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FIGHT FOR STAR WARS: THE REAGAN DOCTRINE AND THE ENDING OF THE COLD
WAR

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FIGHT FOR STAR WARS: THE REAGAN DOCTRINE AND THE ENDING OF THE COLD WAR

August 11, 1984 nearly marked the end of mankind. It was on this day that the 40th president of the United States Ronald Reagan issued a statement that almost started World War III: “We begin bombing in five minutes.” Amidst a height of tense US-Soviet relations, Reagan’s joke of having “signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever” just about led to the devastation of nuclear confrontation. Luckily, no missiles were fired, but this incident symbolizes the US-Soviet battle during the Cold War.

The Cold War, a strenuous conflict that dominated American politics from 1947-1991, finally came to a close at the turn of the twenty-first century. The cause of its ending presents historians and politicians alike with a challenging and dividing debate. Democrats often credit the collapsing Soviet economy and Gorbachev’s own willingness for peace for the end of the war, if not avoiding the topic entirely.¹ Republicans, on the other hand, insist that Reagan’s aggressive foreign policy and the Reagan Doctrine propelled the Gorbachev era and the fall of

¹ James Graham Wilson, “Did Reagan Make Gorbachev Possible?” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 38:3 (September 2008) 456-475. Looking at the overarching viewpoints of the Democratic and Republican party on the ending of the cold war, historian Wilson stated that “Republicans are enamored with what they see as the legacy of Reagan’s foreign policy” and that Democrats “shift the conversation to *perestroika* and *glasnost*” if not avoiding the topic. Further reference of the Democratic and Republican divide of opinions in this paper, though not its focus, is in reference and corroboration to Wilson’s work.

the Soviet Union.² Such research on the impact of the Reagan Doctrine can be seen in direct analysis of Reagan's addresses, Reagan's rhetoric and arms control strategies against the Soviet Union, the role of Reagan's policies in ending the Cold War, and the legacies of the arms race. The question is, then, should Reagan and his policies be credited for the ending of the Cold War, or were internal factors within the Soviet Union the prime factor to the end? Analyzing the US defense conditions prior to and after the Reagan Administration, Reagan's original Addresses, and the Soviet economy, it can be reasonably concluded that although Reagan's policies undoubtedly asserted pressure, the internal factors within the Soviet Union played a much larger role in the ending of the Cold War.

The peace that ensued from World War II was far from long-lasting. The Soviets were quickly gaining global influence and its development of the atomic bomb threatened the US sense of global superiority. Tensions arose as the US was equally as fearful of the Soviet spread of communism to the rest of Europe as the Soviets were of the spread of capitalism. Thus, these two world powers engaged in a long battle for ideological control that never broke out into direct military engagement between the two nations, but was instead fought through proxy wars and diplomacy: the Cold War. The Cold War began in 1947 and lasted until the beginning of the Bush Administration. Not only was this an era teetering on the edge of nuclear war and the extinction of mankind, but it was also a period of intense political and ideological battle between the capitalist West and the communist East in which the last man standing ultimately rose to become the global leader.

² See for example, Andrew E. Busch, "Ronald Reagan and the Defeat of the Soviet Empire," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 27:3 (Summer 1997), 451-466.

The Truman Doctrine is most commonly viewed as the official beginning of the Cold War. The Truman Doctrine stemmed from the belief that Soviet Communism would spread amongst neighboring countries and take over the world and that it was the duty of the US to put a halt to such a spread by aiding any country fighting against Soviet invasion or infiltration. Thus, Truman urged assistance for Turkey and Greece, who were no longer supported by England and who were being threatened by communist insurgents. The Marshall plan was then passed to prevent the spread of Communist influence throughout Europe by providing European nations economic aid. Additionally, NSC-68 was introduced under the Truman Administration, which provided for the increased funding for military development. Together, Truman's rhetoric, his plans, and NSC-68 became the foundation of American foreign policy during the Cold War.

