

# THREE HISTORIES OF THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND THE LESSONS LEARNED

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This review considers how the understanding of Ronald Reagan, drawn by the authors of three leading recent histories of the end of the Cold War, corresponds to the lessons drawn from the end of the Cold War. This correspondence is then compared to nuclear diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula, as discussed in the memoirs of three leading members of the George W. Bush administration: former President George W. Bush, former Vice President Dick Cheney and former Undersecretary of State and Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton.<sup>1</sup>

In considering how Reagan's approach to Gorbachev and the Soviet Union has been referenced by Bush administration officials in its handling of Kim Jong-il and the DPRK, a few key differences will be briefly noted. Firstly, the US was less concerned about, and the USSR was much less inclined towards, nuclear proliferation among other states and potentially non-state actors such as terrorists. Secondly, the disarmament proposed by Reagan and Gorbachev was mutual rather than one-sided (hence additional inducements), and the related charge of "appeasement"—anathema to Reagan, Cheney and Bolton alike—were far less significant. Thirdly, Gorbachev was an idealist, guided by moral principles and a global vision increasingly influenced by liberalism, whereas Kim Jong-il was much more a realist mostly concerned with his own security and sceptical, if not cynical, of the international order.

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<sup>1</sup> This review takes into account five works: *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (2004) by Jack Matlock Jr; *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (2009) by James Mann; *Gorbachev's Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (2008) by Andrei Grachev; *Decision Points* (2011) by George W. Bush; *In My Time* (2012) by Dick Cheney; and *Surrender is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad* (2008) by John Bolton. Full citations are provided in subsequent footnotes.

Reagan's intentions can be briefly understood in terms of a four part agenda: 1) to reduce the threat and use of force in international disputes; 2) to reduce stockpiles of armaments; 3) better working relationship, cooperation and understanding; and 4) human rights and humanitarian concerns.<sup>2</sup> Matlock is unequivocal that there was no tangible plan to bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Gorbachev, however, was already convinced of the need for arms reduction to enable more liberal internal reform.<sup>4</sup> Hence Reagan's greatest contribution to change in the USSR was perhaps to have recognized the opportunity Gorbachev represented and through their agreements to have enhanced Gorbachev's authority to make progress with his reform agenda.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, the Bush administration responded to the terrorist attacks of September 11th in accordance with the concepts of pre-emption and unilateralism. While referencing Reagan's early arms build-up, and echoing his belief in the possibility for dramatic change, the trust-building diplomatic method associated with his second term was arguably made less relevant by the informal nature of the terrorist threat and rendered redundant by belief in the necessity of regime change by military means.

### The Cult of Sincerity

The George W. Bush administration, modeling itself after Reagan and his approach to the Soviet Union, also placed great emphasis on his purported candor and honesty, and invests the tendency to "tell it like it is" with great potential for unpredicted positive consequences.

President Bush's memoir *Decision Points* recalls some personal contact with Reagan, but only alludes to Reagan as a model of leadership in the chapter "Freedom Agenda" where he mentions reading a book by a former Soviet prisoner who felt "inspired by hearing leaders like Ronald Reagan speak with moral clarity and call for freedom."<sup>6</sup> While much of Matlock's account of Reagan suggests implicit criticism of the younger Bush administration, his final analysis of Reagan also lends support to this notion, claiming that Reagan's greatest asset was that he "dealt with his friends, adversaries and subordinates openly and

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2 Jack Matlock Jr., *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (USA: Random House, 2004), 150-152.

3 Ibid., 75.

4 Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy & the End of the Cold War*, (USA: Polity 2008), 44-47.

5 James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 346; and Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 318.

6 George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (London: Virgin Books, 2010).

without guile,” describing a “transparency of intention so unusual among political leaders that many failed to appreciate it.”<sup>7</sup>

Matlock also shows, particularly the memorandum of Reagan’s own thoughts before first meeting with Gorbachev in Geneva, that Reagan was still selective about what was said publicly. Here Reagan regrets that “we are somewhat publicly on record about Human Rights. Front page stories that we are banging away at them on human rights abuses will get us some cheers from the bleachers but it won’t help those being abused.” Reagan also instructs his advisors that there should be “no talk of winners and losers. Even if we think we won, to say so would set us back in view of their inherent inferiority complex.”<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, for those closely involved in the first term of the George W. Bush administration, emphasis on Reagan’s candor creates a resonance between Bush’s famous description of Iraq, Iran and the DPRK as forming an “axis of evil,” and Reagan’s famous description of the Soviet Union as an “evil empire.” The phrase originally drafted as “Axis of Hatred” became “Axis of Evil” with Reagan’s “Evil Empire” in mind, and may have been intended to draw a broader parallel with the defence build-up in early part of the Reagan administration. North Korea and Iran were added to Bush’s State of the Union address at Condoleezza Rice’s suggestion to avoid focusing solely on Iraq.<sup>9</sup>

The label “evil” is only meaningful for what it portends, and although in the early 1980s both the US and USSR were continuing to lend covert support to various proxy wars in Africa, South America and the Middle East, this cannot be compared with an overt policy of regime change by the world’s sole superpower. Furthermore, in contrast to Reagan’s efforts towards mutual disarmament agreements and reducing distrust and hostility, the Bush administration sought release from international agreements which they felt undermined their military capabilities or could not be sufficiently robust in concrete terms, including the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Rome Statute which created the International Criminal Court and Biological Weapons Convention Verification Protocol.<sup>10</sup>

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7 Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 320.

