

# 2009

## *h-diplo*

### **H-Diplo Roundtable Review**

[www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables](http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables)

**Volume XI, No. 5 (2009)**

6 November 2009

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

Roundtable Web/Production Editor: George Fujii

Assistant Web/Production Editor: John Vurpillat

Introduction by Thomas Maddux

Reviewers: Archie Brown, Beth A. Fischer, Kyle Longley,  
Joseph M. Siracusa

**James Mann. *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War.*** Viking Press, 2009. 416 pp. ISBN: 978-0670020546 (hardcover, \$27.95).

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-5.pdf>

### **Contents**

---

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge.....	2
Review by Archie Brown, University of Oxford .....	7
Review by Beth A. Fischer, University of Toronto .....	11
Review by Kyle Longley, Arizona State University .....	13
Review by Joseph M. Siracusa, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology .....	17
Response by James Mann, Johns Hopkins University School of International Studies (SAIS) 19	

### **Copyright © 2009 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.**

---

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

---

James Mann's *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* makes an important contribution to studies that focus on the end of the Cold War and the contribution of Ronald Reagan and Michael Gorbachev to this result. Through the extensive use of interviews, memoirs, and secondary sources, Mann's study reinforces the movement away from an initial dichotomy in which conservatives depicted Reagan as having developed the strategy to win the Cold War versus liberals who gave most of the credit to Gorbachev's decision to end the Cold War as part of his ultimately unsuccessful campaign to reform the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> Mann's assessment of Reagan reinforces an increasing scholarly emphasis on the contributions that both leaders made to bringing the Cold War to a relatively non-violent conclusion. The contributions are not the same, and scholars disagree to some extent, in their assessments of both leaders' strategy and tactics.<sup>2</sup>

Mann explores the relationship between Reagan's rhetoric and his actual policies with respect to the Soviet Union by looking at four main topics: Reagan's relationship with Richard Nixon before and during Reagan's administration; Reagan's involvement with the author Suzanne Massie who became an informal adviser on the Soviet Union; the origins of Reagan's 1987 speech in front of the Berlin Wall in which he urged Gorbachev to "tear down that wall"; and Reagan's summit conferences with Gorbachev, especially the last two in Washington and Moscow.

The reviewers are impressed with Mann's study and generally endorse his central thesis on Reagan's contributions to the end of the Cold War. They do raise some issues and Mann's responds to their concerns:

- 1.) Mann's central thesis is that in the last three years of his administration Reagan broke with both conservatives and Republican foreign policy leaders to negotiate with Gorbachev, recognizing that he was different from previous Soviet leaders, and thereby provided Gorbachev with time and space to proceed with his reforms and end the Cold War. As Mann concludes, "unquestionably, Gorbachev played the leading role in bringing the four-decade-old conflict to a close. Yet Reagan,

---

<sup>1</sup> For the conservative victory assessment, see Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994) and Paul Kengor, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York: Regan Books, 2006). For accounts that attribute more credit to Gorbachev than Reagan, see Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994) and Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> For a range of perspectives, see the H-Diplo roundtables at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/> on Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2007); John Paul Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); and Norman A. Graebner, Richard Dean Burns, and Joseph M. Siracusa, *Reagan, Bush, and Gorbachev: Revisiting the End of the Cold War* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008).

overcoming considerable opposition of his own at home, played a crucial role by buttressing Gorbachev's political position. It was in this sense that Ronald Reagan helped ensure the Cold War ended in the tranquil fashion that it did. Reagan didn't win the Cold War; Gorbachev abandoned it. By recognizing Gorbachev's significance, when many others in the United States did not, Reagan helped create the climate in which the Cold War could end." (346) The reviewers don't question this thesis. Instead, they suggest that it restores some of the contemporary context that has been lost or misused in continuing political debates about Reagan and bolsters a number of studies, including those by the reviewers that point in this direction.

- 2.) Mann's assessments of Reagan's relationship with Nixon in Part I and Massie in Part II receive a mixed reaction from the reviewers. The reviewers do not question the attention devoted to the Nixon-Reagan relationship or Mann's assessment of how the relationship evolved from one in which Nixon advanced détente against Governor Reagan's increasing criticism to one in which President Reagan implemented a real détente with Gorbachev against the reservations advanced by Nixon in the media, correspondence, and White House meetings. Mann uses the relationship to foreshadow the larger conservative criticism of Reagan's diplomacy on arms control after 1985. Kyle Longley questions the attention devoted to Massie at the expense of more coverage of officials such as George Schultz and Reagan's chief of staff Howard Baker. Beth Fischer and Archie Brown note more significance in Massie's contribution in influencing Reagan's shift in his view on the Soviet Union and the Russian people, although Brown would have welcomed more attention to Ambassador Jack Matlock's influence on Reagan.
- 3.) The reviewers also have reservations about the attention Mann gives to Reagan's Berlin speech in 1987. Mann's detailed analysis covers everything from background on the Berlin Wall to Reagan's campaign visit to West Berlin in 1978, from the internal battle between the White House speech writers and conservative advisers versus the State Department and National Security advisers over whether or not Reagan should ask Gorbachev to "tear down the wall" to discussions with Moscow concerning aspects of the speech. Mann's treatment definitely supplants previous evaluations and he frames this case study with the larger debate on Reagan's strategy toward the Soviet Union and whether or not the speech was a "triumphal moment" in the victory strategy or "mere showmanship, without substance" in the "stumbling along" strategy. (117-118) Brown suggests that Mann "devotes far more space to the minutiae of the writing of Reagan's 'Tear down that wall' Berlin speech than the speech was worth," although he gives Mann credit for noting the lack of any immediate impact of the speech except with Reagan's Republican and conservative supporters. (3) Mann, however, does find significance in the speech in what it reveals about Reagan's willingness to disagree with Secretary Shultz and NSC advisers and as a reflection of Reagan's hope that Gorbachev might follow through on his rhetoric about reform at home and abroad. Furthermore, Mann highlights the larger point on Reagan that he probably didn't think through all the calculations attributed to him. Reagan "didn't talk about

underlying strategy or tactics. The world saw only the simple façade: catching Reagan in some Machiavellian maneuver would have been akin to catching him dyeing his hair.... It may well be that Reagan based his decisions largely on instinct. He may never have explained even to himself the considerations that lay behind changes in policy, his reasons for sometimes standing on principle and at other times setting those principles aside in favor of diplomacy or negotiation.” (218-219)