Additionally, the Truman Doctrine prompted US engagement in a multitude of proxy wars against Communist invasions, few of which were particularly successful: the Korean War resulted in a stalemate and the Vietnam War was a Communist win. US-Soviet tensions wavered quite drastically throughout the entirety of the Cold War, peaked the first time in the 1960s when the Soviets strategically installed missiles in Cuba for the easy targeting of US cities, an event known as the Cuban Missile Crisis, before calming somewhat during the 1970s when President Nixon signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) in an attempt to establish a more peaceful relationship with the Soviet Union. The SALT II treaty was later signed under the Carter Administration. This period of détente lasted for 8 years (1972-1980) before US-Soviet relations took another drastic downturn as Ronald Reagan assumed presidency.

Originally a Hollywood actor before becoming the governor of California, Reagan won a surprising victory over President Jimmy Carter. As the Carter Administration had been riddled

with economic problems and, most recently, the issue of renewed Soviet aggression and American hostages, Americans were hesitant for his reelection. Reagan, on the other hand, campaigned for a new supply side economics program, later dubbed Reaganomics, that seemed much more promising than Carter's meek proposals as well as renewed vigor after a decade of low spirits. Reagan wanted to draw the nation away from what he called the Vietnam Syndrome, and bring in a renewed sense of nationalism and spirit. Reagan also opposed large federal government and advocated for state rights, though this was not deeply elaborated upon during his campaign. In the end, Reagan won by a landslide with support from 44 of the states as citizens were hopeful for what they called the Reagan Revolution.

When the Reagan Administration began, it was undeniable that the tensions between the US and the Soviet Union were once again rising. The Soviets had invaded Afghanistan under the Carter presidency and the SALT treaties was facing quick deterioration, and thus, the era of détente was coming to an end.³ Despite this, Reagan's presidency served to expedite the ending of détente and urged the nation into a rapidly escalating arms race. Following President Reagan's Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security in 1983, which presented his plan to maintain "peace through our strength," the national defense budget faced its largest increase yet of 20% to \$258 billion.⁴ Reagan's policies and the increase in military spending propelled the largest arms race on both sides and from it nationalistic, militaristic, and hegemonic thoughts emerged.

³ Brian White, *The Concept of Détente* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 165; Brian K. Muzas, *Jimmy Charter, Ronald Reagan, and the End (or Consummation?) of Détente* (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2014), 163-220.

⁴ Earl C. Ravenal, "Reagan's 1983 Defense Budget: An Analysis and An Alternative," (Washington: Cato Institute), available from <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/reagans-1983-defense-budget-analysis-alternative>.

As a staunch anti-Communist, Reagan's determination to end the Cold War through not just the containment of Soviet Communism but rather its complete destruction could be seen on almost all fronts: Reagan ordered aid to Afghanistan which helped fight off the Soviets and supported Nicaraguan insurgents (Iran-Contra affair) without approval from Congress among many other authorized assistance for proxy wars against the Soviets. Reagan's aggressive approach towards the Soviets became known as the Reagan Doctrine. The Reagan Doctrine stemmed from his belief that merely containing the Communists was not enough; the US must actively involve itself in the dismantlement of Communism completely. Reagan accentuated this viewpoint in his "Evil Empire Address" to the National Association of Evangelicals, reiterating the treacheries of the Soviet Union and the arms buildup necessary to conquer them. Reagan denounced, in his speech, the Soviet Union as an "Evil Empire" and portrayed life under the communist regime as one of "totalitarian darkness," warning audiences of "its omnipotence over individual man" and "its eventual domination of all peoples." Reagan's rhetoric framed the Soviets and Communist as the ultimate "focus of evil in the modern world," invoking fear in audiences and rallying support for his campaign for the complete extermination of communism. Reagan further emphasized his point when he described in his address that the fight between the US and the Soviet Union, the arms race, and the continued aggression towards the Soviets as a battle between "right and wrong and good and evil." Reagan also rejected the idea of a nuclear freeze in American as he believed it to be a "very dangerous fraud" and "merely the illusion of peace. The reality is that we must find peace through strength."⁵

⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Evil Empire Speech," [article on-line] (University of Maryland, MD: Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project, 1983, accessed 23 March 2020); available from <https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/>.