8 *Ibid.*, 153.

9 “Rumors of War,” *Newsweek*, February 19, 2007, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17086418/site/newsweek>.

10 John Bolton, accorded authority beyond the position of Undersecretary of State after his crucial role in the result of the 2000 presidential election, in his memoir used quotation marks to reflect his contempt for the notion of “international law,” dismissing it as “just another theological exercise.” See: John Bolton, *Surrender is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Beyond* (New York: Thresholds Editions, 2007), Chapter Three.

While this threatening defense posture successfully intimidated Gaddafi into renouncing nuclear weapons, in the absence of the trust building efforts which characterised Reagan's second term, it was always likely that for some countries any possible prospect of war would be incompatible with the one-sided form of denuclearisation.

### Negotiation and Summit Dialogue

As in the Bush administration, Matlock describes how there were also those in the Reagan administration that felt that the Soviet Union must do something to deserve dialogue, and that the US would be "honoring" the Soviet Union to engage in dialogue while Soviet troops were still present in Afghanistan. But Secretary of State George Schultz, among others, argued communication on political and security issues was necessary whether or not the Soviet Union was changing and that change was much more likely with serious dialogue than without. Reagan would sometimes waver but ultimately always support dialogue.<sup>11</sup>

The notion of Reagan as a hardliner is supported by the fact that he had no meetings with the Soviet General Secretary until his second term when he met Gorbachev. However, communications now show that Reagan had been interested in meeting Gorbachev's predecessors including Yuri Andropov, during whose leadership (1982-1984) Reagan labelled the USSR an "evil empire."<sup>12</sup> Dick Cheney's famous comment that "We don't negotiate with evil, we defeat it" does not seem to be one that Reagan would have agreed with. As Reagan wrote in his diary in April 1983, "some of the NSC staff are too hard line and don't think any approach should be made to the Soviets. I think I'm hard line and will never appease. But I do want to try to let them see there is a better world if they'll show by deed that they want to get along with the free world."<sup>13</sup>

Cheney's memoir *In My Time* devotes a whole chapter to North Korean proliferation to Syria and the Six-Party Talks, concluding with a number of lessons. One of these is to "negotiate from a position of strength," a principle associated with the Reagan administration's building up of America's purportedly inferior defence capabilities before entering negotiations with the Soviet Union on disarmament; this clearly has no parallel in negotiations with the DPRK in view of the US undisputed military superiority. Cheney uses the aphorism of "mindfulness" when referring to denuclearization (as an objective) and the

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11 Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 64.

12 *Ibid.*, 65-66.

13 *Ibid.*, ix.

will to walk away from the negotiating table without an agreement. "A good model for future leaders" he helpfully suggests, (shifting between Reagan's two presidential terms) "is Ronald Reagan's approach at the Reykjavik Summit with Gorbachev," which ended after Reagan refused to give up "America's right to missile defense" (more accurately to the program's out-of-laboratory testing, which Reagan believed essential to Congressional funding approval).<sup>14</sup> But to take Reagan at his word, he envisioned the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) as a necessary means to guarantee US and Soviet security from other nuclear states after they had abolished their nuclear weapons. Although Reagan may also have been reluctant to make an agreement in view of on-going proliferation activities, Reagan's minimal requirements to what he was otherwise prepared to agree on was entirely different to that required by Cheney.

Bush's Undersecretary of State and Ambassador to the UN John Bolton similarly claims in his memoirs that the continuation of the Six-Party Talks, in spite of clear evidence of North Korean assistance to Syria in constructing a nuclear reactor, "threatened to prove once and for all that Bush was no Ronald Reagan."<sup>15</sup> This also identifies Reagan with a hard line negotiating position, but, in the quotation three paragraphs above, Reagan says he thought of himself as hard line, and was indeed not prepared to compromise what he believed to be essential for the survival of a program designed to protect the US after its nuclear disarmament. Matlock is clear that the "linkage" Reagan talked of in his first press conference was (generally) "not a rigid 'You must do x before we do y,' but a more general attitude that improvement of relations in one area [of his four-part agenda] could not get far ahead of improvement in others."<sup>16</sup>

In negotiating with the Soviets, Reagan believed that the process of dialogue may in itself be a result, and before his first meeting Gorbachev recorded that agreeing to future meetings would be an important result, as it would "set up a process to avoid war in settling our differences in the future,"<sup>17</sup> whereas Bolton fears that the longer the Six-Party Talks continue the more able the DPRK is to strengthen its nuclear and missile capabilities.<sup>18</sup> Clearly this partly reflects differences of the level of development in the DPRK's nuclear weapons program and the greater risks of and concerns about proliferation.

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14 Dick Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 490-494.

15 John Bolton, *Surrender is Not an Option*, 465.

16 Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 152.