- 4.) In the fourth section on summit diplomacy, Mann skips Geneva in 1985 and devotes little attention to Reykjavik before moving on to Washington and Moscow with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (I.N.F.) as the major focus. Reykjavik, however, might have added further support for Mann’s insights on Reagan’s approach of “winging it” with respect to strategy and tactics as Reagan went all in on giving up missiles and nuclear weapons and held back only on the right to test a future strategic defense weapon rather than confining it to the laboratory. This approach, moreover, intensified his problems in persuading his advisers, the Pentagon, his allies, and especially Republican leaders, to agree to an I.N.F. Treaty with Gorbachev. Joseph Siracusa and Brown suggest that Mann covers the many-sided negotiations and political maneuvering very well, although Brown notes that Mann has some problems on the Soviet side with respect to Gorbachev’s domestic policies. In his evaluation of the summits, the I.N.F. Treaty, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) negotiations that Reagan backed away from as he focused on winning Senate ratification of the I.N.F. Treaty and, as a 77-year-old president, relied more and more on his senior advisers to keep the ship moving forward, Mann highlights the conflict Reagan faced with Republicans and conservatives, from Nixon and Henry Kissinger to Senators Dan Quayle and Jessie Helms, over approval of the INF treaty and, in a larger sense, his acceptance of an end to the Cold War with Gorbachev. Since Reagan always viewed the Cold War as an ideological battle and lacked any significant training in international relations and geo-politics, it was far easier for him to accept the end of the “evil empire” and Gorbachev’s decisions to end the conflict than it was for Nixon and Kissinger who couldn’t believe that an empire like the Soviet Union would give it up, scrap its Marxist-Leninist ideology, and withdraw back to Russia. States just didn’t behave like that according to their training and experience and they refused to trust Gorbachev or believe that the “Great Game” of the Cold War was over.
- 5.) Does Mann enhance understanding of Reagan’s objectives and leadership with his case studies? Fisher and Brown suggest that Mann is successful; Siracusa points to the difficulties that every author faces in finding Reagan’s views and identifying his contributions. “Finding ‘out what was uniquely Reagan during the period’ may have been a bridge too far,” as “we may never know exactly what he was thinking or what his motives were” and we will have to evaluate him primarily on his actions. (2) Mann and the reviewers agree that Reagan left little evidence for historians beyond his speeches and letters as his diary and memoirs are relatively unrevealing. Longley suggests that Mann would be better served by giving more consideration to the context around the summit negotiations, suggesting that the Iran-Contra affair prompted Reagan and his advisers to search for other issues to divert attention

from it. Reagan clearly was somewhat befuddled, at least in public, about what he approved, what he knew, and welcomed help from all directions. (3) Mann points out in his response that Reagan shifted toward the Soviet Union long before Iran-Contra exploded on the Washington scene and had already bet all of his chips at Reykjavik. (2-3) Longley also raises the question as to whether Reagan “merely reflected” the views of the advisers around him and when they changed, he changed. (3) Reagan was eager to talk with a Soviet leader whereas he maintained a fairly hard line around the globe with other communist and socialist countries from Vietnam to Africa to Cuba and Central America and never pulled back the Reagan Doctrine of providing aid to “freedom fighters” against communism. Why resist, as Longley notes, negotiations in Central America focused on Nicaragua led by Oscar Arias? Republican leaders like George W. Bush, James Baker, and Henry Kissinger were more willing than Reagan to participate in geo-political based negotiations despite ideological issues. This example could support Mann’s view of Reagan as following his own drummer.

### Participants:

**James Mann** is an author-in-residence at Johns Hopkins University School of International Studies (SAIS). He is a former Washington correspondent and Beijing bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times*. His previous books have included *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004) and three books about Sino-American relations: *Beijing Jeep* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989), *About Face: A History of America’s Curious Relationship With China, From Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) and *The China Fantasy* (New York: Viking, 2007). He is currently working on a book about American foreign policy in recent Democratic administrations.

**Archie Brown** is Emeritus Professor of Politics at the University of Oxford, and an Emeritus Fellow of St Antony’s College within that university. He taught there for thirty-four years after seven years as a member of the Department of Politics at Glasgow University. Brown’s publications include *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and, most recently, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York: Ecco; London: Bodley Head; and Toronto: Doubleday, 2009). He has written extensively on the end of the Cold War (in, for example, *Cold War History*, *The Journal of Cold War Studies*, and *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*). He is currently embarking on a study of political leadership.

**Beth A. Fischer** is a senior lecturer in the Political Science Department at the University of Toronto where she specializes in international security and U.S. foreign policy. She is the author of *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997) and *Triumph?: The Reagan Legacy and American Politics Today* (forthcoming). She has written numerous articles and book chapters about the ending of the Cold War, as well publications on the Cuban Missile Crisis, the international campaign to ban landmines, foreign policy making, and other security-related issues.

Fischer was a Senior Nobel Fellow in 2002, as well as the editor of *International Journal*, Canada's leading journal on international affairs.

**Kyle Longley** is the Snell Family Dean's Distinguished Professor in the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies and the School of Government, Politics, and Global Studies at Arizona State University. He is the author of *The Sparrow and the Hawk: Costa Rica and the United States during the Rise of José Figueres* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), winner of A.B. Thomas Prize for outstanding book by the South Eastern Council on Latin American Studies, *In the Eagle's Shadow: The United States and Latin America* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson Press, 2002), *Senator Albert Gore, Sr.: Tennessee Maverick* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), editor and contributor to *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), and *Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2008). Currently, he is completing this semester, *The Houses of the Purple Hearts: The Morenci Nine, Small Town America, and the Vietnam War*, and starting a book on the foreign policy challenges of the United States in the twenty-first century with Admiral Jim Stavridis, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

**Joseph M. Siracusa** is Professor of Human Security and International Diplomacy in Global Studies in the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning, at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology where he is a specialist in presidential politics and global security. A native of Chicago and long-time resident of Australia, he studied at the University of Denver and the University of Vienna and received his PhD from the University of Colorado (Boulder). He is internationally known for his writings on nuclear history, American diplomacy, and presidential politics. Professor Siracusa is also a frequent political affairs commentator in the Australian media, including ABC Radio National. He has worked at Merrill Lynch, in Boston, the University of Queensland, in Brisbane, and for three years served as senior visiting fellow in the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University. Among his numerous books are *A History of United States Foreign Policy* (with Julius W. Pratt and Vincent De Santis) (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1980); *Depression to Cold War: A History of America from Herbert Hoover to Ronald Reagan* (with David G. Coleman) (Westport: Praeger, 2002); *Presidential Profiles: The Kennedy Years* (New York: Facts on File, 2004); *Real-World Nuclear Deterrence: The Making of International Strategy* (with David G. Coleman) (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2006); *Nuclear Weapons: A Very Short Introduction; Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev: Revisiting the End of the Cold War* (with Norman A. Graebner and Richard Dean Burns) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and *Globalization & Human Security* (with Paul Battersby) (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2008).