Reagan's presidency and the Reagan Doctrine marked a renewed attack on the Soviet Union and the launching of the largest US military buildup. Reagan's strategy was to negotiate from a position of strength. He insisted that his arms race policies were necessary to gain nuclear and conventional arms superiority over the Soviets so as to deter attack. Reagan's "deterrence" strategy stated that "weakness only invites aggression" and that it is only when the US is strong enough militarily that the Soviets realize the harms of attack "outweigh[ed] any potential gains," that they would stand down. Reagan stated in a radio address to the nation that:

Our aim has been to ensure that America has the will and the means to deter conflict and to defend the interests of freedom. We've done this for one reason and one reason only -- because a strong, respected America is the surest way to preserve the peace and prevent conflict.⁶

Parallel to the ideas of NSC-68 signed earlier in the war, Reagan believed that a military buildup also put him "in a stronger negotiating position to push for change in the Soviet system itself,"⁷ and the dismantlement of Communism, as compared to the current situation of which Reagan condemned the existing weapons arsenal as "increasingly obsolete." In the 1970s, the "US [military] investments had fallen 20 percent, while Soviet investment has risen 50 percent," which had allowed the Soviets to gain nuclear superiority during the era of détente. By the 1980s, the "Soviet Union had an eleven-year lead" in investments.⁸ Reagan also offered

⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on United States-Soviet Relations and the Vice President's Trip to Europe," (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, 1983, accessed 29 May 2020); available from <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/10883a>.

⁷ Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "Reagan's Strategy for the Cold War and the Evil Empire Address," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 19:3 (Fall 2016), 433.

⁸ Ben L. Martin, "Has There Been a Reagan Revolution in Defense Policy?" *World Affairs*, 148:3 (Winter 1985-86), 173.

numerous examples of the Soviets' gaining power in his Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security in 1983:

The Soviet Union built over 200 new Backfire bombers... We haven't built a new long-range bomber since our B - 52's were deployed about a quarter of a century ago... In 1978 the Soviets had 600 intermediate-range nuclear missiles based on land and were beginning to add the SS - 20 -- a new, highly accurate, mobile missile with 3 warheads...the Soviets are still adding an average of 3 new warheads a week, and now have 1,300. These warheads can reach their targets in a matter of a few minutes. We still have none.

Additionally, the US was also falling short on conventional arms:

Since 1974 the United States has produced 3,050 tactical combat aircraft. By contrast, the Soviet Union has produced twice as many. When we look at attack submarines, the United States has produced 27 while the Soviet Union has produced 61. For armored vehicles, including tanks, we have produced 11,200. The Soviet Union has produced 54,000 -- nearly 5 to 1 in their favor. Finally, with artillery, we've produced 950 artillery and rocket launchers while the Soviets have produced more than 13,000 -- a staggering 14-to-1 ratio.⁹

To reverse this gap of technology and “too many years of neglect and mistake,” Reagan pushed through Congress funding for a largescale development and modernization of US nuclear weaponry. Reagan’s primary goal was to first revitalize the military from its years of “neglect” so as to compete with the increasing threat of the Soviets. By the time of this speech, Reagan had already put his plans into effect. In 1981, Reagan approved mass increases in defense spending:

...that totaled \$1.5 trillion over five years and included a host of new weapons systems: 100 MX missiles (later scaled back to 50), each equipped with 10 multiple independent reentry vehicles (MIRVs) with 300 kiloton warheads, or the equivalent of 20 times

⁹ Ronald Reagan, “Address to Nation on Defense and National Security,” [article on-line] (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, 1983, accessed 23 March 2020); available from <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/32383d>.

the impact of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima; the B-1 bomber; the Trident submarine; the neutron bomb; and the F-14 fighter plane...there were new research projects geared toward acquiring particle beam technology, high-energy lasers and space weapons, as well as wage increases and 75,000 new civilian jobs at the Defense Department, and outlays for two new aircraft carrier groups priced around \$18 billion each (Stockman 1986, 281).¹⁰

These figures represented only a few of the many defense investments made by Reagan.

Additionally, one of Reagan's most prominent and problematic defense proposals was the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) or "Star Wars" to fund for research into a space-based missile defense. It was Reagan's belief that reliance on Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) did not discourage nuclear war, but rather it guaranteed mutual suicide. Reagan emphasized in a radio address that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought" and that MAD was "truly mad."¹¹ Instead, what was needed was a "reliable defense against them [nuclear weapons]," which was the basis of Reagan's advocacy for the development of offensive missiles and the SDI, despite his foreign policy team's protests of it being an unsuccessful expenditure. Furthermore, Reagan's intentions with the SDI, as displayed in his radio address, were "to make the world safer through development of nonnuclear security shields that would protect people by preventing weapons from reaching their targets and, hopefully, render ballistic missiles obsolete." Reagan's insistence on SDI later cost the US its relations with the Soviets, even delaying the resolution to the decades long conflict.

