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**The Good Guys Win:  
Ronald Reagan, Fiction, and the Transformation of National Security**

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**The Good Guys Win:  
Ronald Reagan, Fiction, and the Transformation of National Security**

**by**

**Benjamin Griffin**

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## **Dedication**

To Amibeth, Natalie, and Patrick. Thank you for your continued love and support. None of this would be possible without you all.

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## **Abstract**

### **The Good Guys Win: Ronald Reagan, Fiction, and the Transformation of National Security**

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The dissertation examines how Ronald Reagan made use of fiction in developing his world view and grand strategy. It argues his use of narrative played an essential role in shaping his vision and in how he communicated with the American public. In particular, the works of Tom Clancy, westerns, and science-fiction novels provided synthetic experiences and creative space that helped Reagan contextualize information and imagine the near-future. Fiction also helped Reagan develop empathy for peoples behind the Iron Curtain leading to a nuanced policy that clearly distinguished the people from their government. The creativity and imagination of Reagan's vision caused him to break with orthodox conservative positions and hastened the end of the Cold War. The dissertation will also examine how Reagan's use of fiction proved damaging in the developing world as his narrow reading reinforced tropes and stereotypes leading to ineffective policies that contributed to great suffering in Latin America, South Africa, and the Middle East. The dissertation argues that policy makers read a broad amount of fiction from diverse sources and actively seek to incorporate it into their strategies.

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## **Introduction: Strategic Culture**

Americans watching *Saturday Night Live* on December 6, 1986, saw rookie cast member Phil Hartman portray Ronald Reagan for the first time. The sketch opens with an apparently senile president discussing the unfolding Iran-Contra scandal with a reporter. The reporter noted she was unsure what was worse, Reagan knowing or not knowing about the crisis. Hartman gradually ushers her from the oval office, saying he hopes he was informative “given the very little that I know.”<sup>1</sup> When the reporter leaves, Hartman’s Reagan transforms. The president no longer shakes and stands straighter, and an expression of angry calculation replaces the previous grandfatherly confusion. He assembled his staff and described a master plan to continue supporting the Contras. When Caspar Weinberger, played by Jon Lovitz, asked Reagan to slow down since “there’s still a lot about the Iran-Contra affair” he did not understand the president berates him. Hartman shouted, “You don’t need to understand! I am the President, only I need to understand and later quotes Montesquieu on the danger of sharing knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Over the remainder of the skit, Reagan does complex financial calculations without the aid of a calculator, concludes a weapons deal with Iraqis while speaking Arabic, and talks with bankers in German. His staff looks on befuddled before eventually falling asleep as the president works through the night.

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<sup>1</sup> “President Reagan: Mastermind,” *Saturday Night Live*, NBC December 6, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



Hartman played Reagan again in a 1987 sketch centering on Gorbachev's visit to Washington DC for the signing of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. The Reagan of the sketch was clueless and rather than describe the historical significance of landmarks in the capital, discussed their use in movies. At one point, Hartman's Reagan offered to take Danny DeVito's Gorbachev into the war room of the Pentagon, before the Marine driver tells the president that the Soviet leader would not be allowed. Reagan noted that he had never been in the war room, but if there was a war someone would "evidently" take him there.<sup>3</sup> The final site on the tour was the UFO landing site from the 1951 movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Reagan points to the location where the alien robot Gort stood, prompting Gorbachev to respond with "Klaatu barada nikto," a famous line from the climax of the movie.<sup>4</sup> Although included in the skit as a joke, the movie was one that Reagan was both fond of and one that shaped his world view. Historian Sean Wilentz notes in *The Age of Reagan* the president often spoke of the movie and it contributed to the "global humanitarian vision" of Reaganism.<sup>5</sup>

The two sketches touched on central questions about the Reagan administration. Though personally popular, Reagan and his White House remained enigmatic to many Americans. Hartman's first outing asked who was in charge of the administration. Bureaucratic chaos and personal rivalries played out publicly throughout Reagan's time in office lending the impression that the administration lacked a strong leader. Tell-all

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<sup>3</sup> "President Reagan Gives Gorbachev a Tour of Washington D.C." *Saturday Night Live*, 5 December 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008*, (New York: Harper Books, 2008), 138.

books by disgruntled former aides and administration officials contributed to the public image of the president as an amiable figurehead that was out of his depth on policy issues. David Stockman, Reagan's first director of the Office of Management and Budget and architect of the administration's early budget cuts, released the first of these, entitled *The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Revolution Failed*, in 1986. He describes how those around Reagan "made him stumble into the wrong camp," and how the president "had no business trying to make a revolution" as he lacked the will to lead one.<sup>6</sup> The book debuted in the top spot on *The New York Times* non-fiction bestseller's list and Stockman played a prominent role in a media blitz promoting the book and the failure of Reagan's leadership.<sup>7</sup>

In its review of the book, *The New York Times* highlighted what it viewed as evidence that Reagan was not mentally capable of directing his administration. It noted that Stockman's "Reagan stories are priceless."<sup>8</sup> The book repeatedly demonstrates the president sitting silently in meetings until the mention of a magic word, like 'welfare' or 'Medicare,' caused him to launch into an anecdote. For Stockdale and *The New York Times* these stories and jokes showed how the president "totally misunderstood the preceding conversation."<sup>9</sup> The memoir showed cabinet members who "take skillful advantage of the president's capacity for befuddlement," as they pursue their agendas by

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<sup>6</sup> David Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Revolution Failed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Bob Greene, "Triumph of Politics is a Triumph of Hype," *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1986.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Kinsley, "In the Land of the Magic Asterisk," *The New York Times*, May 11, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

using misdirection, movies, and comic strips to sway the leader of the free world.<sup>10</sup> Stockman and *The New York Times* view Reagan's preference for spinning yarns as a sign of his intellectual incapacity, and proof that he did not provide the ideology and policy ideas his administration pursued.

George Shultz, who served as Reagan's Secretary of State from 1982 to 1989, views the use anecdotes differently. He acknowledges that many of Stockman's criticisms were in fact accurate. Reagan "could allow himself to be deceived, sometimes almost knowingly."<sup>11</sup> He would rearrange facts to make stories better, and at times simply ignore the facts entirely. However, Shultz did not view this as a sign of intellectual incapacity or even dishonesty on the part of Reagan. Instead, he views the president's use of stories in a positive light, noting, "he used a story to impart a larger message --- and sometimes the message was simply more important than the facts."<sup>12</sup> Reagan recognized the "stories create meaning" and that "facts are the unassembled parts" of a story waiting for a master to piece them together into something greater than its parts.

Caspar Weinberger, Reagan's Secretary of Defense from 1981-1987, agrees with Shultz on the issue of Reagan's use of anecdote, one of the few areas where Shultz and Weinberger concurred. He argues that Reagan's use of stories and jokes were important factors in giving the president "such high standing and deserved popularity" with the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, (New York: Scribner's, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

public.<sup>13</sup> The stories and jokes created “an atmosphere” that produced “vital agreements that neither logic, nor table pounding, nor cajoling could bring about.”<sup>14</sup> Weinberger viewed Reagan’s seemingly unorthodox method of communication as essential to the success of the administration and the accomplishment of Reagan’s agenda. Both Weinberger and Shultz vehemently deny that anyone other than Reagan acted as the driving force of the administration, and years after Reagan’s term in office ended wrote their memoirs in part to combat the continuing perception that others defined Reagan’s policies and goals.

The “President Reagan: Mastermind” and “President Reagan Gives Gorbachev a Tour of Washington” skits showed the role of popular culture in shaping perceptions of leaders and policies. They played on and reinforced the public’s false understanding that Reagan was a figurehead, or as former Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford termed him, “an amiable dunce.”<sup>15</sup> Edmund Morris, Reagan’s official biographer, took a similarly dim view of his subject. Morris frequently found himself asking “how much does Dutch really know” and expressed doubt that scholars would find much of value in Reagan’s diaries.<sup>16</sup> In a 2011 op-ed he sought to counter the “sentimental colossus [Reagan’s] acolytes are trying to erect,” arguing the Reagan he knew was a “person of no ego and

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<sup>13</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 33.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 132.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan*, (New York: Random House, 1999), xxiii, xxv

little charisma.”<sup>17</sup> History’s first draft on Reagan largely portrayed an intellectual lightweight, blandly mouthing others words and ideas.

More recent scholarship views Reagan with greater nuance. John Patrick Diggins admits to initially following the “lightweight” line of thought, but felt the president’s reputation “improved considerably” with publication of Reagan’s letters, speeches, and radio transcripts, all revealing an intelligent, sensitive mind, with passionate convictions.”<sup>18</sup> Diggins came to a “belated respect” for the “boldness” Reagan used to Sean Wilentz’s *Age of Reagan* though “sharply critical of Reagan’s leadership,” argues that Reagan created a “new fusion of deeply conservative politics with some of the rhetoric and even the spirit of Franklin D Roosevelt’s New Deal and of John F Kennedy’s New Frontier.”<sup>19</sup> Stephen Hayward’s work, also titled *The Age of Reagan*, finds a similar link between Reagan and Roosevelt. Hayward posits that Reagan’s divergences from conservative orthodoxy demonstrate an active political mind seeking to remake his party. Rick Perlstein believes Reagan to simultaneously be a rescuer and a divider. He argues the president’s ability “to reimagine the morass in front of him as a tableau of moral clarity” explains this.<sup>20</sup> For Perlstein, Reagan’s supporters wanted “crystalline black-or-

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<sup>17</sup> Edmund Morris, “Five Myths About Ronald Reagan,” *The Washington Post*, 4 February 2011

<sup>18</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), xvii.

<sup>19</sup> Wilentz, 3, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2014), xv-xvi.

white melodramas” while others recognized his words as those of a “phony or a hustler.”<sup>21</sup>

Each of these histories portray Reagan differently and range from hagiography to indictment. However, reflect a nuanced political ideology that challenged the orthodoxy of both liberals and conservatives. Perlstein’s observation about Reagan’s distillation of complex situation is cogent, but the implication of blanket oversimplification is unfair. The president’s ability to portray moral certitude enabled the bold actions Diggins praised. It provided for a clear national vision and simple slogans like “Peace through Strength” belied complicated, well-reasoned, and effective strategies. Reagan’s approach to the Soviet Union defies the oft-applied characterization of first term hostility followed by second term rapprochement. The rhetoric could produce misunderstanding and Wilentz rightly criticizes Reagan’s indirect approach to decision-making. Iran-Contra offers the most glaring failure. Perlstein’s depiction of Reagan as divisive is also fair, as many audiences had difficulty finding themselves in Reagan’s simplified vision.

