617</sup> “NKorea: Paper condemns vice president’s echoing of ‘axis of evil’ idea,” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Feb. 28, 2002.

<sup>618</sup> Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth*, 179.

their rulers are defeated, or accept enslavement in the new evil empire, Arab masses will assume direct responsibility for their freedom and humanity. But in the meantime the evil empire is here, and we are all its subjects."<sup>619</sup>

Secretary of State Colin Powell tried to provide political cover for the “axis of evil” by tying the phrase to “evil empire.” He was uniquely qualified to do as a former Reagan national security advisor. “It does have a familiar ring ... to the old ‘evil empire’ of Ronald Reagan days... The fact of the matter is Ronald Reagan was right and the fact of the matter is George Bush is right.” Powell concluded, “There is no reason for us not to identify them for what they are: regimes that are inherently evil.”<sup>620</sup> Powell made some public relations headway as even the left-leaning *Independent* admitted that Reagan’s “evil empire” rhetoric worked against the Soviets by encouraging dissidents and provoking a bankrupting arms race. These remembrances are simplistic. The causality between Reagan’s words and the fall of the Soviet Union is spurious at best and reveals the inability of U.S. policymakers to remove themselves from a Cold War mentality. “The axis of evil, like the evil empire before it, is certain to become a defining phrase of our age,” The *Independent* presciently asserted but not for the reasons expected back in 2002.<sup>621</sup> Eight years after the Axis of Evil speech, the Iranian regime remained. North Korea acquired nuclear weapons in the meantime, with Iran poised to become the next nuclear nation. That seminal address launched the case for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, a conflict which continued to ensnare the United States over seven years later.

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<sup>619</sup> “BBC Monitoring quotes from the African press.” *BBC Monitoring Africa* Oct. 10, 2002.

<sup>620</sup> “‘Axis of evil’ label not a prelude to U.S. invasion: Powell,” *Agence France Presse*, Feb. 5, 2002.

<sup>621</sup> “President Bush’s Talk of an ‘Axis of Evil’ is not Mere Rhetoric – He Means It,” *Independent on Sunday*, Feb. 17, 2002.

On the one year anniversary of the Axis of Evil speech, the administration had its eye on history. It attempted to tie the president's words to the historical memory of "evil empire." The administration expected "axis of evil" to have a life beyond the Bush presidency. Press Secretary Ari Fleischer sounded as if he were discussing Soviet dissidents by proclaiming: "Just as Ronald Reagan was accurate in calling the Soviet Union the evil empire, it's important to people inside those three countries who want to be free to know that the United States has not forgotten their cause." The Bush White House displayed no regret about either its phraseology or actions in attempting to remake the internal politics of the Middle East.<sup>622</sup>

In February 2003, on the eve of huge worldwide anti-Iraq War protests, "evil empire" and its meanings were bandied about across the political spectrum in large part due to Bush's rejuvenation of the phrase. The conservative *Times of London* opinion page equated antiwar activists with antinuclear activists from the early 1980s. "The 'peace movements' of the European Left which fought against the deployment of cruise and Pershing were toasted in the Kremlin. So it doesn't surprise them (Eastern European allies of the United States in the Iraq War) when Saddam proclaims: 'We admire the development of the peace movement around the world.'"<sup>623</sup> On the other side, an American protesting in Paris called herself a "Citizen of the Evil Empire" noting "I think today by attacking Iraq, we've become the evil empire."<sup>624</sup> Furthermore, Richard Ford, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist designated by the US State Department a "cultural

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<sup>622</sup> "Axis of Evil: First Birthday for a Famous Phrase," *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 2003.

<sup>623</sup> "Palmerston versus pirates, pacifists and parasites," *Times of London*, Feb. 11, 2003.

<sup>624</sup> "Tens of thousands in French anti-war demo outside Paris US embassy," *Agence France Presse*, Mar. 20, 2003.



ambassador," called President Bush a "moron" who governed an "evil empire."<sup>625</sup> By 2003, regardless of one's political persuasion, having "evil empire" in one's rhetorical arsenal was fashionable.

President Bush remained undaunted as he continued comparing himself to his political forbearer, Ronald Reagan. During a November 2003 state visit to Britain, the president tied his unpopularity in Europe to that of Reagan in the early 1980s: "some observers had pronounced the 'evil empire' speech to be 'simplistic and naive, and even dangerous.'"<sup>626</sup> Bush implied that history would justify his words and deeds as it had for Reagan. Bush admired Reagan's "moral clarity, a willingness to call oppression and evil by their proper names."<sup>627</sup> "Evil Empire" also punctuated the president's eulogy of Reagan: "His politics had a freshness and optimism that won converts from every class and every nation and ultimately from the very heart of the evil empire."<sup>628</sup> Bush hoped for a similar positive historical reappraisal of his foreign policy in the years to come.