The argument that Ronald Reagan won the Cold War by increasing US military expenditure, launching the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and employing stern rhetoric (his 1983 description of the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire' and his injunction of June 1987 in Berlin, 'Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall') has many adherents. James Mann does a good job of showing that these are serious misconceptions. He is, however, far from dismissing Reagan's role in the ending of the Cold War. While not a starry-eyed admirer – he acknowledges the late president's intellectual shortcomings and ignorance of the world beyond America's shores – he shows that Reagan's political antennae were well attuned to change in Moscow. His understanding that real and substantive change was occurring in the Soviet Union, after Mikhail Gorbachev had assumed its leadership, was far in advance of that of many leading members of the Washington political and foreign policy establishment.

Henry Kissinger, for example, hopelessly underestimated the significance of the Soviet *perestroika* and misjudged Gorbachev's intentions. Mann shows how time and again Kissinger and former President Richard Nixon, who saw themselves as realists, got things wrong. Even after Gorbachev's successful visit to Washington in December 1987, when the Soviet leader made a good impression on the American public, Mann notes that Kissinger 'refused to take seriously the idea that Gorbachev might be trying to wind down the Cold War'. (275) Reagan's growing rapport with Gorbachev, his willingness to reach concrete agreements with him – and especially the goal he shared with him of attempting to rid the world of nuclear weapons – alarmed not only many conservative columnists but also members of his own administration, among them Cap Weinberger, Kenneth Adelman and Richard Perle. Mann's well-researched study demonstrates that the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) hardly distinguished themselves by their perception and foresight during the second half of the 1980s. The State Department under George Shultz was far quicker to grasp the opportunity of putting an end to the Cold War, recognising that Gorbachev was at least as interested in terminating it as they were.

Reagan's role as a 'peacemonger' rather than warmonger is not entirely a new insight. It has already been stressed by Shultz in his memoirs and by Jack Matlock, who moved from being the Soviet expert on the National Security Council to heading the American Embassy in Moscow from 1987 until 1991.<sup>1</sup> Matlock, in particular, has already shown that Reagan, even in his first term, was willing to negotiate with Soviet leaders if only he could find a negotiating partner. As Reagan complained, though, 'These guys keep dying on me'. Furthermore, in the final analysis Reagan preferred the judgement of Shultz to the disbelief of the Defense Department and the dogma of his conservative Republican power base. In his second term, in particular, he could afford to ignore the advice of the latter.

---

<sup>1</sup> George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner's, 1993); Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995); and Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004).

That much is not especially novel. However, Mann devotes more attention to the process by which Reagan came to a different view of the Soviet Union and of Russians as people than any previous author. In particular, while he is by no means the first to note that the writer Suzanne Massie had an influence on Reagan's perceptions of Russia, Mann more fully than anyone hitherto documents the extent of her contact with him and its significance. Although Massie eventually overstepped the mark, even proposing herself as American Ambassador to Moscow at the time when Matlock was appointed (105), her informal contact with the President helped make him more empathetic with the average Soviet citizen and enhanced his desire to talk with his Russian counterpart. Although the administration distrusted Massie's one-to-one meetings with Reagan and did their best to discourage them, her amateur diplomacy did far more good than harm. No doubt there were hundreds of Americans who knew more about Russia than she did, but Massie was able to hit the right wavelength for engaging with the President and she strengthened his resolve to seek a peaceful resolution of the East-West conflict.

In noting that there was no great love lost between Massie and Matlock, and stressing the role of the former, Mann does not, perhaps, give as much recognition as he might to the highly positive role of Ambassador Matlock. Both in the National Security Council and, still more, when he became America's man in Moscow, Matlock provided a steady stream of good advice to the administration. As the political landscape of the Soviet Union was transformed before his eyes between 1987 and 1991, he was the right person in the right place at the right time. Massie's influence was significant in the earlier years of Reagan's presidency when she became a surprising counterweight to the influential voices within the administration who took the view that the less engagement with the Soviet Union the better. From 1987 onwards the professional diplomat and highly-qualified Russianist Matlock was far more important in keeping Washington well-informed. He himself was an exceptionally skilled practitioner of the new engagement. Sometimes Matlock was able to brief Reagan face-to-face, as when he prepared him for his 1988 summit talks with Gorbachev in Moscow. More often Matlock's insights came to the President via George Shultz who developed his own good sense of political trends in Moscow and of the evolution of the thinking of Gorbachev – and of Shultz's direct Soviet counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze.

Indeed, Shultz's judgement was superior to Reagan's. The President must have sorely tried Gorbachev's patience with his store of bad anti-Soviet jokes. Gorbachev, like most Russians, doubtless knew far funnier ones. It was also simple-minded of Reagan to think that if only he could show Gorbachev America and, in particular, in what splendid houses people lived, he would forsake his ideological beliefs. Reagan was doubtless unaware that Gorbachev had in the 1970s seen on short visits quite a lot of Western Europe – France, Italy, West Germany, Holland and Belgium – and that had, indeed, had an impact on him. Gorbachev himself has noted that this was when he began to appreciate the gulf between Soviet propaganda about the West and how people actually lived in Western Europe. Reagan's response to Gorbachev's West European insights might possibly have been: 'You ain't seen nothin' yet!'. However, for Gorbachev, who in less than seven years in the Kremlin evolved

from Communist reformer to socialist of a social democratic type, Western Europe was a more important and attractive exemplar.