The question of the extent to which Reagan and his administration had a Cold War strategy remains a contested one. In *The Triumph of Improvisation*, James Graham Wilson argues that “no master plan explains either the developments in Eastern Europe and East Germany or the response to those developments in the west.”<sup>22</sup> Instead, “individuals in power ended the Cold War through unscripted actions” and “in the last

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, xvi

<sup>22</sup> James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev’s Adaptability, Reagan’s Engagement, and the end of the Cold War*, (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2014)

years of the conflict improvisation mattered more than any market plan.”<sup>23</sup> Melvyn Leffler in *For the Soul of Mankind* that Reagan recognized that “strength tempered the adversary’s ambitions and tamped down its expectations” but that the “main purpose of strength is to negotiate.”<sup>24</sup> However, like Wilson, Leffler argues that Gorbachev’s actions proved more decisive in ending the Cold War. He argues that the Soviet leader’s belief that “Soviet security was not threatened by capitalist adversaries” was the key to peaceful resolution.<sup>25</sup> The work of both historians suggests the response of Reagan to a new Soviet leader was more important than any strategic program.

Hal Brands sees a more successful strategy in *What Good is Grand Strategy?* He admits Reagan “was hardly the prototypical strategic savant,” but finds that his “shrewd geopolitical instincts” led to a winning strategy.<sup>26</sup> The President’s recognition that the Soviet Union “was military strong, but economically, politically, and ideologically weak,” meant the blending of strength and outreach yielded an “immensely productive” strategic approach.<sup>27</sup> Improvisation and relationships were important, however, they are a core part of any successful strategy. Reagan established a clear vision on engaging with the Soviet Union and demonstrated the ability to wield hard and soft power in a variety of ways to support his vision. Brands joins critics of Reagan’s management style and also

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 464.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 461.

<sup>26</sup> Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*, (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2014), 142.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 142-43.

notes that the single-minded focus on the Soviet Union was detrimental to US initiatives in the developing world.<sup>28</sup> The criticism is both fair and accurate. Reagan's failure to transcend the zero-sum mentality of the Cold War globally harmed not only US interests and his administration, but also contributed to significant amounts of bloodshed, particularly in Latin America.

In his survey of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis argues that Reagan, Gorbachev, and Pope John Paul II recognized the Cold War as a theater and "like all good actors, they brought the play at last to an end."<sup>29</sup> Gaddis speculates that it took "dramatizations" by all three men to "remove the mental blinders" of their constituencies.<sup>30</sup> While the characterization risks oversimplifying the motivations behind Reagan's "Peace through Strength," Pope John Paul II's World Youth Day, and Gorbachev's Perestroika, it accurately represents the importance of performance and stagecraft in politics and international relations. Reagan's background as an actor and story teller undoubtedly played a critical role in his ability to achieve his largest policy objectives. His Hollywood past also provided critics an easy way to malign his intellect, agency, and capability.

The ways Reagan communicated and developed ideas are part of why scholars question both the existence of a Reagan grand strategy and the extent of his involvement with his own administration. He relied heavily on non-traditional sources, often preferring to use

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, (New York: Penguin, 2005), 197.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 196.



fiction to both create and articulate policy. Reagan also drew primarily from middlebrow sources rather than high literature or academic works and arguments. The focus on popular culture and simple parables led many to dismiss the nuance and merit contained within Reagan's message.

In *Cold War Orientalism*, historian Christina Klein examines how popular culture influenced American attitudes towards east Asia in the post-war period. She argues that books, plays, and movies were a particularly powerful way to shape opinion and policy on the region. Creators of middlebrow culture "often presented the Cold War as something that ordinary Americans could take part in."<sup>31</sup> Popular culture translated important strategic partnerships and alliances of the US "into personal terms and imbuing them with sentiment" creating a meaningful and individual connection with previously abstract ideas.<sup>32</sup> Klein argues these connections took on particular importance because "the exercise of political, economic, and military power always depend on the mechanism of culture."<sup>33</sup> Popular culture helped build national will to fight the Cold War in the Pacific.

Literary scholar Edward Said argues that culture provides "a sort of theater where various political and ideological causes engage one another."<sup>34</sup> In *Culture and Imperialism*, he asserts that the novel and imperialism are "unthinkable without one

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<sup>31</sup> Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), xiii.

another.”<sup>35</sup> This is because novels either explicitly or implicitly reinforce the existing structures of the state. They depend on the existing “authority and power” of society and established institutions to create legibility across a broad audience which adds to the legitimacy of the existing structure of the state. Said could easily include other mediums of popular culture into his framework. Movies, plays, and music, as well the novel, depend on their audience instantly contextualizing it within their own lives, and use prevailing societal norms as a common language. Even elements of culture intended as subversive rely on this common language. They often shock consumer’s sensibilities through the absence of a familiar frame of reference or create a sense of alienation through the juxtaposition of existing norms.

Melani McAlister expands on this notion in *Epic Encounters*. She looks at depictions of and references to the Middle East in American culture to show that culture actively assists the construction of “narratives that help policy make sense in a given moment.”<sup>36</sup> She notes that cultural fields constantly interact with and respond to “other fields in the larger social system.”<sup>37</sup> The relationship is a complex one, and often results in a cultural object that is a fun house vision of policy rather than a direct reflection. Said and McAlister are correct to identify the absence of cultural examination from the study of policy. However, their focus on the idea of culture as a clarifying agent of policy and strategy describes only a part of the relationship.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 71

<sup>36</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 7

Culture also influences decision makers. In *Grand Strategies*, Charles Hill argues, “literature shows its relationship with statecraft to be reciprocal.”<sup>38</sup> Although he then goes on to lament how “popular cultures of entertainment” evicted literature “from its place in the pantheon of arts,” his argument still applies to the cultural realms he disdains.<sup>39</sup> Hill recognizes that literature informed the actions of leaders, which then in turn informed the actions of future works of literature. Popular culture accelerates this cycle and can directly influence policy makers in several ways. It provides feedback on popular attitudes and opinions across a larger scale than other measures such as polls. Culture can also model the outcomes of policies in an accessible and visible manner, potentially providing a sense of the feasibility of particular course. This is particularly useful in defense planning, as culture can serve as informal war games allowing for visualization of concepts without an actual war or large-scale exercises. Positive cultural portrayals will serve to reinforce a leader’s confidence in a given initiative, while the opposite can highlight the need for a new course.

Political scientists Paul Musgrave and J Daniel Furman argue that popular culture can provide its audience with “synthetic experiences” which are “impression, ideas, and pseudo-recollections about the world derived from exposure to narrative texts.”<sup>40</sup> The new experience of the audience can “reinforce, induce, and even replace identities and

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature Statecraft and World Order* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Musgrave and J Daniel Furman, “Synthetic Experiences: How Popular Culture Matters for Images of International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 61, Issue 3, September 2017.

beliefs” related to how individuals interpret and act in the real world.<sup>41</sup> Policy makers use their new expertise and perspective, regardless of those view actual validity, to design strategies and accomplish national objectives.

Fictional accounts and synthetic experience can also build empathy towards populations previously seen as foreign or hostile. The “personal terms” and “sentiment” Klein identifies as the product of middlebrow narratives stem from individuals relating with narratives in a manner that is intimate and unique to each reader. The close identification with the subjects of a story can translate into increased sympathy for and curiosity about different people and societies. Effective and well-constructed narratives can counter the dehumanizing effect of prolonged conflict be it war or geo-political rivalry. Policy stemming from this nuanced and complex view is more likely to be imaginative and successful.

It is important to note that a reaction to narrative is not determinative of how an individual will act in the future. Synthetic experiences and emotional connections are part of a broad array of inputs, ideas, and skills that an individual can draw on. In addition, it is possible that fiction could have a detrimental effect through use of stereotypes, one-dimensional portrayals, or in actively seeking to elicit a hostile response. Less maliciously, but still damaging, unrealistic or inaccurate narratives can lead a reader to incorrectly believe they understand a situation. In addition, each consumer reacts to and interprets fiction in a uniquely personal manner, leading to the risk of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

misinterpretation if a leader employs it as a common language with advisors. Used incorrectly in policy making, narratives can exacerbate tensions and destroy well-intentioned initiatives.

Reagan's administration showcases both the potential for gain and incredible risk that come from creating policy strongly influenced by fictional narratives. Reagan was exceptionally cognizant of the representations of American policy and strength in popular culture, and actively sought to shape them to support his agenda. On the eve of his election to the presidency, he perceived the prevailing trends as hostile to his agenda. Popular movies, books, and music portrayed the United States as weak and morally compromised, and Reagan had a particular revulsion for movies such as *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter*. They were, Reagan asserted, examples of the "reprehensible pandering" of Hollywood to the forces of "anti-militarism and anti-Americanism."<sup>42</sup> If themes of moral equivalency and impotent American military might remained dominant in cultural discourse, it would be difficult for Reagan to accomplish the reinvigoration of the defense establishment and pursue a hawkish course with regard to the Cold War.

Fortunately for Reagan, the majority of the American public was ready for a change in the discussion. They felt battered by the previous decade. Military embarrassments in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Iran raised difficult questions about the capacity of the United States to exert its will on minor powers, much less the Soviet

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<sup>42</sup> Draft of Reagan's Commencement at West Point, Folder: "West Point Speech and Back Up File (1)", Box 8 Speechwriting, White House Office Of: Research Office, 1981-1989, Ronald Reagan Library.

Union. Communism seemed on the march as well, as in addition to the emergence of new communist state in Southeast Asia, military action led to communist states in Angola, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua. Americans began to doubt their chances for a victory in the Cold War. Additionally, the fall out of the OPEC oil embargo demonstrated the ability for small states to drastically affect the lives of everyday Americans and inflict lasting harm on the economy. The diminishment of American prestige and power in the 1970s created an enthusiastic audience for Reagan's message of optimism and rebirth.