¹⁰ David A. Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics: How the Reagan Revolution Failed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 281, as quoted in Wilson, p. 462.

¹¹ Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation and the World on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva," [article on-line] (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, 1985, accessed 29 May 2020); available from <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/110985a>.

By the mid-1980s, it was clear that both sides had grown tired of the conflict. The Soviet economy was at the lowest it had been since the start of the decades long economic decline beginning shortly after World War II. Reagan and the US were also eager to establish a better conflict prevention mechanism than the unpromising MAD. The agreement established between both sides was that there needed to be an arms reduction. Therefore, the Geneva Conference of 1985, the first of a series of Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was planned. Going into the conference, the Soviets sought for a 50% decrease of nuclear bombers and missiles. The US, on the other hand, was intent on a more sustainable way to deter nuclear war and take reliance off of MAD. The US also sought the right for continued development of defensive weaponry, specifically SDI, and to show that the US was not lenient on this condition, it was boldly declared before the Geneva Conference that the SDI program was still running and that it would have its first testing soon, despite the SDI being nowhere close to operational. This launched the START Conferences with a shaky beginning.

However unpleasant the events leading up to the conference were, the results proved to be optimistic. A foundation for future discussion was set and substantial talk of issues on both sides were accomplished, including that on both countries' perceptions of each other and SDI. When Reagan and Gorbachev met in November 1985, the leadership in the Soviet Union had just changed, and with it, new thinking emerged. Under the leadership of Gorbachev, the Soviets were no longer focused solely on a military buildup to ensure their victory in the case of a nuclear war. Rather, there was a desire to act on common security—the prevention and “response

to the mass destruction that would ensue if nuclear deterrence failed.”¹² During the meeting, Gorbachev remarked that “we [the USSR] are realistic pragmatists who categorically oppose attempts to dominate other countries” and the US “overestimate[s] the power of the Soviet Union.” Gorbachev’s words had the gradual influence on Reagan to back down from his hardline anti-communist stance. To the outrage of many conservatives, Reagan relayed to the press that “in the past, Soviet leaders have openly expressed their acceptance of the Marxist theory of the one-world communist state; that their obligation was to expand in the whole world. They no longer feel that way;” Gorbachev “has never affirmed that.”¹³ Reagan and Gorbachev developed an amiable relationship that could arguably be considered the cornerstone to the US-Soviet relations’ later success. However, this was not enough for Reagan to release his attachment on SDI, nor could it be enough to convince Gorbachev that SDI would not be used to start and “offensive arms race” in space. Reagan insisted on the continued development of SDI and ensured Gorbachev that he only wanted to “make the world safer” and that the missile system was for defensive purposes only. Reagan also proposed that if the US and the Soviet Union “would both eliminate our offensive missiles,” then the US was open to “share[ing] the benefits of advanced defenses [SDI]” with the Soviets. However, Gorbachev still held reservations as shown by his remarks at the Geneva Plenary Meeting:

If the U.S. embarks on SDI, the following will happen: (1) no reduction of offensive weapons; and (2) Soviet Union will respond. This response will not be a mirror image of your program, but a

¹² “Reagan and Gorbachev: The Geneva Summit,” [article on-line] (Atomic Heritage Foundation, 2018, accessed 23 May 2020); available from <https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/reagan-and-gorbachev-geneva-summit>.

¹³ “The Nation: Is Reagan Now Less Hard on Communism?” *The New York Times*, CXXXVII: 47,359 (Dec. 20, 1987), sec. 4, 5.

simpler, more effective system... It will just destabilize the situation, generate mistrust, and waste resources.¹⁴

Gorbachev's dislike for SDI was obviously stated during the Plenary Meeting, but Reagan did not back down from his position. However, despite the lack of progress on SDI, the Geneva Conference set the stage for improved relations between the two superpowers and continued negotiation. A joint statement was also signed that highlighted the aims for peace and arms reduction, despite differences in approach. The joint statement specifically established that avoiding nuclear war and abandoning the quest for military superiority was in the best interest of all individuals.¹⁵ This was monumental and crucial to the ending of the Cold War as the decades long ideological battle and race for superiority was coming to an end.