In general, Mann's book is both readable and well-constructed. My one qualification on the latter point is that he devotes far more space to the minutiae of the writing of Reagan's 'Tear down that wall' Berlin speech than the speech was worth. It certainly did nothing to hasten the fall of the wall. Mann himself has no time for the simplistic nonsense that would see cause and effect between the 1987 speech and the breaching of the wall on 9 November 1989. Indeed, he makes the good point that the rhetoric was aimed rather more at Reagan's domestic audience than at Moscow and East Germany. (Mann also amusingly notes (210-211) that the East German leader Erich Honecker was greatly annoyed that it was 'Mr Gorbachev' and not 'Mr Honecker' who was asked to tear down the wall. Honecker had absolutely no intention of summoning the bulldozers, but he thought that since it was East Germany's wall, he should have been the addressee of Reagan's demand.) As he prepared for further diplomacy with Gorbachev, Reagan, Mann observes, 'was protecting his political flanks, particularly on the right' (218). Leading Western politicians (with the possible exception of Margaret Thatcher, whose hostility to movement toward a united Germany later became clear) were, of course, virtually at one in wishing to see the demolition of the wall. The State Department, though, was not alone in questioning the timing of Reagan's insistent demand. By calling directly on Gorbachev to demolish the wall, Reagan made it harder for the Soviet leader to do precisely that. However, as it turned out, Gorbachev did not need to do any demolition of his own. His policies changed the entire political climate in Eastern Europe and provided the facilitating conditions for the dramatic changes of 1989, of which the ending of the division of Berlin and, subsequently, of Germany was a logical consequence.

Mann is a perceptive guide to the making of America's Soviet policy during the Reagan years and, in particular, to the evolution of the President's own thinking. It was not easy to keep track, and understand the full significance, of the still more dramatic changes of outlook and policy in Moscow. However, as Mann shows with many examples, Reagan came closer to grasping the profundity of them than did many of the people in Washington who were paid to be aware of what was going on in the Soviet Union.

Mann is, understandably enough, not as sure-footed when discussing the Soviet political context as he is when dealing with high politics in America. It is very misleading to describe Gorbachev as 'an aide to Chernenko' (137) at a time when Gorbachev was the second secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with a growing power base of his own, and while Chernenko's actual aides were casting around for a way to put a stop to Gorbachev's seemingly inexorable rise. It is also incorrect to describe Boris Yeltsin in 1987 as 'the populist mayor of Moscow'. (257) The adjective is right but the noun wrong. Yeltsin was the First Secretary of the Communist Party in Moscow. Moreover, important as was Gorbachev's speech to the United Nations in December 1988 (317), it was not the first major public occasion on which he had unequivocally embraced 'freedom of choice' for all countries. He had done so in the summer of the same year at the Nineteenth Conference of the Communist Party.

More seriously, Mann is wrong in saying that Gorbachev was 'hardly radical in his domestic policies'. (345) The author recognises (ibid.) that Gorbachev's foreign policy was 'a break with the past'. But it was no less of a break with the past to introduce contested elections for a legislature with real powers (a policy Gorbachev pushed through the Nineteenth Party Conference), with the elections taking place in March 1989. He allowed members of the Communist Party to compete against one another, espousing fundamentally different policies, thus driving a coach and horses through the sacred Communist precept of 'democratic centralism'. Gorbachev consciously presided over the withering away of censorship, allowing glasnost to develop into freedom of speech and publication. Even Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, which made clear not only Stalin's but also Lenin's culpability in setting up the system of slave labour camps for political offenders, was serialised in 1989 in a large-circulation Soviet journal.

Yet, this is a very valuable book. It is a necessary corrective to much that has been written about Ronald Reagan. So far as the U.S.S.R. is concerned, it is the transformation of Soviet foreign policy which is most germane to Mann's arguments. While acknowledging that Reagan played a significant part in ending the Cold War – but not in the way so many of his admirers believe – Mann is quite clear that this role was by no means as important as the contribution of Gorbachev. He appositely concludes (346):

Unquestionably, Gorbachev played the leading role in bringing the four-decade-old conflict to a close. Yet Reagan, overcoming considerable opposition of his own at home, played a crucial role by buttressing Gorbachev's political position... By recognizing Gorbachev's significance, when many others in the United States did not, Reagan helped create the climate in which the Cold War ended.

The ending of the Cold War has become a cottage industry in academia, with a plethora of outstanding books by both academics and foreign policy practitioners. A downside to this bounty, however, is repetition: in all honesty, how many times can even the most avid Cold War scholar read the chronology of events during the Geneva summit meeting and remain engaged? Happily, James Mann's book does not summarize the march of events during the 1980s, despite what its subtitle suggests. Instead, it takes a more unconventional approach. Mann has chosen four topics pertaining to the end of the Cold War and written a section of the book about each. Three of the four sections are rather unique, while the fourth is a more traditional rendering of the summit meetings between Reagan and Gorbachev.

Mann begins the volume with a section on Richard Nixon, someone who typically makes nothing more than a cameo appearance in more conventional volumes about the ending of the Cold War. Drawing upon Nixon's own memos and notes from his meetings with Reagan, Mann tells the story of two ardent anti-communists and the manner in which their roles, views, and relationship evolved over time. Despite their common roots as California Republicans, the two leaders rarely agreed on U.S. Soviet policy, even in private: Reagan believed President Nixon had been too "soft" on communism, while Nixon felt likewise about Reagan's policies during the late 1980s. Nixon shared neither Reagan's trust of Gorbachev, nor his desire to eliminate nuclear weapons. Although Nixon had promoted détente during his own term in office, he (and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger) increasingly joined forces with other conservatives in an effort to forestall Reagan's overtures to the Kremlin.

This opening section of the book sets the stage for a theme that Mann returns to frequently: the growing conservative opposition to President Reagan's Soviet policy. By the late 1980s Reagan's detractors were not liberal Democrats, but rather conservative members of his own party. Nixon, Kissinger, journalist George Will, Brent Scowcroft and other party luminaries not only believed that Gorbachev differed little from his predecessors, but were adamant that nuclear disarmament was foolhardy.

The second section of the book focuses on Suzanne Massie, who served as an ad hoc adviser to President Reagan on Soviet affairs. She was also an informal emissary, carrying messages between the White House and the U.S.S.R. Massie has been something of a puzzle: she was a writer who adored Russian culture, but she had few, if any, of the traditional credentials of a presidential adviser. She was not a government official, or an academic, or even a Soviet expert. Neither was she part of the inside-the-beltway cognoscenti nor a member of Reagan's so-called "California Cabinet," which had been advising Reagan since his days as governor. Yet during Reagan's term in office she had approximately twenty meetings with the president, oftentimes in private. As Mann notes, this was "more often than any Soviet expert or indeed anyone else outside his own immediate subordinates." (64) The two also corresponded frequently.

As Mann tells it, Massie was able to bring the Soviet Union alive for Reagan through her stories about Russian culture and history. She was his informal tutor. Never one to delve deeply into pedantic briefing books, the president found her anecdotal style and passion for the country engaging. Massie also taught Reagan snippets of Russian, including “doveryai no proveryai” (trust, but verify) which, as Gorbachev pointed out, the president repeated at every summit meeting.