Throughout Reagan's time in office a large segment of popular culture reflected the resurgent American nationalism his administration encouraged. Movies like *Rocky IV*, *Rambo II*, and *Top Gun* reflected a desire to move beyond the questioning of the previous decade towards an embrace of exceptionalism. Even the toy industry embraced Reagan's optimistic language about American power. Hasbro rebooted the G.I. Joe action figure in 1983, after previously suspending the line due to the unpopularity of the military during Vietnam. No one captured the sentiment and content of Reagan's presidency as well as Tom Clancy. The author's first book, *The Hunt for Red October*, debuted in 1984 and after receiving an endorsement from Reagan catapulted up the bestseller lists. Every year from 1986 through the end of the decade, Clancy would release a new novel that finished in the top two on end of year bestseller charts and would later spawn a movie franchise. Clancy's books certainly support McAlister's sense that popular culture makes policy legible to the public. Each of his early novels highlights the

superior morality and quality of those in the American military, the need for advanced technology to fight and win modern wars, and the rightness of the American cause in the Cold War. Clancy's novels also demonstrate the ability of popular culture to affect policy makers. In addition to gaining a wide readership within the Pentagon and Congress, the novels became of favorite of Reagan. He read them both as entertainment and as research.<sup>43</sup> The realistic and successful portrayal of administration initiatives reinforced Reagan's sense that he was pursuing the correct course. Clancy's books became evidence to Reagan that not only were his policies popular, but that they were working as intended and could achieve their goal of winning the Cold War.

This study argues that the complex relationship between culture and policy remains under examined, to the detriment of historical inquiry. Closer examination can help answer questions about how policy origins and sustainability. The study will also argue that fiction is a potentially valuable and constructive tool in developing effective, nuanced approaches to complex problems. Narratives provide for creative space to explore unconventional and imaginative solutions. The use of imagination and creativity in policy development can allow for consideration of a broader range of options and lead to evaluation of unexpected contingencies.

Narratives also support the development of empathy. Effective strategy requires acknowledgement and respect for the basic humanity of groups perceived as hostile. The ability to understand and seriously consider the desires and objectives of a variety of

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<sup>43</sup> Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 294.

actors help create nuanced, effective, and lasting strategy. Empathy remains a vastly underrated leadership trait and requires active and persistent cultivation. Fiction also makes policy relatable. The ability to force personal identification with otherwise obscure ideas enhances support and increases the sense among target audiences that they have agency in events beyond their immediate circumstances. Further, narratives can compellingly show that non-elites can play an important role in the success or failure of a given strategy.

Reagan used fiction in three broad ways. He sought out stories that spoke to his life experiences or that he otherwise related to. These narratives largely ended happily for the protagonist. They helped form the basis of his value system and a sense of how the broader world operated. Fiction reinforced his own experience, and convinced Reagan of the basic correctness of his views on subjects like freedom, religion, and the military. His reading allowed him to identify common desires and goals with disparate groups.

Stories also provided Reagan with a creative space to develop and test policy. They offered a way to visualize information presented in more conventional formats. Fiction often served as an opportunity to wargame ideas and think about policy in a less abstract way. The ability to insert himself into a narrative humanized policy for Reagan and led him to seek more creative solutions. Through stories, Reagan gained the confidence in his policies and as a result challenged orthodox political views.



Finally, Reagan sought to use popular culture to mobilize broad support for his administrations objectives. He and others in his administration promoted narratives that portrayed their policy goals favorably while attacking elements of popular culture they deemed as hostile. Reagan viewed these activities as essential to restoring national will and sustaining his policies. He spoke frequently about the state of television and movies, and consistently advocated for them to embrace his definitions of patriotism and liberty. This study is divided into two parts, each consisting of three chapters. It is primarily concerned with how Reagan used and reacted to middlebrow books and will argue his reading played a significant role in both the development of his world view and his actions throughout his life. Part one will examine the period from his adolescence through the 1950s. It will primarily focus on themes relating to the development of Reagan's views on religion, freedom, anti-communism, and military service.

The first chapter, "Vagrant Martians," looks at Reagan from his early boyhood through the end of the Second World War. During this period, the future president demonstrated a predilection for stories which allowed him to view himself as both heroic and destined for greatness. He established a lifelong pattern of seeking out comforting stories that ended happily and reaffirmed his self-worth and world view. The chapter will examine Reagan's relationship with the works of Harold Bell Wright and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Each author helped an adolescent Reagan identify the sort of man he wanted to be. Wright's stories about the nature of Christianity provided Reagan with a religious framework he would follow for the remainder of his life. It offered a path to salvation

that centered on practical deeds rather than public prayer and church attendance.

Burrough's John Carter of Mars novels kindled a life-long love of science fiction. The stories inspired a fascination with technology and Carter became the archetype for Reagan's ideal protagonist. The wayward Virginian's strong moral code, courage, and martial prowess would shape Reagan's view of the military and of the importance of sacrifice.

Chapter two, "Friendly Witness," will examine the development of Reagan's anti-communism. Following the Second World War, Reagan came to identify communism and the Soviet Union as an existential threat to individual liberty. Reagan's increased political activism during the period from 1945 to 1953 led to personal and starkly negative encounters with communists. His reading of the non-fictional *Witness* by Whitaker Chambers and the fictional *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler demonstrated to Reagan that his personal experiences were not aberrations, but rather indicative of how communists operated throughout the globe. Reagan became convinced communists would employ any means to achieve their ends, which in his view necessitated the extermination of individual agency.

In Chapter three, "Cowboy Values," the study will look at how westerns and similar genres offered Reagan a model for how to counter communism. His reading of Louis L'Amour's westerns, James Michener's accounts of the Korean War, and reflection on childhood reading of Rudyard Kipling led him to see resisting communism as a moral imperative and to define the Cold War as a simple struggle between white and

black hats. He wanted the US to pursue policy that would see the US do the morally right thing without seeking reward or long-term influence. Imagery from the movie *High Noon* would come to serve as policy shorthand in his administration. The chapter will also explore the negative consequences of the narrowness of Reagan's reading. His efforts to apply the morality of westerns and single-minded focus on the Soviet Union would lead to policy that ranged from tone-deaf to disastrous in Africa and Latin America.

Part two will examine the Reagan administration in detail, using the works of Tom Clancy to identify how Reagan and his advisors developed and built support for their initiatives. It also explores the complicated relationship between leaders, authors and the public. Each influences the others, making it difficult to determine both the origins of ideas and assign responsibility for their success or failure. Clancy's open embrace of Reagan's ideology, Reagan's public declarations of support, and the significant popularity of the author make Clancy's work particularly useful in tracing how fiction both influences and is influenced by the broader geo-political environment.

Chapter four, "Up from the Depths," uses Clancy's first novel *The Hunt for Red October* to look at how Reagan both inspired and used fiction. As he wrote the book, Clancy consciously adopted the themes of Reagan's first term. The work highlights Reagan's first-term efforts to shift how Americans perceived their military and to draw attention to the importance of technology in a potential Cold War struggle. Reagan's fulsome praise of the novel helped propel it the top of the best seller's list and helped

launch Clancy's career. He also viewed the book as validation of the success of his first term and a sign that the will of Americans to fight the Cold War had returned.

Clancy influenced Reagan more directly with his second book, *Red Storm Rising*.

Chapter five, "Techno-thriller Rising," shows how Reagan used the book to think about a potential conventional war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Clancy's portrayal of the emerging doctrine of AirLand Battle and the dominant US advantage in technology convinced Reagan of the ability of NATO to conventionally defeat the Soviet Union and its allies. The realization spurred his efforts to seek nuclear abolition, a lifetime ambition. *Red Storm Rising* provided Reagan with a critical creative space and allowed him to reach a wildly different, and optimistic, conclusion about US power. Reagan's conclusions in turn spurred diplomatic efforts and directly influenced the peaceful ending of the Cold War.

The final chapter, "Pebbles from Space," explores how popular culture shaped the debate over Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative. Reagan's missile defense proposal led to a public split and vocal argument in the science fiction community. Politicians and journalists sought out the opinion of genre writers, treating Robert Heinlein, Arthur C Clarke, and Isaac Asimov as credible and important voices in the debate over space policy. Defense hawks also seized Clancy's fourth book, *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, lauding it for its positive portrayal of SDI. Supporters in the military and government, actively worked to enhance Clancy's credibility and believed his mass market appeal could build durable support not only for SDI but for persistent high levels of defense

spending. Caspar Weinberger tried to emulate Clancy's success by writing a novel with a collection of fictional vignettes which were thinly veiled policy proposals. The debate over SDI demonstrates the ability of policy makers to inspire works of popular culture and the ability of those works to shift public opinion.

This dissertation concludes with a brief examination of the legacy and consequences of Reagan's relationship with popular culture. It will examine the evolving way Americans engage with their military and the creeping militarization of US foreign policy. The conclusion will also argue Reagan's use of fiction positively contributed to the peaceful end of the Cold War and helped restore American's belief in their nation's global mission. It also created precedent for the over-simplification of policy discussion and led many to disengage with in-depth discussion about foreign intervention. Finally, the conclusion will argue popular culture should be a source of inspiration for policy. Employed deliberately and in conjunction with more conventional influences, it can challenge assumptions and increase understanding of impacted groups. The result is a nuanced and flexible strategy which employs a broad range of assets.

## **Chapter 1 Vagrant Martians: Reagan and the Power of Narrative**

In January of 1989, a valedictory President Reagan addressed the nation from the Oval Office for a thirty-fourth and final time. Typical of a farewell address, the speech fondly recounted the successes of the administration and offered the nation advice on how to sustain and build on the president's achievements in the future. Typical of Reagan, the speech began with a series of stories. More than any other president, Reagan relied on stories to convey his message to the American people. Stories, both real and fictional, were the foundation upon which Reagan built his policy.