Reagan and Gorbachev next met at the Reykjavík Summit. During this summit, it was proposed that all ballistic missiles be banned in both countries. This proposal was almost passed, showing the extent both countries were willing to go to establish peace. However, Reagan's insistence on SDI hindered efforts again. Gorbachev was convinced that the Defense Initiative led to the militarization of space and a space arms race. The general Soviet population was also convinced that the goal of SDI was to, as one Soviet newspaper wrote, "shift the arms race to

¹⁴ National Archives and Record Administration of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, "Geneva Summit Memorandum of Conversation Second Plenary Meeting," (November 19, 1985: Simi Valley, CA).

¹⁵ Guidelines and goals were set were also set in the joint statement for Risk Reduction Centers, nuclear non-proliferation, chemical weapons, MBFR, CDE, fusion research, and more. For more information, see: "Joint Soviet-United States Statement on the Summit Meeting in Geneva," [article on-line] (National Archives and Record Administration of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, 1985, accessed 23 May 2020); available from <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/112185a>.

outer space and threaten mankind from there.”¹⁶ The summit ended again with a stalemate and Gorbachev refused to sign onto proposed arms reduction treaties due to SDI, wary of the first strike advantage it gave the US and explaining that “if they [US and Soviets] could agree to ban research in space, he would sign in two minutes.”¹⁷ It was not until the Washington Summit in 1987 that the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), an agreement to dismantle ballistic missiles with a range of 300-3,400 miles, was signed as the first nuclear (and conventional) arms reduction treaty since SALT II. Had Reagan been more lenient with his SDI policy, an agreement on arms reduction and peace between the US and the Soviets could have taken shape earlier as the arms reduction talks made it apparent that Gorbachev was extremely open for negotiation, but was unwilling to compromise on SDI. In fact, it was not until the Bush Administration at the Malta Conference that peace was reached between the US and the Soviets, showing that Reagan’s SDI proposal actually delayed the ending of the Cold War.

Despite these facts, Republicans continued to argue that Reagan’s arms build-up policies forced the Soviets to stand down, bringing the Cold War to an end as Reagan made both the Soviets and Americans realize that nuclear war was devastating and that neither side gained anything from it. It is also argued that the Soviets were deeply fearful of Reagan’s massive arms buildup plans and his anti-Communist rhetoric. In particular, the Soviets were wary of the dangers of attack SDI imposed. Reagan’s aggressive stance against the Soviets and Communism

¹⁶ “The Soviet Propaganda Campaign Against the US Strategic Defense Initiative,” [article online] (United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1986, accessed 27 May 2020), p. 9; available from <http://insidethecoldwar.org/sites/default/files/documents/Soviet%20Propaganda%20Against%20the%20US%20Strategic%20Defense%20Initiative%20SDI%20August%201986.pdf>.

¹⁷ National Archives and Record Administration of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, “Geneva Summit Memorandum of Conversation Second Private Meeting,” (November 19, 1985: Simi Valley, CA).

only relaxed as Gorbachev took leadership of the Soviet Union and assumed a more diplomatic stance, establishing a more amiable relationship between the two countries. However, many insist that credit for START and Gorbachev's stance should be given to Reagan.¹⁸

Data suggest otherwise. Reports from the CIA on US and Soviet military spending budgets and Soviet GNP statistics confirmed that there was “virtually no effect caused by the US military buildup of the 1980s on Soviet military spending.”¹⁹ Furthermore, “Reagan began abandoning his hardline anti-Soviet stance in late 1983, 18 months *before* Gorbachev took power.”²⁰ Thus, one can conclude that Reagan's policies did not put nearly as much pressure on the Soviets as claimed by many of Reagan's conservative base. Contrarily, though Reagan's abandonment of his staunch anti-communist stance allowed for the formation of a friendly relationship between himself and Gorbachev that resulted in the eventual success of arms reduction negotiations and the Cold War's ending, it would not have been possible if Gorbachev himself had not been so willing for negotiation, independent of military influences.