The third section of the book focuses on Reagan’s June 1987 speech in front of the Berlin Wall in which the president exclaimed, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Mann maintains that this speech “lies at ground zero in the historical disputes over Ronald Reagan and his presidency.” (117) One camp believes this speech to be a climactic turning point, leading directly to the ending of the Cold War, while another believes it was “mere showmanship, without substance.” (118) I’m not certain I would attribute so much weight to the Berlin speech per se, but Mann’s larger point is correct: two opposing views have emerged regarding Reagan and the end of the Cold War. One contends that Reagan’s tough policies forced the U.S.S.R. to capitulate, while another claims that Gorbachev ended the conflict, with the president merely looking on. Ironically, it is conservative Republicans who have promoted the first view – the same camp that opposed his policies in the late 1980s.

The final section of the book is more conventional; it focuses on the four summit meetings between Reagan and Gorbachev. Mann emphasizes Reagan’s growing rift with conservative Republicans as he sought both improved relations with Gorbachev and nuclear disarmament.

When reviewing edited volumes one typically asks whether all the chapters “hang together” to form a coherent whole. I found myself asking the same question about this book. Each section is something more than a long essay, yet something less than a book, and together, they do not quite form a coherent whole. I found the section on Nixon to be both innovative and engaging, while the part on the Berlin Wall seemed unduly long. Mann devotes over 100 pages to this speech, but then concludes, “By itself, there was nothing new in Reagan’s declaration that the Berlin Wall should come down. Reagan had said so before, and so had other American officials.” (218) The section on Massie is uneven in that it includes some chapters with interesting background information about the author, yet others have little to do with her. For example, the chapter on the 1983 war scare not only doesn’t pertain to Massie, it is a story that was told in much the same way over a decade ago. It is still an interesting read, but it is not clear how it ties into this section of the book or the overall volume.

Nonetheless, I would recommend this book. What it lacks in overall coherence, it makes up in innovation. The sections on Nixon and Massie are particularly worth reading.

In the classic “Saturday Night Live” skit, “Masterbrain/Mastermind” from December 1986, Phil Hartman impersonates Ronald Reagan at the height of the Iran Contra Affair. Initially, he plays a doddering old fool for visitors to the White House. However, as soon as they leave, his staff enters including Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and CIA Director William Casey. Speaking furiously and coherently, he barks orders about transferring funds from the sale of Iranian arms to bank accounts. Then, he jumps on the phone to speak in Arabic before continuing his lecture of his aides. He only breaks to entertain feebly a Girl Scout and Jimmy Stewart before starting again. At one point, Casey asks something about Iran Contra and Reagan curtly responds, “and you don't need to understand! I'm the President! Only I need to understand! Is that clear?” The skit concludes with Reagan presiding over worn out associates and muttering, “Well, just me again . . . great. Well, I've been doing it this way for six years, why should I change now?”<sup>1</sup>

In another “Saturday Night Live” skit from November 1987, Hartman again portrays Reagan traveling around Washington D.C. with Mikhail Gorbachev (played by Danny Devito). As they circle, Reagan points out the monuments, not as historical places but as sites where movie scenes unfolded such as the Lincoln Memorial with Jimmy Stewart in “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” or Washington Monument and “The Day the Earth Stood Still.” Regarding the former, Gorbachev quotes, “With malice toward none. With charity for all.” Reagan corrects him, emphasizing it was Jean Arthur saying, “You can't quit now, Jeff.” Throughout the tour, Reagan presents his own reality, much to the consternation of the Soviet leader. Reagan concludes, “Klaatu barada nikto” (from the movie, “The Day the Earth Stood Still”) which Gorbachev translates as, “Live, from New York, it's Saturday Night!”<sup>2</sup>

James Mann in *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan* struggles to reconcile the latter perception of a disconnected Reagan with that of an in control Reagan. He clearly comes down much closer to Reagan as the mastermind, arguing that in the “political and bureaucratic battles in Washington” relating to arms reduction near the end of the Cold War, “Ronald Reagan was at the center of those conflicts.” (xx) According to Mann: “My aim in this book is to reach beyond these simple formulas, to challenge old stereotypes about Reagan, and, through a combination of new interviews and newly available documents, to look back at what actually happened.” (xv)

Despite being over three hundred pages in length, this is a very narrow story built primarily on English language oral histories, interviews, memoirs, and secondary materials. Fundamentally, it focuses on arms reduction through examining episodes including Reagan and Richard Nixon, the influence of Suzanne Massie, the Berlin Wall speech in 1987, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Transcript of “Masterbrain,” “Saturday Night Live,” <http://snltranscripts.jt.org/86/86fmasterbrain.phtml>. Clip of “Mastermind,” at Hulu, <http://www.hulu.com/watch/4174/saturday-night-live-president-reagan-mastermind>.

<sup>2</sup> Saturday Night Live transcripts, Season 13, Episode 6, <http://snltranscripts.jt.org/87/87fgorbachev.phtml>

the summits over nuclear arms reductions. Ultimately, Mann concludes that Reagan ignored his conservative advisers and recognized Gorbachev, not as a continuum of Soviet leaders (as Nixon and Henry Kissinger envisioned), but a significant break from the past that ensured an opportunity for change in the Soviet Union. In the end, Mann acknowledges that Gorbachev's centrality to the process that ended the Cold War, but he gives high marks to Reagan for aiding it.

The strength of the book is that it spends a great deal of time debunking the mythology regarding Reagan, especially from the right. He builds on the work of several authors in this area including Will Bunch's *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics and Haunts Our Future*.<sup>3</sup> For example, he challenges the idea "the Reagan administration won the Cold War by intentionally driving the Soviet Union over the brink." (248) He argues that no consensus existed in the administration, even among "hawks" like Weinberger who sought to increase nuclear deterrence, not topple the Soviets. Those hardliners that supported the idea such as Richard Pipes, Thomas Reed, and Jeane Kirkpatrick left the administration early. Ultimately, Mann concludes, "the Soviet economy was foundering because of a deep-seated and chronic problems that had little or nothing to do with the Reagan administration's policies." (250)

Mann also questions those who portray Reagan as disconnected or a puppet of his advisers. He correctly argues that Reagan clearly influenced American policy relating to nuclear arms reductions. Of course, Reagan could place a spotlight on an issue when he wanted to do so. For example, during the 1970s, he rabidly seized on the nationalistic side of the Panama Canal debates. When motivated, he learned the intricacies of a topic and tenaciously zeroed in on it. However, that typically proved the exception rather than the rule. As a result, Mann's effort to place Reagan central in the bureaucratic battles has some limitations created by the absence of historical context, a process exacerbated by the concentration on only a few episodes that often created a redundant and overlapping narrative.