During his farewell address, Reagan first told "a small story about a big ship, and a refugee, and a sailor."<sup>44</sup> The story centered on a sailor patrolling the South China Sea aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Midway* during the early 1980s. Reagan recalled the period as "the height of the boat people," and describes a Vietnamese refugee yearning for America.<sup>45</sup> The refugee is aboard "a leaky little boat" tossed about by "choppy seas."<sup>46</sup> Fortunately, a "young, smart, fiercely observant" sailor is part of the crew that sees the boat, and the Navy is able to rescue the refugees.<sup>47</sup> Upon boarding the *Midway*

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<sup>44</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation," Washington DC, January 11, 1989.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

and seeing the sailor, the refugee greets him, yelling “Hello, American sailor. Hello, freedom man.”<sup>48</sup> This was, Reagan concluded, a “small moment, with a big meaning.”<sup>49</sup> Reagan felt this “small moment” effectively summed up “what it was to be an American in the 1980s,” that it showed the United States “stood, again, for freedom.”<sup>50</sup> He saw the story as tailor-made to demonstrate the success of his administration. The contrast between the aircraft carrier and refugee ship demonstrates an advanced, technologically superior American military. The name of the carrier, the USS *Midway*, recalls the Second World War and the last unequivocal military triumph of the US in Asia. Reagan’s description of the sailor as “young, smart and fiercely observant,” traits that Reagan notes “most American servicemen” share, reflects upon the vast improvement in the morale and readiness of the military during Reagan’s time in office.<sup>51</sup>

The refugee is loaded with symbolism for Reagan as well. That a Vietnamese refugee declares an American sailor to be a “freedom man” showed the president two things.<sup>52</sup> First, it represented the defeat of the Vietnam Syndrome. The anecdote showed the United States once again using its military in Southeast Asia, helping the people most impacted by its failure a decade before. For Reagan, the sailor’s tale also showed the banishment of the sense of moral equivalency that defined how many Americans began to see the Cold War during the 1960s and 70s. That people would flee it in a “leaky little

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

boat” demonstrated the moral superiority of the west. One would not brave the choppy waters of the South China Sea in a barely seaworthy vessel without the hope of freedom. Reagan argued the story showed that during the 1980s the world and, more importantly, Americans “rediscovered” that the US “stood, again, for freedom.”<sup>53</sup> A brief encounter between an American sailor and a Vietnamese refugee memorably communicated Reagan’s success in several areas in just eight short lines. It was a parable in paragraph form.

Small moments with big meanings were the sort of stories that Reagan sought, and upon discovering one, the president would latch on to it. Throughout his presidency, Reagan kept small boxes full of index cards that he had written his favorite anecdotes, quotes, and jokes on.<sup>54</sup> Stories like the one of the sailor and the boat people were important to Reagan. He used them not just to communicate his ideas with the American people, but also to see how his policies were working and to imagine how his actions or those of his administration would work in the near-future. Facts were not the most important aspect of a good Reagan story, and he would often change key details of his stories to increase their impact. Throughout his administration, the media and political opponents chastised the president for repeatedly, and knowingly, telling stories with little to no basis in reality. Reagan’s tendency to include apocryphal quotes, jokes, and anecdotes in his speeches frustrated aides and speechwriters. Some advisors even took

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Vice Admiral John Poindexter, interview with the author, telephone, West Point, NY, 19 August 2017



the tendency to be reflective of an uninterested and unintelligent mind. David Stockman, Reagan's first director of the Office of Management and Budget, expressed frustration with how Reagan made decisions in his memoir *The Triumph of Politics*. Stockman argued that the President "had no business trying to make a revolution" as he was those around him easily "made him stumble into the wrong camp."<sup>55</sup> Reagan's reliance on anecdotes was a major point of criticism in Stockman's work. *The New York Times* review of the memoir noted that Stockman's "Reagan stories are priceless" because they show that Reagan's employment of anecdotes reflected how Reagan had "totally misunderstood" the information presented to him by aides.<sup>56</sup>

Foreign leaders took note of the tendency as well. Anatoly Dobrynin, the long-time Soviet Ambassador to the US noted that the president made a "habit of borrowing dubious quotations" to illustrate points.<sup>57</sup> British officials limited the dissemination of the transcript of Reagan's post-Reykjavik phone call with Margaret Thatcher. The conversation was "particularly sensitive," as Reagan had recommended that the Prime Minister read a Tom Clancy novel to better understand NATO's conventional capabilities in Europe.<sup>58</sup> Thatcher and Charles Powell, her private secretary, feared that others in the

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<sup>55</sup> David Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Revolution Failed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 5.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Kinsley, "In the Land of the Magic Asterisk," *The New York Times*, May 11, 1986.

<sup>57</sup> Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents*, (New York: Times Books, 1995), 519.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Powell to Colin Budd, 14 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

government would believe that Reagan’s “grasp of strategy must be pretty limited” if he resorted to imagined narratives to understand the world.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the complaints Reagan persisted because he recognized the power of narratives. Secretary of State George Shultz explained the favoring of stories in his memoir *Turmoil and Triumph*. He argues that Reagan “used a story to impart a larger message.”<sup>60</sup> Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger offered a similar defense in his own memoir, *Fighting for Peace*. He believed that Reagan’s use of narrative was critical to the “high standing and deserved popularity” Reagan enjoyed with the public.<sup>61</sup> He also viewed it as useful internal to the administration, arguing that they helped provide a vision which produced “vital agreements that neither logic, nor table pounding, nor cajoling could bring about.”<sup>62</sup> In the view of his most important cabinet members, Reagan acted as a modern-day Aesop, and constructed fables to “create meaning” that left a permanent imprint on his audience.<sup>63</sup>

Reagan returned to the importance of narrative near the end of his farewell address. He lamented that for many “younger parents... an unambivalent appreciation of America” was no longer “the right thing to teach modern children.”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the president fretted that “for those who create the popular culture, well-grounded patriotism

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<sup>59</sup> Lord Charles Powell of Bayswater to Author, email, 19 August 2016.

<sup>60</sup> George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, (New York: Scribner’s Books, 1995)

<sup>61</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 33.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Shultz

<sup>64</sup> Reagan, “Farewell Address to the Nation.”

[was] no longer the style.”<sup>65</sup> He felt that these trends in culture and parenting threatened the successes reflected in the story of the sailor and the refugee. America’s “spirit was back” but not “reinstitutionalized.”<sup>66</sup> Reagan advocated for a return to a time when “movies celebrated democratic values and implicitly reinforced the idea that America was special.”<sup>67</sup> Television also needed to reembrace these ideas in order to protect the hard-won gains of the 1980s. That the president devoted time in his final address from the Oval Office to the subject of popular culture showed the importance he placed on the topic. He respected the power of movies, television, and books to shape opinion and instill values, in no small part because of the decisive role such media played in shaping his own personal and political identity. The consumption and creation of stories defined Reagan.

### **Identity in Narrative**

Jack and Nelle Reagan instilled an appreciation for stories and jokes in their son. Reagan recalled that his father “was the best raconteur [he] ever heard,” who employed his “wry, mordant humor” when selling shoes.<sup>68</sup> Reading was a critical part of Reagan’s development as a child, and began a lifelong passion for books. In his first

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ronald Reagan and Richard Hubler, *Where’s the Rest of Me?* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1965), 9.

autobiography, *Where's the Rest of Me*, Reagan fondly recalls that one of his earliest triumphs came at the age of five “one evening when all the funny black marks on the paper clicked into place.”<sup>69</sup> Jack Reagan also taught his son about the ability of culture to influence its audience. Reagan and his brother Neil were “the only kids not to see” *The Birth of Nation* when it came to theaters in town because their father stated that he would be “damned if anyone in the family” would see a movie that portrayed the Ku Klux Klan favorably.<sup>70</sup> His mother, Nelle, “was proud enough to canvass the neighbors and get them to come in,” making the young Reagan’s first public performance a dramatic reading of an article about the July 22, 1916 Preparedness Day Bombing in San Francisco.<sup>71</sup> The happiness that Reagan felt in making Nelle proud is evident fifty years later.

Nelle was the stabilizing influence in Reagan’s life. Jack Reagan found little success as a salesman and the family took on a peripatetic lifestyle. Jack’s alcoholism in the time of prohibition also created trouble, making him an often-absent figure in the young president’s life and one whose behavior threatened to uproot the family or leave them in even direr financial straits. Reagan took his love of culture from Nelle. He recalled his mother as “the dean of dramatic recitals for the country,” and saw the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

performances and reading as her “sole relaxation from her family and charitable duties.”<sup>72</sup> She also told her son “he would never be lonely... if you enjoy reading.”<sup>73</sup> Nelle’s emphasis on the value of reading was particularly useful advice for an introverted boy faced with the prospect of being the perpetual outsider as his family moved from town to town. Reagan took the advice seriously and relayed it to those close to him. When serving as governor of California he told Nancy Reynolds, then his assistant for electronic media and a close friend and confidant of Nancy Reagan, that “if you have a book around you never lack for friends.”<sup>74</sup> In a letter 1981, the president mentioned that he “could think of no greater torture than being isolated” in a room “without something to read.”<sup>75</sup> Lou Cannon, a newspaper reporter and Reagan biographer, noted that Reagan had a special relationship with books. The president seemed not to care if “anyone else knew he was a reader” and in many ways actively hid his bibliophilic tendencies from the public because he had a “reader’s conceit that books were secret personal treasures.”<sup>76</sup> Reagan had an intimate relationship with the written word, books in many ways served as his closest friends and advisors. He told as much to the children of Troy, Michigan in a letter celebrating the 1971 opening of the city’s library, Reagan echoed his comments to

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Deaver and Mickey Herskowitz, *Behind the Scenes: In Which the Author Talks About Ronald and Nancy Reagan...and Himself*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1987), 43.

<sup>74</sup> Tom Reed interview with author, Austin, Texas October 16, 2014

<sup>75</sup> Ronald Reagan to Helen P Miller, September 3, 1981, in *Reagan: A Life in Letters* edited by Kiron Skinner, Annelise Anderson and Martine Anderson, 7.

<sup>76</sup> Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 293.