17 *Ibid.*, 153,

18 Bolton, *Surrender is Not an Option*, 466.

While the Six-Party Talks are castigated by Cheney and Bolton, George W. Bush's memoir concludes:

In the short run, I believe the Six-Party Talks represented the best chance to maintain leverage on Kim Jong-Il and rid the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons. In the long run, I am convinced that the only path to meaningful change is for the North Korean people to be free.<sup>19</sup>

Contrary to Matlock and Cheney, Bush's opinion is very Reaganesque formulation.

### Empathy

Whereas emphasis on honesty may be associated with an awareness of one's own objectives and hence with hard line negotiating positions, Reagan was also fascinated by Soviet psychology and his selectivity of about what he said was based on strategic calculations informed partly by empathy for his counterpart:

We must always remember our main goal and Gorbachev's need to show his strength to the Soviet gang back in the Kremlin. Let's not limit the area where he can do that to those things that have to do with aggression outside the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup>

After the INF Treaty had been ratified by Congress and Reagan visited Moscow, he did not hesitate to mention to the Soviet media that he had read and enjoyed Gorbachev's book *Perestroika*, that he no longer considered the USSR an evil empire and that most of the change that had taken place in the USSR was to the credit of Gorbachev, rather than himself.<sup>21</sup> This is said to have visibly increased Gorbachev's confidence and enhanced his authority in moving forward with his reform program.

Clearly this is all based on the fact that Gorbachev really was the leader of change in the direction of a more liberal society, which cannot authoritatively ever be said to have applied to Kim Jong-il. Amidst severe humanitarian and security concerns, it may be legitimately questioned whether attempts at empathy for Kim Jong-il would have been meaningful or helpful. But as stated above,

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19 Bush, *Decision Points*, 426.

20 Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 152.

21 Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 304-305.

Reagan had been open in principle to meeting with Gorbachev's predecessors, including Yuri Andropov, and it seems likely that he would have displayed the same interest in understanding their psychology and challenging their beliefs.

### Trust

All three authors agree on Gorbachev's primacy role, rather than Reagan's, in bringing the Cold War to an end. Moreover, Grachev's description of the separated spheres of influence of individual members of the Politburo supports Matlock's statement that only the General Secretary himself could have liberated the Soviet Union peacefully from the Party's dictatorship. This applies just as much to the DPRK.

Matlock concludes that face to face meetings moved relations "from suspicion to trust (reinforced by promises kept)" and quotes Gorbachev saying that without trust "the slight improvement in world affairs [would have been] impossible to achieve," which echoes Reagan's identification of the "prevalent suspicion and hostility between us" as one of the "main events" to be addressed by the summit process.<sup>22</sup>

Castigating Bush's support of the Six-Party Talks as showing that he was "no Ronald Reagan," John Bolton regards the possibility of the DPRK giving up nuclear weapons program as a "chimera,"<sup>23</sup> and a nuclear DPRK as too dangerous to accept. So in some sense it follows that he advocates a policy of regime change, even though this in itself is usually considered too dangerous.

### Verification

Cheney's critique of the Six-Party Talks process emphasizes the importance of insisting on adequate verification procedures. Although Reagan did not allow himself to personally get overly immersed in the technical details of arms control, he was well known for his Russian proverb "doveryai no proveryai" (trust but verify), and the verification protocols agreed under his leadership appear to have been broadly respected. In contrast, the lack of formally agreed verification procedures the Six-Party Talks appears to have been justly criticized. In this respect, citing Reagan would have been appropriate.

Reagan believed in the importance of trust. This is embodied in his saying that "Nations don't fear each other because they are armed, they arm because the fear each other," whereas Cheney appears to focus exclusively on concrete

22 Mikhail Gorbachev, *On My Country and the World* (New York: Columbia Press, 2000), 179.

23 Bolton, *Surrender is Not an Option*, 465.

and absolute results, accusing Condoleezza Rice's State Department of allowing agreements to become an end in themselves while losing sight of the goal of "getting the North Koreans to give up their nuclear weapons program."<sup>24</sup> This contrast is consistent with Mann and Matlocks's characterization of the outlook of the older George H. W. Bush administration (in which Cheney was Defence Secretary) as fundamentally geostrategic, in contrast to Reagan's more psychological perspective.

## Conclusion

In sum, while Reagan was remembered for his honesty, manifested most conspicuously in the willingness to proclaim a foreign leadership as "evil," to address US military weaknesses, and to ensure reliable verification of any agreements, recent histories highlight how his judgement was informed by his empathy, a point that appears to have been lost on those wishing to emulate him. Contrary to widely held perceptions, it appears that he was far more strategic than his public image would suggest. Reagan expressed an opposition to appeasement similar to that of Cheney and Bolton, but this was much less significant in the context of mutual rather than one-sided disarmament.

There are numerous important differences between the USSR that Reagan encountered under Gorbachev and the DPRK that Bush's administration witnessed under Kim Jong-il. Nonetheless, the example of Reagan suggests that empathy for the North Korean leader is not incompatible with, and indeed may be instrumental for, effectively caring for the North Korean people and ourselves. Y

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24 Cheney, *In My Time*, 490.