The context around the arms reduction issue is important. First, when the administration changed its focus to negotiating with the Soviet Union over the nuclear weapons, Reagan's numbers plummeted to very low levels, as a vast majority believed that the president lied about his knowledge of the events relating to the Iran-Contra Affair. A fundamental question relates to whether Reagan and his staff would have been as likely to move forward if they had maintained the strong position that they had in 1985 in the aftermath of the defeat of Mondale. Was the administration and, in particular, the president desperately trying to grab onto something that would change the focus off Iran Contra and the circus it became to something more positive such as nuclear disarmament? While Mann often understated the effect of Iran Contra, the change proved important. The imperial presidency stumbled mightily with the controversy and sent Reagan and his staff scurrying to find other issues to divert attention.

---

<sup>3</sup> Will Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics and Haunts Our Future* (New York: Free Press, 2009).

In another way, the historical context seems absent for examples that do not fit neatly into the arms reduction prism. For example, if Reagan had such a good handle on where Gorbachev seemed heading, then why was he so adamant along with other conservatives in the United States in torpedoing efforts such as those of Oscar Arias in Central America? Repeatedly, Reagan denounced the efforts of Arias for legitimizing the Sandinista regime with elections and in particular the defunding of the contras. If he really understood the changing dynamics as the author supposes, why would he continue to maintain such an intransigent, hard line position relating to efforts to end the civil wars in Central America? Ultimately, with the support of Democrats in Congress, the Arias plan helped displace the Sandinistas in spite of Reagan's efforts, not because of them.

The context is also important in the fact that the people around Reagan had dramatically changed after his reelection in 1984. Old California associates including Lynn Nofzinger, Michael Deaver, and Edwin Meese either had resigned or been forced out (or were in the process of being) for corruption or other transgressions at the time Gorbachev appeared. In addition, hard liners in the administration had been removed such as William Casey (death), Caspar Weinberger (in process because of Iran Contra), and others. In their place came those who historically promoted negotiation such as George Schultz who proved to be one of the few to issue alarms about the diversion of funds to the contras and negotiations for the release of hostages with the Iranians. Schultz's voice is often noticeably absent as are those of other moderates. In their place, the author tries too hard to fill in the importance of people such as Massie, something that I had a hard time really accepting given the perception of others regarding this rather obscure character, both within the administration and among historians.

In addition, a missing piece of the puzzle throughout the story was the arrival of Howard Baker as Chief of Staff, a much more pragmatic and practical politician, before, during, and after his service as Reagan's chief of staff during the dark days of 1986 and 1987. There is nothing in the bibliography that relates to the Tennessean, either in interviews or the use of his papers at the University of Tennessee. However, Baker was a classic western Tennessee politician who exerted much caution, both as a politician and foreign policymaker including his stint as U.S. Ambassador to Japan, 2001-2005. His hand clearly shaped the administration, both in domestic and foreign affairs. Nonetheless, in this book, he is virtually a silent voice of the restrained position open to negotiations with Gorbachev. His absence along with those of other moderates clearly limits the scope of the argument that Reagan acted almost independently as inferred by Mann.

So an ultimate result might be concluded, both from this research and that of others, that Reagan merely reflected those around him. When the hard liners dominated, his policy reflected that position. When the more practical, pragmatic advisors including Nancy held sway, his policies echoed that orientation. Other issues such as the confusion of the president during the investigation by the Tower Commission where Reagan often appeared incoherent and confused leads one to wonder how much sway he truly held. While I would hesitate to argue that his handlers dominated Reagan, the author has to explain how Reagan really affected the policy or was it shaped by those around him, or perhaps more persuasively affected by those around him.

While the author has presented some pieces of the story on the arms reduction issue and to a larger degree part of the story on the end of the Cold War, the question of what actually happened looks far off in the future due to the severe limitations placed on Reagan's papers by his family and also the executive order of President George W. Bush. The existing private materials such as those edited by Kiron Skinner and others who often have been monitored closely by the family and loyalists, both groups seeking to sustain a particular perception of Reagan. The Reagan Library also suffers additional weaknesses of availability of important sources that could add to the debate. Some materials have begun trickling out, but the efforts to sustain a particular Reagan legacy have severely limited the attempts. Thus, the full story has not or cannot be told at this time and more work remains on many topics related to Reagan and his policies.

While I have some significant questions regarding this book, Mann must be congratulated for raising the question and stoking the debate about Reagan and his place in the history of American foreign relations. The field has too few contributions right now, although I look forward to reading new works on the horizon including those by historians such as Chester Pach. Many topics remain outside of this one and hopefully the historical field will step up and fill the void that until this point has often been left to journalists and White House insiders.

Not until the middle of 1946, when he became president of the Screen Actors Guild during a strike against the producers, had Ronald Reagan become concerned about communism, especially Hollywood communists. He was deeply affected reading Whittaker Chamber's account *Witness* where he apparently picked up the notion of the Kremlin being the focus of evil in the world – and later it wound up in his “Evil Empire” speech in 1983. After he stood against communism during the House Un-American Activities Committee hearing the following year, Reagan became convinced that he was one of the truly blacklisted victims because his roles virtually disappeared.

“I know of no leader of the Soviet Union...including the present leadership,” President Reagan declared in his initial press conference on 29 January 1981, “[who denied that] their goal must be the promotion of world revolution and a one-world Socialist or Communist state.... [And since these leaders] have openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause... [and] reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat... [to gain that goal; thus, when you] do business with them...keep that in mind.”<sup>1</sup>

Reagan's strong conviction that communism was inherently immoral and evil was matched by his fascination with the dramatic biblical story of Armageddon – the world's final struggle between good and evil. As he apparently understood the account, Russia would be defeated by an acclaimed leader of the West who would be revealed as the Antichrist. He, too, would fall, and Jesus Christ would triumph in the creation of a new heaven and earth. The Armageddon story that Reagan envisioned as a nuclear holocaust never reconciled him to the possibility of a nuclear war; indeed, he declared often, “A nuclear war can never be won, and must never be fought.” It was prudent, Reagan believed, to seek means to avert or mitigate such a possibility by the elimination of nuclear weaponry, which he eventually came to believe could be accomplished by a missile defense designed to provide a nationwide shield.