Reynolds and told the children that “books are often our best friends,” and without them the world would be “without light.”<sup>77</sup>

Only a certain kind of story could lay claim to Reagan’s friendship. A book needed to meet two primary criteria. First, Reagan had to be able to identify with the central figure and imagine himself in the narrative. When he first started reading as a boy, books were a form of escape from an alcoholic father, poverty, and his own shyness. The protagonists of books that Reagan enjoyed were traditional; they were universally strong, intelligent, and morally upright. The second key requirement was that the story needed to end happily. Reagan’s heroes were not tragic; they enjoyed the full rewards of their righteous struggles at story’s end. He admitted in a 1977 letter to the director of the Public Library in Mobile, Alabama, that he remained a “sucker for hero worship.”<sup>78</sup> Reading as a child gave the future president “an abiding belief in the triumph of good over evil” and an understanding that heroes lived by “standards of morality and fair play.”<sup>79</sup>

However, Reagan’s reluctance to broaden his reading led to definition of culture that was narrow. While understandable in a child, the inability to consistently broaden the type of literature he read as an adult contributed to the tone-deafness he displayed on issues of race, sexuality, and class as President. Additionally, the lack of nuance in easy morality of his preferred stories contributed to Reagan understanding conflict in Latin

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<sup>77</sup> Reagan to the Children of Troy in “Ronald Reagan’s Letter to the Library and Other Finds From 1971” by Rebecca Greenfield, *The Atlantic.com*, May 12, 2011

<sup>78</sup> Jerry Griswold, “I’m a Sucker for Hero Worship,” *New York Times*, 30 August 1981.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

America, the Middle East, and Africa through a simplistic and inaccurate intellectual framework.

Reagan's "hero worship" did provide him with an alternate model of behavior to follow than the drunken path of his father. Though he generally spoke well of his father in later years, this stemmed more from his aversion to negativity than true affection. One of the formative moments of Reagan's youth was the discovery of Jack Reagan drunk, "dead to the world" and "flat on his back on the front porch" of the family's home in Dixon, Illinois.<sup>80</sup> After dragging his father to the warmth of bed, Reagan began to realize what his father's previous absences and the "loud voices in the night meant."<sup>81</sup> He felt "grief for [his] father" and for himself, and the incident marks his rejection of his father as a role model.<sup>82</sup> Longtime Reagan advisor, and former Secretary of the Air Force, Tom Reed believed that being the child of an alcoholic contributed to the difficulty Reagan had making deep and lasting friendships.<sup>83</sup>

Instead of using his father as a model, Reagan began to look towards the protagonist of books to guide his transition from a shy, introverted child to an outwardly focused young man. The process of defining himself through narrative began in earnest in his "house of magic," the Dixon Public Library.<sup>84</sup> When Dallas Baillio, the director of Mobile's public library, sought the books that influenced one hundred prominent

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<sup>80</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 7.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Reed interview

<sup>84</sup> Reagan to Miller, 8.

Americans, Reagan provided an interesting response. He noted that his first reaction was “to think of examples of classic literature” to list as his favorite, he admitted, “none were forthcoming” and opted to come clean about his youthful reading habits.<sup>85</sup> Lillian Carter, mother to President Jimmy Carter, took a different tact, disingenuously writing that the president’s favorite as a young boy was Tolstoy’s epic *War and Peace*.<sup>86</sup> Reagan identified books that a 10-year old would seem likely to read in the 1920s, stories of King Arthur, the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, and the works of Mark Twain. Edgar Rice Burroughs made a particularly strong impression.

### **Boyhood on Barsoom**

Reagan took care to note in his letter to Baillo while he enjoyed the Tarzan stories, he actually favored Burroughs’ “science fiction, ‘John Carter Warlord of Mars’ and all the other John Carter books.”<sup>87</sup> As president, he reiterated this preference in response to a letter from Dixon resident Helen Miller. Fondly recalling “frequent trips to the strange kingdoms” of Mars, Reagan expressed amazement that more people did not realize the introduction Burroughs provided to science fiction and the letter is tinged with some regret that John Carter fell from the public memory.<sup>88</sup> The recognition of

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<sup>85</sup> Griswold, “I’m a Sucker for Hero Worship.”

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Reagan to Miller.



Burroughs' role as a science fiction pioneer spoke to Reagan's lifelong engagement with the genre. The Barsoom series exerted significant influence on the field and better-known writers like Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein cite his influence on their work. That Reagan sought refuge on the plains of Mars over the jungles of Africa is perhaps unsurprising given the young boy's need to escape. It was difficult for a 1920s youth to travel further away from poverty and a broken home than to the red planet.

Speaking with the *Paris Review* in 2010, famed science fiction writer Ray Bradbury termed Burroughs "the most influential writer in the entire history of the world."<sup>89</sup> He justified his answer by arguing that ten years olds "fell in love with John Carter and Tarzan and decided to become something romantic."<sup>90</sup> Burroughs inspired not only the writing efforts of Bradbury, but also the scientific endeavors of astronomers, engineers and biochemists. Burroughs, in effect, "put us on the moon."<sup>91</sup> Bradbury knew that his answer was hyperbolic. He gave it in part because ranking the pulp of Burroughs over classics by Shakespeare or Tolstoy "upsets everyone terribly."<sup>92</sup> However, there was also a message behind Bradbury's iconoclasm. *Princess of Mars* did not rank with the classics in terms of literary accomplishment, but in Bradbury's view, it outstripped other works for one reason. It gave "romance and adventure to a whole generation of boys," inspiring them to "become special."<sup>93</sup> This was certainly true for Reagan, as much

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<sup>89</sup> Sam Weller, "Ray Bradbury, the Art of Fiction No. 203," *The Paris Review*, Spring 2010 No 192.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> Ibid

like Bradbury, he read Burroughs and took inspiration from the adventures of John Carter on Mars.

Burroughs did not begin writing professionally until the age of thirty-five. He originally intended to embark upon a career in the military. He attended high school at the Michigan Military Academy and upon graduation earned a conditional appointment to the United States Military Academy in 1895. Unfortunately, Burroughs failed the entrance exams, which significantly derailed his plans to become an officer in the Army.<sup>94</sup> Still viewing the military and the Army as his best option, Burroughs enlisted into the cavalry and joined the Seventh Cavalry in Arizona.

However, the reality of service in the desert canyons of the southwest failed to match the romantic vision of Burroughs's imagination. He spent much of his time at Fort Grant ill and saw little direct action against the Apache bands still active in the area. Disillusioned, Burroughs sought and received a medical discharge in 1897, and reentered civilian life.<sup>95</sup> Despite his experience, the romantic image of military life he constructed persisted. The news that Theodore Roosevelt was recruiting a cavalry regiment for service in Cuba led Burroughs to write the future president offering to enlist in the Rough Riders. Roosevelt wrote back declining the offer due to fears of over-enlistment in the regiment, effectively ending Burroughs' flirtation with the military.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Irwin Porges, *Edgar Rice Burroughs*, (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 49.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 65.

<sup>96</sup> Roosevelt to Burroughs, 19 May 1898.

Over the next decade and a half, Burroughs was unable to settle into consistent work. He took jobs with his father's battery company, as a prospector, a railroad policeman, and salesman. Unable to find success and facing financial ruin, he turned to writing fiction and began work on what would become *A Princess of Mars*. In 1911, he submitted the first draft of the story to *All-Story Magazine*, which paid him four hundred dollars for the serialization rights.<sup>97</sup> Burroughs also sought to publish it as a book; however, Houghton Mifflin rejected the manuscript noting that it was "not at all probable" that they could "make use of the story of a Virginia soldier of fortune miraculously transported to Mars."<sup>98</sup> The publishers did not see a market as they believed the story was simply too fantastical to find an audience. After the serialization led to a significant increase of sales for *All-Story Magazine*, Burroughs was able to find a publisher for both his John Carter and Tarzan stories, with the first editions appearing in 1917.

*Princess of Mars* centers on the adventures of John Carter. The book begins with Burroughs talking about Carter as a favored uncle who wills his estate to Burroughs upon his death. Among the effects is a manuscript, which Carter instructs Burroughs to keep sealed for a period of eleven years, and not publish until twenty-one years after Carter's death. The manuscript reveals that Carter, through mystical means, travels to Mars. Upon arrival, he discovers that he has superior strength and speed due to the lower

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<sup>97</sup> Porges, 115.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 118.

gravity of the red planet. This allows him to perform seemingly miraculous feats, impressing the natives and earning a place as a chieftain in their society. He then rescues and woos Dejah Thoris, the titular princess, becoming a respected member of one of the planet's leading city-states. The book ends on a cliffhanger, as Carter races to restore the planet's oxygen generators, blacking out and awaking on Earth unsure if he succeeds in saving Dejah Thoris, their child, and the red planet.

In the foreword of the sequel, *Gods of Mars*, Burroughs describes another meeting with Carter, this time after his supposed death. Again, his uncle provides a manuscript of adventures on Mars. He tells Burroughs that he knows “that you are interested and that you believe,” and that Burroughs would know when to publish it, as “Earth men have not yet progressed to a point where they can comprehend” Carter's experience.<sup>99</sup> Carter also tells his nephew “not to feel aggrieved if they laugh at you,” a nod to the difficulties Burroughs initially experienced in finding a book publisher.<sup>100</sup> The new text reveals that Carter returned to Barsoom ten years after waking up back on Earth, and that he succeeded in restoring breathable air to the planet. *The Gods of Mars* and its sequel *Warlord of Mars* see Carter debunking the religion of the planet and then dismantling the power of those who worship Issus. *Warlord* ends with Carter receiving the universal acclaim of the noble class of Mars, who proclaim him “Warlord of Barsoom” and his

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<sup>99</sup> Edgar Rice Burroughs, *The Gods of Mars* (Chicago: A.C. McClung, 1913).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

wife, “a world’s most beautiful woman,” queen. The trilogy ends with Carter standing in front of his rapturous people, kissing Dejah Thoris.<sup>101</sup>

Burroughs drew heavily on his own experiences in writing *Princess of Mars*, which makes the novel a mix of the science fiction and western genres. Carter, like Burroughs, was a cavalryman, though for the Confederacy rather than the US Army. Of note, Reagan, inspired by Carter and westerns, would also choose to serve as an officer in the cavalry when he joined the Army while working at an Iowa radio station.<sup>102</sup> Much like with Burroughs, his time in service leaves Carter in dire financial straits. All he has at the end of the war is “several hundred thousand” confederate dollars and “a captain’s commission in...an army which no longer existed.”<sup>103</sup> Seeking a reversal in fortune, he travels to Arizona and begins prospecting. Carter’s actions roughly parallel Burroughs’, as the author spent time prospecting in Oregon on the Snake River. His protagonist finds considerably more luck though, finding “the most remarkable gold-bearing quartz vein.”<sup>104</sup> Apaches set upon Carter and his partner just as they are returning to town, killing his partner and chasing Carter to the cave that will transport him to Mars. The action on Mars bears many of the hallmarks of a western as well. Carter first falls in with the Tharks, who despite being eight feet tall, with four arms and a greenish hue stand in for Native Americans. Tars Tarkas, the Thark chief who takes Carter in, plays the role of

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> H. W. Brands, *Reagan: The Life*, (New York, Doubleday: 2015), 54.