Gorbachev's and the Soviet's willingness to negotiate and back down was not due to Reagan's arms race policies, but rather it was due to the stagnating Soviet economy and *perestroika* and *glasnost*. This argument is much more viable as by the end of the Brezhnev era, it was apparent that the structure of the Soviet economic system was responsible for their rapidly

¹⁸ See for example, Paul Kengor, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York: Regan Books, 2006); Peter Schweizer, *Reagan's War: The Epic Story of His Forty Year Struggle and Final Triumph over Communism* (New York: Doubleday, 2002); and John Lewis Gaddis, *Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2005), as cited in Wilson p. 457.

¹⁹ Fred Chernoff, “The Soviet Retreat and the US Military Buildup,” *International Affairs*, 64:1 (January 1991), 111-126.

²⁰ Peter Beinart, “Ronald Reagan,” *Foreign Policy*, 180 (July/August 2010), 30.

collapsing economy. *Perestroika* and *glasnost* stood for “restructuring” and “openness.”

Gorbachev attempted to restructure the Soviet economy using the Western capitalist economy as a model. However, a true free market was not established. Gorbachev also loosened political restraints, amending the Soviet Constitution so that the Communist Party was not the only acceptable political party. Gorbachev promoted political openness as he believed it was equally important to resurrecting the Soviet economy and eliminating corruption as economic reforms; thus, Gorbachev took initiative to not only reconstruct the Soviet economic system, but also its political system, democratizing it. This increased political freedom within the Soviet Union also contributed greatly to the overthrowing of communism and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

Additionally, data and analysis from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) show that the Soviet economy was slowing down long before Reagan’s inauguration. The CIA estimated that “Soviet Average Annual National Income Growth Rate” dropped from 4.9% in 1951 to 1.9% by the end of 1979. By the time Reagan took office, the rate had reached 1.8% and was falling still, compared to the over 4% Average Income Growth Rates in the US, Japan, West Germany, and other nations. “Average Annual Growth Rates of Total Factor Productivity from the Soviet Economy” was also estimated to have dropped to -0.6% in 1971-1980. Furthermore, the declining economy can be traced as far back as the 1950s. This was resultant of the “stagnation of Soviet agriculture”:

Between 1950 and 1958, average annual growth of the Gross National Product in the Soviet Union was 6.8 per cent. For 1958–1962, the growth rate was only 4.6 per cent...The Soviet growth rate has fluctuated very sharply in individual years... 9.9 per cent in 1958, 3.9 per cent in 1959, 5.0 per cent in 1960, 6.5 per cent in

1961, and 2.2 per cent in 1962. For 1963... growth rate was little if any better than in 1962. It may have been even poorer.²¹

The CIA further concluded that “military spending was not the fundamental cause of the slowdown”²² for the Soviets, showing that the Soviet economy had plummeted long before Reagan’s presidency and that Reagan’s military pressures were not the “fundamental” reason for the Soviet economy’s decline. Additionally, “Soviet leaders had long been aware that their economy was in trouble,”²³ and thus Gorbachev’s policies of compromise and *perestroika* and *glasnost* were not primarily due to any pressure Reagan could have instilled. Rather, throughout the war, the US had engaged in import restrictions and export blockades of the Soviets, greatly affected their economy. However, this was not an action unique to Reagan, nor can it be attributed to the Reagan Administration. Furthermore, articles from *The New York Times*²⁴ suggest that it was public knowledge that the Soviet economy was on a “long term declining

²¹ “Added Data Strengthen Belief In Slowdown of Soviet Growth,” *New York Times*, CXXIII: 38,774 (March 22, 1964), L. 21.

²² Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Soviet Economic Problems and Prospects* (July 1977 Directorate of Intelligence: Washington 1999).

²³ Marc Trachtenberg, “Assessing Soviet Economic Performance During the Cold War: A Failure of Intelligence?” [article on-line] (Texas National Security Review, Feb 2018, accessed 20 April 2020); available from <https://tnsr.org/2018/02/assessing-soviet-economic-performance-cold-war/>.