The president did shift away from his initial inconsiderate and provocative anti-Soviet rhetoric during his second term, especially after meeting Mikhail Gorbachev. In his final years in the White House, Reagan came to think of Gorbachev as a friend and proclaimed a “new era” in American-Soviet relations. Reagan had changed, according to his biographer Lou Cannon, even though he did not recognize any ideological odyssey, oddly reminiscent of *The Economist's* verdict of Reagan's role in the Iran-Contra scandal: “Guilty but asleep.”

Enter James Mann's *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War*. Mann, a journalist and author of the *New York Times* bestseller, *Rise of the Vulcans*, a study of the careers of the members of George W. Bush's foreign policy team, wants to have a closer look at Reagan's ideological odyssey, particularly his rebellion “against the forces and ideas that had made the Cold War seem endless and intractable.” (xvi) In particular,

---

<sup>1</sup> Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of A Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1991), 281-282.

Mann's aim is to reach beyond the simple formulas of who "won" or "lost" the Cold War and "to challenge old stereotypes about Reagan, and, through a combination of new interviews and newly available documents, to look back at what really happened." (xv) To get where he is going, he has chosen to probe Reagan's role in the end of the Cold War through the use of four narrative parts or interlocking essays: Part I: "Two Anti-Communists" (the story of the relationship between Reagan and Richard M. Nixon and their differing worldviews of Moscow); Part II: "Informal Adviser" (Reagan's friendship with writer and author Suzanne Massie who tutored the president about life in the Soviet Union and who occasionally acted as a back channel to associates of Gorbachev); Part III: "Berlin" (the story behind Reagan's West Berlin speech, in 1987, calling on Gorbachev to "tear down this wall."); and Part IV: "Summits" (the story of Reagan's summit meetings with the General Secretary). Each part, Mann maintains, "illuminates the way Reagan operated, the role he played, the influences on his thinking, and the underlying dynamics at work during the last years (1986-1988) of his administration." (xvii) At another level, Mann "wanted to find out what was uniquely Reagan during the period – the personal role and views of the president himself, apart from the work of his subordinates or the diplomacy of his administration." (xx) Did Mann find the Reagan he was looking for?

Before I answer that question, I should first like to say that *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan* is a useful contribution to the growing literature on the end of the Cold War, and that many of the interviews – the most original part of this story – offer valuable contemporary insights, though Mann should not have been "astonished to discover how interviews produce more information, more details, more insight than is on the historical record." (348) In any case, they are worth the price of admission. As for looking for Reagan, I am not so sure that Mann did not set himself an impossible task or what he himself calls "a special problem: Reagan rarely chose to explain his policy shifts or not infrequent changes in strategy or tactics. . . . [and] had shrewd political instincts but rarely if ever articulated his underlying motivations." (xviii) Add to this the problem which results from the eternal conflict between the subjectivity of the writer and the objectivity of the past, as well as reconstructing the climate of opinion – the fundamental assumptions and attitudes shared by significant elements of a population at a given time – and, finally, the complex nature of the dualism of conservative and reformer in the human constitution itself, and it becomes clear that finding "out what was uniquely Reagan during the period" may have been a bridge too far.

Don't get me wrong: Mann has done a first-rate job of detailing the two-year struggle, 1986-1988, the president had with the constituencies attempting to slow down his personal diplomacy with Gorbachev – the political right, the realists, and the intelligence and defense officials who didn't like what they were seeing. And he makes a good case for what is fast becoming an emerging consensus: "Reagan didn't win the Cold War; Gorbachev abandoned it." (347) No argument here. Perhaps all we can do with Reagan is to judge him by what he *did* when he was in the presidency – "the ultimate sources of action" in John F. Kennedy's felicitous expression. We may never know exactly what he was thinking or what his motives were. But, I suspect, that would have suited him just fine.

Response by James Mann, Johns Hopkins University School of International Studies (SAIS)

I want to thank the reviewers for their comments. I'm gratified that they found the book to be valuable for its contribution to history and readable in its narrative account. I'm also pleased that the reviewers seem to accept the book's main points -- that Ronald Reagan did not "win" the Cold War by driving the Soviet Union over the brink, and that during Reagan's second term, he infuriated his conservative supporters through his extensive diplomacy with Mikhail Gorbachev.

The historical question at issue in this period is why Reagan's Soviet policy during his second term seemed so different from that during Reagan's first years in office. The first and obvious answer, of course, is that Reagan's second term coincided with the ascent of Gorbachev as Soviet leader in March 1985. Although American conservatives and Washington's foreign-policy elites portrayed Gorbachev as representing continuity, a new face for the same old Soviet policies, Reagan saw Gorbachev as fundamentally different from his predecessors. Those debates within the United States about Gorbachev are easily forgotten now. Everyone remembers Reagan 1983 speech calling the Soviet Union the "evil empire." Far fewer people know that, on his first visit to Moscow in 1988, Reagan was asked if he thought the Soviet Union was *still* an evil empire. No, he answered. "No," said Reagan, "I was talking about another time and another era." Why the change? Mostly because of Gorbachev, Reagan answered.

How should we evaluate Reagan's intensive diplomacy with Gorbachev? Was it merely cosmetic in nature? And was Reagan personally responsible for its genesis, or was he merely the instrument of others?

Kyle Longley's review seems to suggest that Reagan's move towards arms reduction with the Soviets was a political response to the Iran-Contra scandal. Reagan and his staff, he writes, were "scurrying to find other issues to divert attention." Perhaps (so Longley's argument goes) if Reagan had maintained the political strength he possessed soon after his reelection in 1984, he would not have proceeded with the Soviets in the fashion that he did.

I think this proposition is not supported by the historical evidence or, indeed, the chronology of events. Reagan's Soviet policies changed well before the Iran-Contra scandal erupted. Indeed, if there is any single event that symbolized Reagan's departure from Cold War and conservative orthodoxy, it was the summit at Reykjavik in October 1986 -- the most significant of all the Reagan-Gorbachev summits, at which the two men discussed far-reaching reductions or even elimination of nuclear weapons. That summit prompted widespread consternation about where Reagan was heading, even from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Yet at the time of Reykjavik, the public knew nothing about Iran-Contra; few in Washington (outside Reagan and a few of his aides) knew anything about it.