<sup>103</sup> Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Princess of Mars*, (Chicago: A.C. McClung, 1917).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

“noble savage,” who teaches the hero the tribe’s way and is in turn civilized by the protagonist. The use of familiar narratives and stories in unfamiliar settings likely made the book easier for its target audience to accept.

John Carter was the exact sort of hero that Reagan would worship. The cavalryman was “a splendid specimen of manhood,” whose steel gray eyes reflected a “strong and loyal character” and displayed “fire and initiative.”<sup>105</sup> Brave to the point of recklessness, he believes that “cowardice is of a surety its own punishment,” Carter consistently risks himself for his companions. Intolerant of violence against women, he risks his place with the Tharks in order to protect Dejah Thoris from assault. Carter also battles giant apes in order to save his pet Martian hound and on several occasions places himself at greater risk to save Tars Tarkas and other brothers in arms. He displays fidelity in his relationship with Dejah, spurning the advances of numerous women despite their beauty. People of all races on Mars come to admire Carter’s code and he ultimately transforms a system based on violence and strength to one that rests on honor and justice. In effect, as Reagan noted to the Mobile Public Library, the novels provided the basis for his “abiding belief in the triumph of good over evil.”<sup>106</sup>

The way Burroughs presents notions of maternal and paternal love also gave the novels a special appeal to Reagan. Carter reflects with horror that in the Thark society the “commonest amusement is to inflict death on their prisoners of war” and as a result

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<sup>105</sup> *Princess of Mars*

<sup>106</sup> Griswold

“the Martian laugh is a thing to cause strong men to blanch in horror.”<sup>107</sup> As a race, they are “devoid of all the finer sentiments of friendship, love, or affection.”<sup>108</sup> This absence stems from how Tharks raise their young. After hatching from eggs, adult Tharks claim the children at random, meaning that there is no direct biological link and children receive no affection from their adoptive parents.

Only one shows Carter “characteristics of sympathy, kindness, and affection,” the Thark woman Sola.<sup>109</sup> She is unique among her people, because she is the product of a forbidden love, and her biological mother raised and loved her after she emerged from the egg. Sola recalls her mother hiding her and “lavishing upon [her] the love the community life” denied most children.<sup>110</sup> Upon discovery of the act, Sola’s mother hides her daughter and then undergoes torture and execution at the hands of Taj Hajus, the Tarks’ primary chieftain. She willingly sacrifices herself to protect her husband and child. In Burroughs’ world, maternal love is defined by sacrifice and responsible for instilling basic virtue.

In the Barsoom series, paternal love plays a different role, as the heroes of the stories often have absent fathers. Sola is the daughter of Tars Tarkas, who is initially unaware of her identity, as he was participating in a prolonged military campaign at the time of her birth and returns only after his wife’s execution. Sola is aware of her father’s

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<sup>107</sup> *Princess of Mars*.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

identity and sees “his great love is as strong in his breast” for his lost wife and child as it was upon his first departure. She recognizes that love for her mother drives her father to greater heights and a desire to transfigure his entire society stems from her death. For her, Tarkas is an untouchable figure, but still a model to copy. Carter later reveals Sola’s secret to Tarkas and the knowledge that his child still lives, spurs the Thark leader to challenge Tal Hajus, who he kills in single combat, and ascend to overall leadership of his people.

John Carter and Dejah Thoris’ son, Cathoris, has a similarly distant father figure to Sola. Carter saves Mars by restoring its oxygen generators, but in the act blacks out waking up on Earth. He is unable to return for over ten years, missing the hatching of his son, which takes place the same night as his return to Earth. Since Martian children mature at a rate significantly faster than their ones from Earth, when Carter first encounters his son, Cathoris is a young man. Unaware each other’s identity initially, the two together escape from prison and only when another companion mentions Carter’s name does Cathoris realize he is with his father.

After leaping into his father’s arms with “a cry of pleasure,” the boy reveals over the past decade his mother “described to [him] a thousand times” Carter’s stature, manner, and fighting ability. This provided the youth a model to follow. While the experience of fighting next to his father proves the truth of his mother’s words, these skills are not what most impresses Cathoris. Instead, it is that Carter’s “first words to [him]... were of [his] mother” and only someone who loved her as she told him his father



did “would have thought first of her.”<sup>111</sup> Just as with Sola, Cathoris’ admires his father due to his mother’s descriptions, the father’s virtuous example, and the father’s love for the mother, rather than feeling resentment for his father’s absence.

The different way that Burroughs depicts maternal and paternal relationships resonated with Reagan, as he likely identified with the author’s sense that values instilled by the mothers would define their children. Cathoris and Sola become heroic thanks to their mothers, and in many ways despite the absence of their fathers. Though Jack Reagan was not absent in the strictest sense, his alcoholism created periods of literal and emotional absence from his family. Just as with Burroughs’ characters, it fell to the mother to explain the paternal absence and assure the children of the prospect of return. Throughout his childhood, Nelle told Reagan that his father was absent because of “something that was beyond his control.”<sup>112</sup> It was his “occasional bouts with the dark demon in the bottle,” that held him aloof from his sons, much like the void of space and absence of knowledge held Carter and Tarkas from theirs.<sup>113</sup> It created hope for a permanent return of “the bluff and hearty man [Reagan] knew and loved.”<sup>114</sup>

In reading the John Carter series, Reagan also took in the militarism of Burroughs. The author was an ardent supporter of the late-19<sup>th</sup> century imperialist turn in American Foreign Policy, even unsuccessfully volunteering to join Roosevelt’s Rough

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<sup>111</sup> *The Gods of Mars*.

<sup>112</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me?* 8.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

Riders.<sup>115</sup> The racial politics of the era suffuse the John Carter books, and they embrace the notion of the “White Man’s Burden.” Martian society is exotic and savage. It falls to John Carter, a white Virginian, to transform it to something more resembling his homeland. Carter is intellectually, physically, and morally superior to the Martians. Over the course of the first three books, he remakes their social, political, and religious structures.

Carter succeeds despite his foes possessing vastly superior and unfamiliar technology. Burroughs fills Barsoom with the seemingly impossible. Battleships fly through the air, rifles shoot bolts of energy, and cities walk across the desert and possess shields to protect from bombing attacks. Thanks to his superior intelligence Carter quickly understands and employs new technologies. It is often a combination of his superior character and advanced technology that allows him to overcome impossible odds. He also frequently relies on instigating rebellions from oppressed populations to win the day.

The tactics and strategies employed by Carter helped to create the creative space Reagan used when thinking about policy. In *Role of a Lifetime*, Lou Cannon notes that the president’s love of science fiction exhibited a clear influence on his policy decisions. Reagan resisted fiscal arguments to cut NASA’s budget “because spaceflight appealed to his own imagination.”<sup>116</sup> Writing in response to a letter criticizing the agency’s funding

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<sup>115</sup> Porges, 70.

<sup>116</sup> Cannon, 214.

Reagan argued, “Man’s great yearning to explore the great unknown should not be curbed because he can’t tell in detail what he hopes to find.”<sup>117</sup> The president imagined a universe full of mysteries to explore, an image strongly influenced by his love of the genre.

Science fiction also influenced some discussions during his first summit meeting with Gorbachev at Geneva in 1985. At dinner on the first night, Reagan spoke Gorbachev and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze about what the nations would do if aliens appeared poised to invade and destroy life on Earth. Reagan expressed confidence that the “knowledge would unite all the peoples of the world,” something to which his Soviet counterparts readily assented to.<sup>118</sup>

His imagination and ability to view problems in an unconventional manner proved to be one of the greatest assets of his presidency. John Carter and his adventures on Barsoom primed the pump for how Reagan approached problems of strategy and war. The self-proclaimed “sucker for hero worship” learned from his boyhood idol. Just as a generation of scientists and writers used Burroughs to shape their craft, Reagan allowed the books to influence his approach to politics and strategy. The stories appealed to Reagan at the time because they allowed him to escape Illinois and imagine himself as a heroic figure. They also offered Reagan the first evidence of what the union of individual freedom and technology could accomplish. Carter’s devotion to liberty allows him to

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<sup>117</sup> Reagan to Cyndi Davis, undated circa early 1970s, in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 679.

<sup>118</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation Reagan-Gorbachev Meetings in Geneva Dinner Hosted by the Gorbachevs,” November 19, 1985, *To the Geneva Summit: Perestroika and the Transformation of U.S.-Soviet Relations National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 172*, November 2005.

build powerful alliances among formerly subjugated people. The newly-freed often display creativity and ingenuity, which paired with the advanced technology of Barsoom allow Carter to bring down oppressive empires and remake Martian society on American values.

Reagan viewed the Cold War in similar terms. He expected the US to prevail because of its free society and advanced technology. Speaking to graduating cadets at the Air Force Academy, he argued that “technology plus freedom equals opportunity and progress.”<sup>119</sup> The new officers were limited only by their “own courage and imagination,” and Reagan believed that as a society Americans had both in ample supply.<sup>120</sup> In *The Impossible Presidency*, historian Jeremi Suri argues that one of the strengths of Reagan was that he “married traditional values of self-sufficiency and individual freedom with modern technologies of science and war.”<sup>121</sup> This led to an executive focus on vision and creativity rather than bureaucratic detail and served Reagan particularly well in his approach to the Soviet Union. While Edgar Rice Burroughs’ tales of a Virginian on Mars were not the sole reason for this approach, they did mark the beginning of how Reagan thought about societal virtue and potential.

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<sup>119</sup> “Address at Commencement Exercises at the United States Air Force Academy.” Colorado Springs, Colorado, 30 May 1984.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America’s Highest Office*, (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 240.