### Conclusion

Ronald Reagan possessed a winning combination of luck and skill in diplomacy and politics. He was lucky in that communism collapsed soon after rhetorical rearmament. Indeed, this development soon eclipsed the Iran Contra Affair. The president demonstrated his communications skills by crafting a speech and a phrase that reverberate around the world and across decades. "Evil Empire" resonated with many

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<sup>625</sup> "The man who calls Bush a moron," *Sydney Morning Herald* Mar. 13, 2004.

<sup>626</sup> "Bush Calls Iraq Mission Watershed for Global Democracy 'Revolution' Casts Himself to Follow Reagan as Warrior for World Democracy," *Independent*, Nov. 7, 2003.

<sup>627</sup> "How they misjudged the Reagan I knew," *Sunday Telegraph*, Jun. 6, 2004.

<sup>628</sup> "'Ronnie won Cold War without firing a shot'; Frail Thatcher hails 'great liberator,'" *Sun Herald*, Jun. 13, 2004.

people in the Soviet Union as a familiar, direct, moral phrase. The Evil Empire speech revived the moralistic streak in U.S. foreign policy that had existed before détente. Yet, calling one's enemies evil in an address created a set of problems for Reagan that the Bush administration judged not significant enough to temper their enthusiasm for updating "evil" phraseology for the new century. "Evil Empire" was a precise, focused, and simple term. "Axis of Evil" was an imprecise, unfocused, and sprawling term. The word "axis" evoked the memory of the Axis Powers allied against the American side in World War II. Moreover, no axis existed between the Hermit Kingdom of North Korea and perpetual antagonists Iran and Iraq.

The "evil empire" phenomenon endures because it makes the end of the Cold War a fable that teaches the dire consequences of prolonged struggle with the forces of evangelical Americanism. Reasons to condemn Reagan during his presidency became rationale to praise him after he left office. The president's anti-Soviet polemics further destabilized superpower relations during his first term, but looking back on his presidency that rhetoric sounds transformative. Reagan's moral clarity and optimism enhanced his legacy over time. The historical estimation of President Reagan grew with the advantage of historical perspective, but also in large part due to a concerted effort to forget the folly and recklessness of his polemics. Thanks to the end of the Cold War and the work of legacy makers on the Right, "Evil Empire" metamorphosized from a political miscalculation into a landmark moment of the Reagan presidency.

## CONCLUSION

President Reagan balanced pragmatism and ideology in his foreign policy throughout his time in office. Reagan's ideological anticommunism prompted the rhetorical rearmament of the Evil Empire speech in 1983. By 1985, the president's pragmatic political instincts led him to diplomacy upon realizing that Mikhail Gorbachev was willing to negotiate on his terms. His personal experiences explain the balance between the president's ideological and pragmatic impulses. Reagan's ideological anticommunism developed as he fought with leftists in Hollywood during the second Red Scare of the late 1940s. Reagan's pragmatic instincts helped him get elected governor of California in 1966 just two years after Reagan's brand of Goldwater conservatism suffered a massive electoral defeat in 1964. The president's pragmatism drove American diplomacy after Reagan met Gorbachev in 1985. He developed a personal chemistry with the Soviet leader. The president believed he could work with Gorbachev to reduce the number of nuclear weapons and encourage reform within the Soviet Union.

The president's worldview and subsequent actions were also heavily influenced by his evangelical Americanism. He possessed a deep faith in the power of the United States as a force for good in the world and as a land of opportunity for its citizens. Reagan had experienced the bounty of America. For him rags to riches stories, such as his own, exemplified American greatness. People living under the yoke of communism suffered together in totalitarian darkness. He rejected moral equivalency. The president believed the United States was superior to the Soviet Union.

Part of Reagan's problem with the Nuclear Freeze movement was what he saw as its implicit equivalency between the opposing sides in the Cold War. Reagan rejected the notion that both sides were equally at fault for the arms race. The United States was a force for good and the Soviet Union was a force for evil. That idea never changed for Reagan. His address to the NAE was a culmination of evangelical Americanism. This group believed in both the goodness and greatness of America. He praised the United States before a friendly audience and condemned the Soviet Union in hopes that the organization would support his foreign policy. The forum was a natural venue for the president to weave together evangelical Americanism and evangelical Christianity in one address. Reagan was not expecting much praise from the news media for the address, but the political baggage he picked up as a result of the speech was perhaps heavier than expected.