²⁴ See for example, “Andropov Assails Economic Failings of Soviet System,” *New York Times*, CXXXIII: 45,907 (Dec. 29, 1983), Section A, 1; “Russian Economy Gives Andropov Huge Problems,” *New York Times*, CXXXII: 45,707 (June 12, 1983), Section 1, 1; “CIA Sees Stagnation in Soviet,” *New York Times*, CXXXII: 45,695 (May 31, 1983), Section D, 1; “C.I.A. in a Report to a Congressional Committee, Predicts an Economic Slowdown in Soviet Union,” *New York Times*, CXXVI: 43,662 (August 9, 1977), 3; “Brezhnev Reports Wide Economic Ills, Asks Tight Control,” *New York Times*, CXIX: 40,901 (January 17, 1970), 1.

trend”²⁵ since the 1960s that “was not unanticipated” and that “a decline in the rate of labor productivity appears to be the prime cause of a marked slowdown in the rate of growth of Soviet industrial output.”²⁶ This decline was observed to be due to internal conflicts and discontent among Soviet workers:

Western observers speculate that the discontent of Soviet workers stems not only from shortages of some foods and of durable consumer goods, but also from a slowdown in the housing program. Construction has been cut back sharply from the levels first announced in the mid-1950's, although the population of Soviet cities has been increasing.²⁷

Additionally, the CIA study “Soviet Economic Problems and Prospects” published in July 1977, described “long-standing problems” that were predicted to have contributed to the significant Soviet economic slowdown, including “a limited capacity to earn hard currency to pay for needed technology imports and intermittent massive grain purchases” and issues with capital productivity, climate patterns, and a labor shortage due to “depressed birth rates.” However, the Soviets’ largest problem was their “looming oil shortage”:

Soviet exploration and extraction policy has long favored increasing current output over developing sources of future output. As a result, new oil deposits have not been discovered rapidly enough to offset inevitable declines in older fields. Consequently, production will begin to fall off in the late 1970s or early 1980s.²⁸

²⁵ “Added Data Strengthen Belief In Slowdown of Soviet Growth,” *New York Times*, CXIII: 38,774 (March 22, 1964), L. 21.

²⁶ “Soviet Economy Remains Sluggish,” *New York Times*, CXIX: 40,900 (January 17, 1970), 86.

²⁷ “Slowdown Continues,” *New York Times*, CXIV: 38,991 (October 25, 1964), 20.

²⁸ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Soviet Economic Problems and Prospects* (July 1977 Directorate of Intelligence: Washington 1999).

Additionally, the 1977 CIA study concluded that “a marked reduction in the rate of economic growth in the 1980s seems almost inevitable.” Historian Richard Saull also highlighted in his book *The Cold War and After: Capitalism, Revolution and Superpower Politics* that the growing debt of the European communist economies, the disparity between capitalist and communist economies, and the “asymmetric trade” as another factor the Soviet economy’s decline²⁹. Saull explained in his books that the Soviets, like many other east-central European nation, relied on “export of raw materials and the import of higher-value technological goods” but were “unable to pay for more imports through increasing (the value) of their exports, due to the competition from the low-wage, low-cost ‘newly industrializing countries of south-east and east Asia and Latin America.” Thus, the Soviets resorted to foreign debt “to fund consumption and living standards.” The increasing debt became a problem until the Soviets were “forced to introduce rationing in the provision of basic consumer goods.” This occurred during the late 1980s, simultaneous to the period of time where Reagan had begun to relax his staunch anti-communist stance and aggression towards the Soviets.

These economic constraints led to increased pressures for reduced military expenditure in the Soviet Union, and Gorbachev understood that the high military expenditure was only harming Soviet viability, economy, and society as funds were taken from critical social service and educational programs. When Gorbachev took leadership, it was evident that the not even foreign debt could sustain the Soviet economy and that the economy, as the CIA predicted, was on the brink of collapse. Thus, it was not surprising that Gorbachev initiated *perestroika* and *glasnost* and was open to arms reduction.

²⁹ Richard Saull, *The Cold War and After: Capitalism, Revolution and Superpower Politics*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007), 171.

Therefore, to claim that Reagan's policies and the arms race was what ultimately led to the fall of the Soviet Empire is a false assumption. Though the Reagan Administration may have put pressure on Soviet leadership, the Soviet's already collapsing economy left it in no shape to continue on in the Cold War and the arms race. The Soviet economy and other domestic issues were ultimately what influenced Gorbachev's openness to arms reduction and peace. Reagan's arms race policies may have influenced Soviet leadership to reciprocate the US militarily, putting additional burdens on its already failing economy, however, the long-term impacts of an insufficient economic system and Gorbachev's governmental and political changes were what finally prompted the Soviet collapse and the ending of the Cold War.

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