## Fictional Faith

Other books from Reagan's childhood exerted a lifelong influence on the president. The most prominent was Harold Bell Wright's 1903 book *That Printer of Udell's*. Around the same time that Reagan found his escape on Barsoom, his mother gave him Wright's book to read. Writing in 1984 to Wright's daughter-in-law, the president noted that it "had an impact [he] would always remember."<sup>122</sup> He found a "role model" in Dick Falkner and through him embraced religion.<sup>123</sup> Shortly after reading the book, Reagan told his mother he wanted to "declare [his] faith and be baptized," and forsook his father's Catholicism to join his mother's church, the Disciples of Christ.<sup>124</sup> As evidenced by the embrace of Christianity, the books of Wright "played a definite part" in how Reagan grew into an adult.<sup>125</sup>

Reagan and his mother were among the many who read Wright's work and found their faith deepened. The itinerant preacher was the first American to write a novel that sold over a million copies.<sup>126</sup> Though largely forgotten, Wright was among the most popular writers in the US during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The son of a Civil War veteran who married above his station, Wright emerged from a broken home. His father was an alcoholic and his mother died of disease when Wright was eleven.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ronald Reagan to Jean B. Wright, March 13, 1984, in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 6

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Lawrence Tagg, *Harold Bell Wright: Storyteller to America*, (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1986), 7.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Following his mother's death, Wright lived with a series of friends and relations and worked odd jobs. Appalled at the abuse he faced and the exploitation of his labor, Wright sought an escape. Eventually, he found himself working in a printing shop, when after performing pro-bono work for a church event he decided to pursue a career in the ministry.<sup>128</sup>

Arriving in Pittsburg, Kansas, as the pastor of the town's church, Wright found himself unsatisfied with the effectiveness of his sermons. Seeking to make his words more relevant to his parishioners, Wright began embracing about how to apply Christian tenants to everyday life. As part of this shift, he began work on a series of sermons in the form of a fictional story. Wright submitted the thinly masked autobiography for serial publication in *The Christian Century* but, unsatisfied with the edits made in the published version, sought to publish it as a book as well. The Book Supply Company of Chicago purchased the rights, restored Wright's original version, and published the sermons under the title *That Printer of Udell's*.<sup>129</sup>

Dick Falkner, the protagonist of *Udell's*, is the fictional avatar of Wright. The book opens with a scene that mirrors the preacher's experience. Dying of consumption, his mother beseeches "God, take ker' o Dick."<sup>130</sup> Expiring mid-prayer, Dick mourns briefly in the cabin with his mother's body, as his drunken father lay passed out across the room. Noting to his dog that the father could not "hurt maw anymore" and believing

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>130</sup> Harold Bell Wright, *That Printer of Udell's* (Chicago: Book Supply Company, 1903), 11.

he and his pet could “rustle fer ourselves,” Dick leaves his home and sets off on his own.<sup>131</sup>

The narrative then advances sixteen years to reveal a bitter young man seeking out his father. Conversing with a transient who knew his father, Dick quickly becomes violent when the other man insults his mother’s memory. He threatens to kill the transient with his “bare hands” if he ever dared take Dick’s “mother’s name in [his] foul mouth again.”<sup>132</sup> The transient cowers and reveals that Dick’s father is now dead as well, causing Dick to reflect on the previous decade and a half and the hard life he led. Dick thinks of all the times, “inspired by his mother,” he nearly broke free from evil only to be “dragged back by the training and memory of his father.”<sup>133</sup> The death of his father frees him from the path of his history, and Dick resolves to lead a different life.

Reagan readily identified with the opening chapter of *That Printer of Udell’s*. Reading the book at the same age as Dick is when the novel opens, Reagan found many commonalities in the family situations. The key difference between the two was that Nelle Reagan still lived, though his mother’s narrow escape from the Spanish Flu likely remained a vivid memory for the young boy.<sup>134</sup> Wright, like Burroughs, presents maternal love as a redemptive, essential power. However, unlike Sola and Cathoris, Dick does not receive the full benefit. As a result, he becomes morally and spiritually lost, and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>134</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me*, 13

in need of redemption. As a result of the obvious parallels to Reagan's own life, Dick's path to salvation became a narrative that the future president could imagine himself following, causing it to become a model for the boy as he thought about what he would become as an adult.

Dick arrives in the town of Boyd and first seeks work from churchgoers. Attending a mass featuring a sermon about the need to help the poorest of the community, he expects the parishioners to assist. However, they offer sympathetic statements about his situation rather than work or shelter.<sup>135</sup> It is George Udell, a printer who "ain't much of a church man," that provides Dick with employment and a path to salvation.<sup>136</sup> Many in the town regard Udell as an "infidel" as he did not join the church and often denounced the sermons.<sup>137</sup> However, it is the "practical working of Christianity" that Udell employs that saves Dick.<sup>138</sup> Under Udell's patient guidance, Dick slowly integrates into the community and becomes a leader in a church youth group that seeks to do charitable work throughout the town. Over time, he becomes a respected leader in the community, and begins to court Amy, the daughter of a wealthy merchant in the town.

Amy's father rejects Dick, prompting Amy to run away to Cleveland. Unable to make her own way, she eventually finds herself in a brothel. Dick, after a long search,

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<sup>135</sup> *That Printer of Udell's*, 32.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 36

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 44.



finds her there and seeks to bring her home. He convinces the reluctant Amy by telling her that “we have each fallen,” but they could be “forgiven and accepted” by their future actions.<sup>139</sup> They return together and confront her father, who despite being a regular attendee at church, still cares more about “his pride” than “his daughter’s salvation from a life of sin.”<sup>140</sup> Due to this he threatens to disown Amy for seeking to marry a man who “came to this town as a common tramp,” but Dick is eventually able to force acceptance of their marriage.<sup>141</sup> The novel ends with Dick and Amy happily married and setting off to Washington DC, where Dick will serve as a member of Congress. Before, departing for the capitol, the couple return to the site of Dick’s childhood and visit the graves of his parents, completing Dick’s reconciliation with his past.<sup>142</sup>

The book exerted influence on Reagan because of his ability to imagine himself as the protagonist of Wright’s narrative. The echo between the book and Reagan’s life concerns Reagan’s religious views. Reagan credits the book with making him a “practical Christian.”<sup>143</sup> Shortly after reading it, he joined the Disciples of Christ, the same denomination that Dick joins and in which Wright ministered.<sup>144</sup> Dick’s redemption and success is part of how reading gave the president “an abiding belief in the triumph of good over evil.”<sup>145</sup> More important, the book showed Reagan how good

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid 315

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 318.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 319.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>143</sup> Morris, 40.

<sup>144</sup> Reagan to Wright, 6

<sup>145</sup> Griswold, “I’m a Sucker for Hero Worship.”

would triumph over evil. Victory required action. Townspeople like Amy's father who went to Church but did not engage in Wright's version of practical Christianity, were no better than the drunks, con men, and murderers of Dick's youth.

The belief that virtue alone would not ensure triumph over evil is a message Reagan repeated throughout his political career. While advocating for Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election, Reagan gave a speech that launched his political career. Entitled "A Time for Choosing," but known more commonly amongst his inner circle as "The Speech," Reagan laid out two options for the US in the Cold War. Using apocalyptic language, he argued that "well-meaning liberal" politicians employed a "policy of accommodation" that sought a "peace at any price" which would ensure the US fell into "a thousand years of darkness."<sup>146</sup> He then rhetorically asks if Moses should have told the Israelites to endure slavery or if Christ should have refused the cross, before calling on his fellow Americans to take action and make their "rendezvous with destiny."<sup>147</sup>

Reagan employs similar language in his 1983 address to the National Association of Evangelicals, in which he famously termed the Soviet Union and "Evil Empire." Referencing C.S. Lewis' "unforgettable Screwtape Letters," he noted that evil does not triumph because of "sordid dens of crime," but rather by "quiet men in white collars" who speak in "soothing tones of brotherhood."<sup>148</sup> He urged the evangelicals to "beware

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<sup>146</sup> Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing," televised speech, October 27, 1964.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Address to the National Association of Evangelicals," March, 8 1983.

the temptation of pride,” the same deadly sin that doomed Amy’s father in *That Printer from Udell’s*, and “blithely declare [themselves] above it all.”<sup>149</sup> Instead, those assembled needed to “speak out against those who would place the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority.”<sup>150</sup> It would take concerted action for good to triumph over evil.

Religion was a driving force in how Reagan viewed the Cold War and shaped the strategy his administration implemented. The spark for his faith did not come while listening to a minister from the pews of a church. Rather, it came from Reagan imagining himself in place of Dick Falkner. While there would be other works to shape Reagan’s religious views, *Witness* by Whitaker Chambers is particularly prominent; *That Printer of Udell’s* started Reagan’s religious awakening and, combined with the other books he read as a boy, provided an immersive and creative space through which Reagan viewed the world.

Historian John Patrick Diggins described Reagan’s religious beliefs as “baffling,” as in his view Reagan seemed to “offer a Christianity without Christ and the crucifixion.”<sup>151</sup> Diggins goes further, arguing that Reagan’s religion was “without reference to sin, evil, suffering, or sacrifice.”<sup>152</sup> While Reagan’s religious beliefs were unconventional, he rarely went to church and was not prone to proselytizing, notions of

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate Freedom, and the Making of History*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 14.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

evil and sacrifice were essential to his faith. His optimism led him to believe in the general goodness of humanity, making anything that threatened or suppressed individual liberty a prime sin and evil. This notion underpinned his hatred of communism and of nuclear weapons. Throughout his public career he would denounce both in strong language and frequently invoke religious justification for his opposition.

Wright's novel provided a foundation for this belief. Dick and Amy are only able to achieve happiness when provided the opportunity to live free of oppression. Dick became a leader in the community after rejecting the inaction of the town's church and choosing to engage in direct acts of charity. Amy is freed only after Dick helps her confront her hypocritical and controlling father. Once free, both achieve their full potential as people and Christians. Reagan believed the book made him a "practical Christian," because it focused his faith on taking moral actions, rather than prayer and reflection. His reference to Lewis' "quiet men in in white collars" speaking "soothing tones of brotherhood" is further evidence of this approach.<sup>153</sup> Reagan's religious belief rested on the need to both identify oppression and take action against it. At its best, this religious belief led him to reestablish the moral high ground of the US in Cold War and inspire oppressed people in Eastern Europe. At its worse, it led him to favor action over understanding and support morally repugnant regimes and groups in the name of resistance to his prime evil.