Reagan earned the political capital to deal with the Soviet Union as he saw fit by defeating the Nuclear Freeze movement in his first term. The administration had exposed the Nuclear Freeze movement as a popular phenomenon whose political power was intangible. Positive news media coverage of the Freeze juxtaposed with criticism of the administration created a serious political problem for the White House. The elections of 1982 and 1984 proved that the Nuclear Freeze movement spoke loudly, but carried a puny political stick.<sup>629</sup> In general, Reagan's foreign policy often faced spirited and loud opposition throughout his presidency, but his opponents did not cause him deep political wounds. Economic factors took their traditional role in determining Democratic

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<sup>629</sup> "Widespread Vote Urges Nuclear Freeze," *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 1982.

successes in 1982 and failures in 1984.<sup>630</sup> The Freeze was never a central reason for victory or defeat as claimed by proponents such as Senator Edward Kennedy.<sup>631</sup>

Neutralizing the Freeze further bolstered Reagan's conservative credentials.

Gaining evangelical support for Reagan's foreign policy constituted a durable legacy of the address. The Republican Party already spoke for evangelicals on social issues, but had not convinced this religious faction of the Reagan coalition support peace through strength. Evangelicals, particularly within the NAE, had an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the Nuclear Freeze.<sup>632</sup> In addition, the GOP faced the reality that as recently as 1976 Jimmy Carter won a majority of devout Protestant voters.<sup>633</sup> During the 1982 Congressional elections evangelicals favored Democrats over Republicans by a margin of sixty-three percent to 29 percent. Despite voting two to one for Reagan, Evangelicals also remained affiliated with the Democratic Party with fifty-seven percent calling themselves Democrats versus twenty-three percent labeling themselves Republicans.<sup>634</sup>

Such strong sentiment for the Democrats and the Nuclear Freeze movement along with moderate and liberal evangelical factions deriding Reagan's rhetorical rearmament, made the conversion of the NAE to peace through strength all the more remarkable. The NAE, an organization that failed to support Reagan's foreign policy despite his personal

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<sup>630</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 196, 435.

<sup>631</sup> "Nuclear Freeze Vote: Both Sides Term It a Victory," *New York Times*, Aug. 7, 1982.

<sup>632</sup> NAE Office of Public Affairs: NAE/Gallup Poll. Morton Blackwell Files: Nuclear Freeze, folder 1, July 5, 1983. *NAE Washington Insight*, July 1983; "Poll Shows Evangelicals Support Nuclear Freeze," *Washington Post*, Jul. 8, 1983.

<sup>633</sup> Burton I. Kauffman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr., Second Edition, Revised*. (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2006), 20.

<sup>634</sup> The Gallup Poll Public Opinion, 1935-1997. The CD-ROM Edition (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000), 185.

entreaties during his 1983 address to their convention, by 1986 had been converted to his foreign policy vision.<sup>635</sup> Reagan's conflation of religious social issues with a hawkish foreign policy laid the groundwork for organized evangelical support for peace through strength.

The president demonstrated, in a manner Jimmy Carter did not, that making a political bet on the appeal of evangelical Americanism was safer than equivocating on the potential of the United States. While Reagan's rhetorical rearmament went too far for many people, he did so in part because of his unflagging faith in the U.S. ability to win the Cold War. The president eventually prevailed upon his NAE audience to support his foreign policy, which helped to neutralize the Nuclear Freeze movement and win a landslide reelection in 1984. Although Reagan moved in a more pragmatic foreign policy direction in his second term, he nevertheless evangelized for America during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1988.

The Right methodically took a liability, rhetorical rearmament, and turned it into a political strength. Aside from shoring up his right flank and cultivating a Reaganite consciousness among erstwhile foreign policy agnostics, the president caused enough concern to jolt Moscow toward diplomacy. According to Anatoly Dobrynin, the Kremlin worried far more about Reagan's rhetoric than it admitted.<sup>636</sup> The Soviets were eager to talk to Reagan and were finally able to set a summit after the gerontocracy fell and Gorbachev rose to power. Reagan eventually realized that his polemics had gone too far. Through dehumanizing America's Cold War adversary, the president had lost sight of the

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<sup>635</sup> National Association of Evangelicals. *Guidelines: Peace Freedom, and Security Studies: A Program of the National Association of Evangelicals*. Wheaton, IL, Mar. 1989.

<sup>636</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 522-523.

fact that communists were equally fearful of nuclear war. With the determined prodding of Nancy Reagan, the president began a rhetorical freeze that calmed the Kremlin's nerves and made negotiations possible.<sup>637</sup>

While superpower relations turned out better than anyone in the United States could have hoped during the early 1980s, a darker possibility existed. The inflammatory rhetoric on both sides was at such a fever pitch that nuclear war seemed publicly plausible. Letting the situation reach such a heightened level of tensions amounted to a dangerous misjudgment by the superpowers. Reagan realized that things had gone too far and steadily moved toward engagement.