Moreover, the Reykjavik summit was hardly the first sign of change in Reagan's Soviet policy or of his desire to scale back on nuclear weaponry. Some historians (among them Beth A. Fischer, author of the book *The Reagan Reversal* and one of the commentators in the

current discussion) have made a strong case that one can trace the changes in Reagan's Soviet policy much further back. A series of events in late 1983 brought the tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States to a peak (the KAL shootdown, the Able Archer exercises, the "war scare"). In early 1984, Reagan delivered a speech on Soviet policy that was strikingly different in tone from the "evil empire" speech less than a year earlier. In my own book, I focus on the series of events in the late summer of 1986; when Soviet officials detained the American reporter Nicholas Daniloff, Reagan's National Security Council (N.S.C.) wanted to take a very tough line against bargaining for his release, but Reagan chose instead to support his Secretary of State George Shultz in quiet negotiations; and these negotiations to free Daniloff in turn led to agreement for a summit at Reykjavik. However or wherever one puts the point of change in Reagan's approach to Moscow, it certainly preceded Iran-Contra. In fact, by the account of Jack Matlock, then working on Reagan's N.S.C., the effect of Iran-Contra was to slow down the pace of the administration's ongoing diplomacy with the Soviets.

Longley's review also raises the other broad question about Reagan: Was he merely the agent or instrument of others? Was Reagan a real-life version of Chance the Gardiner in the classic Peter Sellers movie "Being There"? This is a perennial issue, both because Reagan often seemed so passive in response to daily events and because his public statements often seemed so simplistic.

During Reagan's first term, many argued that he was merely a front for right-wing interests. By contrast, during Reagan's second term, conservatives regularly portrayed him as the tool of a "moderate" cabal, composed of people like Nancy Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz. Longley interestingly combines both theories, suggesting that Reagan "merely reflected those around him as the personnel within the administration changed. When the hardliners dominated, his policies reflected that position. When the more practical, pragmatic advisors including Nancy held sway, his policies echoed that orientation."

The first problem I have with this argument is that it is hard to square with the facts. Shultz didn't replace the Reagan old-timers, as Longley seems to suggest; he joined the administration in mid-1982. Michael Deaver was by all accounts one of the doves in the administration's internal debates, an ally of Nancy Reagan, so Deaver's departure from the administration could hardly have weakened the conservatives. William Casey stayed on at CIA all through Reykjavik and the change of direction in Reagan's Soviet policies.

More broadly, the argument doesn't answer the question of *why* the more hawkish aides seemed to "dominate" Reagan in the first term and the more moderates ones held sway in the later years. Even assuming one can divide up the administration into two competing factions, who decided what group would prevail, and why did the personnel change? In the middle years of the administration, conservatives like Casey pushed hard for Reagan to make a top-level change by appointing Jeane Kirkpatrick either as national security adviser or to replace Shultz as secretary of state. This effort failed. Who made the decision to turn them down?

Nancy Reagan was certainly influential, but she didn't always get her way with her husband. She didn't want Reagan to visit the Bitburg cemetery in West Germany, but he did. (Had it been up to Nancy Reagan, Reagan would have abandoned his 1976 challenge to President Gerald Ford after a few primaries, rather than continuing all the way to the convention.) Shultz, too, was extremely important in setting the course for Reagan's foreign policy during the second term, but Shultz didn't always win out, either. He, too, was opposed to the Bitburg visit. He didn't want Reagan to say, in his now-famous Berlin speech, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." When Nancy Reagan or Shultz won out with Reagan, it was usually after an intensive, weeks-long internal struggle (such as Mrs. Reagan's prolonged campaign to get her husband to fire Donald Regan as White House chief of staff).

To me, the proposition that best fits the facts is that Reagan himself set the course for his own administration. He was often detached from day-to-day events, but knew where he wanted to go; he was himself responsible both for the administration's transgressions (Iran-Contra) and its successes (the diplomacy with Gorbachev). So when it comes to Longley's entertaining revival in his review of the two contrasting "Saturday Night Live" sketches about Reagan – yes, he judges rightly, I do tend towards the view of Reagan as more canny and more in control of what his own administration was doing than his public persona suggested. (I agree with Joseph M. Siracusa's review that we will never know whether Reagan actually thought in Machiavellian terms without ever acknowledging he did so, or whether his actions were the result of instinct. His own wife admitted Reagan kept a wall around himself, sometimes hiding his thoughts and motivations even from her. I agree all the more with Siracusa that this opacity served Reagan's own purposes.)

I want to respond briefly to some of the points that reviewers have made about leading personnel within the administration. Archie Brown is certainly correct that Jack Matlock, both as a Soviet specialist on the National Security Council and as U.S. ambassador to Moscow, played an important and positive role in the last years of the Cold War, and I did not intend to suggest otherwise. (The book mentions that Suzanne Massie thought of him as bureaucratic, but this passage was intended to show her own hostility to bureaucracy, not to accept her view of Matlock.) Regarding Shultz, Longley is right to credit the secretary of state's importance, and the book does so repeatedly, including in an entire chapter describing the significance of Shultz's presentations to Gorbachev on the subject of globalization. I interviewed Shultz and Matlock for the book. As Longley notes, I did not have an interview with Howard Baker (that was his choice, not mine); but I did interview his top aides Kenneth Duberstein and Thomas Griscom. The book describes (142) how the Baker team sought to revive Reagan's presidency after Iran-Contra.

My argument is not that these other officials were unimportant to Soviet policy, but that they couldn't have done what they did without Reagan himself. This is a point that Shultz and Matlock themselves have regularly acknowledged in their interviews and memoirs, but that others, such as Longley, seem to discount. Reagan decided when Shultz won the internal battles over Soviet policy and when he didn't.

Finally, Archie Brown makes a fair point in criticizing me for the vague assertion that Gorbachev was “hardly radical in his domestic policies.” I was thinking of the early-Gorbachev period during Reagan’s presidency; the examples Brown gives are from 1989, after Reagan left office. I was judging Gorbachev against the standard of others in the Soviet Union at the time, such as Boris Yeltsin. Even so, I think “hardly radical” was too imprecise a phrase, open to different interpretations. Gorbachev was trying to preserve the Communist Party leading role, but in the process of trying to do so, he was, as Brown notes, opening the way for far-reaching domestic changes.

No matter how one characterizes Gorbachev’s domestic policies, it is clear that his foreign policies – his approach to Eastern Europe, the changes in military doctrine and troop cutbacks – represented a dramatic departure from the Soviet past. As the book says (345), Reagan and Shultz grasped the significance of Gorbachev as an agent of change while American conservatives, and realists like Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft, did not. Reagan’s second-term diplomacy helped give Gorbachev the international recognition and success that (by Gorbachev’s own subsequent account) he needed in order to protect his position and to proceed with his reforms at home. That was no small accomplishment for American diplomacy, even if it is often lost amid the current conservative mythology about Reagan’s role.

---

**Copyright © 2009 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.** H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

---