Reagan skillfully led his administration away from Cold War brinksmanship toward diplomacy. The president proved adept at extricating himself from political problems of his own making. Despite an earlier belligerent tone, he delivered on making 1984 and the remainder of his presidency years of peace and peaceful rhetoric. The so-called Reagan victory school of historiography argues that Reagan was the peacemaker who won the Cold War; however, such an assertion is incomplete and incorrect. This work has attempted to complicate the narrative by explaining the roots of Reagan's ideology and pragmatism and how those factors shaped diplomacy with the Kremlin.

The legacy of rhetorical rearmament is mixed. Reagan's "evil empire" phraseology frightened Moscow, heightened Cold War tensions, and troubled the American people. The news media made the phrase a political liability that Reagan had to address in every major encounter with the Soviet Union after March 8, 1983. An unexpected benefit of this oratory was his opportunity to use it as a carrot in superpower

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<sup>637</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 510.

relations. The international phenomenon of “evil empire” was so ubiquitous that Gorbachev counted Reagan’s abandonment of the phrase in May 1988 as a tangible diplomatic victory.

Famous rhetoric was a dynamic legacy because words are malleable and can be easily used to promote various and divergent political agendas. The Evil Empire speech remains more open to interpretation than Cold War episodes that have a discrete beginning, middle, and end. Those words shook the Kremlin and the American political culture with tremendous force. This period of ideological and rhetorical confrontation lends itself to a politicized historical debate. Historians panned the address immediately after it was delivered as reckless and dangerous. Recent scholarship more sympathetic toward Reagan has turned the negative consequences the phrase into symbols of Reagan’s courageous leadership. “Evil Empire” endures as one of the more contentious terms in American history and for American historians. This dissertation has attempted to contextualize the political sniping over “evil empire” and shift the terms of debate by demonstrating that Reagan meant what he said, but he learned from the phrase and turned it into a diplomatic advantage.<sup>638</sup>

The Evil Empire speech was not necessarily better or worse than other controversial addresses such as Carter’s Crisis of Confidence speech or George W. Bush’s Axis of Evil speech. Sympathetic Reagan scholars and the mainstream media have judged Reagan’s oratory successful because of events that occurred years after the address and that had little to do with the president’s words that day. Reagan benefitted from events out of his control in a manner that his predecessor and successor did not.

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<sup>638</sup> Cannon, *President Reagan*, 746.



Presidential rhetoric affects and reflects the times in which leaders govern, but does not determine the future. While President Reagan was a skilled politician, his success cannot be derived from contorted reasoning that ties a speech in 1983 with events half way around the world in 1989. Rather, Reagan's accomplishment was a pragmatic change of course in how he talked about the Soviet Union and a willingness to engage in substantive diplomacy with a long-time adversary.

The Evil Empire speech marks just one episode in a two term presidency. Yet, Reagan supporters and detractors point to this address as an example of what they respectively love and hate about the president's ideology. Although the age of Reagan has ended, his words and deeds continue to influence contemporary discourse more than any former leader of the past four decades. The Reagan presidency demonstrated a sizeable shift in Cold War oratory from the Carter years, if not Cold War policy. His definition of foreign enemies in moral terms was a touchstone of the George W. Bush administration. Of course his moralistic discourse on United States foreign relations was perhaps just a return the traditional state of American foreign policy oratory prior to détente. Perhaps Nixon, Ford, and Carter were the outliers, not Reagan.

The shift from his immediate predecessors by injecting religious rhetoric into Cold War diplomacy resonated to the point that even as he moved away from didactic condemnations, his earlier rhetoric clung to him. Reagan used "evil empire" to his advantage. The political capital garnered by rhetorical rearmament allowed the president to freely negotiate arms control agreements with Gorbachev and improve relations with

the Soviet Union. His most enduring diplomatic legacy was his pragmatic conservative course toward ending the Cold War.

Perhaps Ronald Reagan was neither an “amiable dunce” nor the mastermind of victory in the Cold War. Perhaps Reagan was just a politician looking to the next election who thrived on public affection. Perhaps President Reagan said what he believed if he thought it would appeal to a large number of Americans and learned to temper his less popular ideas. If reviews of his presidency turned sour, then he recalibrated his message. Perhaps Reagan scholars are unnecessarily complicating an uncomplicated man. Reagan hated communism and he liked reminding people of that fact. When Americans became uncomfortable with anticommunist rhetoric, he stopped talking that way. He did so not because Reagan had changed his beliefs, but because the president had the chance to make the world more peaceful, a popular concept with the American people.

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