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<sup>153</sup> Address to the National Association of Evangelicals

## Learning to Tell the Story

Personalized narratives did not only give Reagan the means to interpret the world and imagine policy, but they also provided him a powerful tool to communicate his ideas. He believed that stories created a personal connection with his audience that would be otherwise impossible to achieve.<sup>154</sup> Reagan's belief stemmed from both his own experience with books and from his professional life. Every professional experience from the time he graduated Eureka College in 1932 until he became the governor of California in 1967 reinforced Reagan's faith in the power of a well-told story.

Soon after his graduation, Reagan sought work as a broadcaster at WOC radio in Davenport, Iowa. He embellished his experiences playing football at Eureka, implying to the station manager that he was a consistent starter, and earned an invitation to audition as a play-by-play announcer on the spot.<sup>155</sup> Receiving instructions from the station manager to "tell us about a game and make [him] see it," Reagan entered the studio.<sup>156</sup> Realizing that he had a limited opportunity to make a strong impression, he decided to create a "dream game" with the "kind of climax" that would "permit a little excitement to creep in."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Jack Matlock, interview by author, tape recording, Austin, Texas, September 23, 2014.

<sup>155</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 49.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

He used a game from the previous season between Eureka College and Western State University as the inspiration for his audition and began his broadcast with the game entering the fourth quarter. Describing “a chill wind” blowing through the stadium, Reagan spun a story of a tightly contested game with two teams separated by a touchdown.<sup>158</sup> He then set up his alma mater for a dramatic “college-try finish” as time expired.<sup>159</sup> The play succeeds, and Eureka College leaves the field triumphant. Reagan did embellish one portion of the play from the real game. He chose to have himself level a linebacker “with a block that could be felt in the press box,” rather than mention that in reality he had missed it jeopardizing the play’s success.<sup>160</sup>

Duly impressed by Reagan’s flair for the dramatic, the station manager offered him an assignment the next week covering a game for the University of Iowa. He also promised Reagan that if he did well, then the station would assign him the remaining three games of the season. Reagan began that first broadcast seeking to “be hopefully adequate.”<sup>161</sup> Over the first quarter of the game, he “played it straight,” avoiding any dramatic flourishes and only relaying the simple facts of the game.<sup>162</sup> Trading off with another broadcaster for the second quarter, he realized the need to ad-lib and tell a story. Changing his approach as the second half began, Reagan threw himself into the broadcast telling a compelling narrative that led the station manager to write a note telling him to

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

call the remainder of the game.<sup>163</sup> After the game ended, Reagan received the job and a pay raise.

In shifting his broadcasting and winning the job, Reagan realized several important things about how to tell a story on radio. It “was the theater of the mind,” which meant that at times it was necessary to take dramatic liberties to hold the audience’s attention.<sup>164</sup> He needed to make the audience “see the game through his eyes,” which by necessity would include the inclusion of personal interpretations and feelings.<sup>165</sup> The result is that audience members would feel like they were at the game, they would see it, though differently than people in the stands. Reagan also sought to fill his broadcasts with outside stories and anecdotes cribbed from the Chicago sports pages.<sup>166</sup> These would add extra color and make the broadcasts a more immersive experience for his audience by creating the illusion that they were insiders and a part of the team. The inclusive nature of the broadcast and the ability of the audience to place themselves in the narrative ensured they would return to listen again the next week.

Reagan still had a difficult lesson to learn about broadcasting. Shortly after the football season ended, he received an offer to be a station announcer. The job consisted largely of playing records and reading advertisements on the air. This proved challenging for Reagan, as he found himself unable to make his “reading sound like talking.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Morris, 112.

<sup>165</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me?*, 51.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 56.

Unable to achieve the tone needed to make “the easy conversational persuasive sell,” Reagan soon found his career as a broadcaster in jeopardy.<sup>168</sup> The stilted delivery broke the immersion of the radio listener, shattering the illusion of intimacy and friendship between broadcaster and audience. Reagan improved his approach, demonstrating a remarkable ability to include a sales pitch into a broader narrative. Soon after, he received a promotion and moved to WHO and the larger market of Des Moines, Iowa.

Reagan’s primary duty while working for WHO was as their primary sports broadcaster. From 1933-1936 he called play-by-play for Chicago Cubs home games. He did not call the games live from Wrigley but rather from the studio in Des Moines. The only knowledge of the game Reagan would receive came in from a telegraph feed. The telegraph operator would pass three letter codes to Reagan, which he would have to turn into a compelling radio experience. Simply translating the code “SC1” to “curve ball strike one,” would not create the immersive broadcast required to maintain an audience in the face of competing stations that also called the games.<sup>169</sup> Instead, Reagan had to imagine a plausible way to expand on the simple code and relay it to his audience. A Cubs fan listening to “Dutch” Reagan on WHO would be able to recreate a box score from the broadcast but would have a completely different understanding of the action on the field from someone who attended the game at Wrigley Field.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> “Cubs-Pirates,” WGN, September 30, 1988.



One example of this disconnect comes from one of Reagan's favorite stories from his broadcasting days. In his autobiography, *Where's the Rest of Me?*, he writes about being in the middle of a broadcast when the telegraph feed failed.<sup>170</sup> He also tells a similar story in a 1985 letter to Buzzy Sisco.<sup>171</sup> Reagan, knowing that if he stopped calling the game he would lose his audience, tells his listeners that the batter kept hitting foul balls for over six minutes.<sup>172</sup> In order to maintain their interest, he colored his descriptions. One foul ball was nearly a homerun, another landed in the stands and Reagan "described in detail the redheaded kid who had scrambled" for it.<sup>173</sup> When the feed from Wrigley returned, Reagan learned the batter had hit a fly ball for an out on the first pitch.<sup>174</sup>

In the letter to Sisco, he recalls the game was a scoreless tie going into the ninth inning.<sup>175</sup> This is inaccurate, as there is no instance of the Cubs and Cardinals entering the final frame scoreless between 1933 and 1936.<sup>176</sup> However, the version of the story in Reagan's autobiography holds up. He describes a tie-game in the ninth with Cardinals pitcher Dizzy Dean facing Cubs outfielder Auggie Galan.<sup>177</sup> Galan did lead off the ninth

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<sup>170</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 64

<sup>171</sup> Reagan to Buzzy Sisco, 24 December 1985 in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 33.

<sup>172</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 64.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Reagan to Sisco

<sup>176</sup> This information comes from looking through box scores of every game between the Cubs and Cardinals in the years Reagan was the play-by-play man for WHO. The information is available at [baseball-reference.com](http://baseball-reference.com)

<sup>177</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 66

inning against Dean on April 24, 1935, in a tie game. On the first pitch, he flew out to left field just as Reagan recalled.<sup>178</sup>

It is unusual that this game was the one Reagan spoke about most often. He used it in his autobiography, while answering letters as president, and even recounted it to Harry Carrey during a 1988 Cubs-Pirates game.<sup>179</sup> The game in question took place in the beginning of April and was unimportant. Numerous games from that season were more significant and dramatic. In 1935, the Cubs set a record by winning twenty-one consecutive games in September to overtake the Cardinals in the standings and win the National League pennant.<sup>180</sup> They would then play in the World Series, losing to the Detroit Tigers in six games.

The April game against the Cardinals stands out in Reagan's memory because it was the one that most affected him personally. There were games that were more important that year for the Cubs and their fans, but Reagan did not experience them personally. If he did his broadcasts directly from Wrigley, it is likely he would favor a different game, as he would be a direct part of the narrative. Instead, he broadcast from Des Moines and the moment of greatest tension and drama in 1935 was when he needed to buy time by creating a plausible story of action in the game. Reagan learned best when personally impacted by events. This experience as a broadcaster also taught him how to create compelling stories and that everything in a story needed to serve a higher truth. In

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<sup>178</sup> <http://www.baseball-reference.com/boxes/SLN/SLN193504240.shtml>

<sup>179</sup> "Cubs-Pirates," WGN, September 30, 1988.

<sup>180</sup> James Clarity and Warren Weaver, "Briefing; Reagan at the Bat" *The New York Times*, October 2, 1984

the case of Cubs games, the higher truth was the result of the play and the game, everything else had to make the result as memorable as possible. Reagan would use these lessons to hone his approach and its influence on how he communicated with the American people as president is evident.

Pursuit of compelling stories led directly to Reagan's career as an actor. Following the 1935 season, Reagan approached his station manager about giving up his vacation time if the studio would pay his way to accompany the Cubs to spring training in Catalina, California.<sup>181</sup> He argued that doing so would improve the "color and atmosphere" of broadcasts during the next season.<sup>182</sup> The experience in Catalina proved valuable, as Reagan cultivated personal relationships with Cubs manager Charles Grimm and many of the players. While at spring training, Reagan sent back letters to for WHO to read on air that detailed off the field actions of players. Learning about how a "smart-bottomed young reporter" was on the receiving end of a "one-punch fight" made fans feel more connected to the team, and the stories helped Reagan expand his audience.<sup>183</sup>

The success of Reagan's trip in 1936 led the station to dispatch him to California again the next year. This time, Reagan had an ulterior motive, to become an actor. Using connections he made with singers as a WHO broadcaster, Reagan met with an agent and, just as he did at WOC, exaggerated his credentials. He told the agent that the acting club he was a part of was actually a professional company, which naturally featured Reagan as

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<sup>181</sup> *Where's The Rest of Me* 69

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Reagan to Paul Loyet, circa September 1968. *Reagan: A Life in Letters*.

its lead.<sup>184</sup> The agent was also not adverse to the use of “little white lies” and further built on Reagan’s potential to land a screen test with Warner Brothers.<sup>185</sup> The gambits paid off, and soon after his return from California, Reagan received his first movie contract, which paid him two hundred dollars per week. The merging of reality and fiction, and the pursuit of stories helped Reagan achieve his life’s ambition, reinforcing a sense that the message, and not the content, is all that matters.

Acting in movies and living in Hollywood did little to dissuade Reagan from this belief, and likely served to increase his faith in the power of a well-told story. Although his career peaked with the 1942 Oscar-nominated movie *Kings Row*, he spent nearly two decades in an industry that immersed him in narrative creation. He also saw firsthand the way these narratives could influence the public as a whole during World War II. Serving with the First Motion Picture Unit in Hollywood, Reagan made training films and propaganda throughout the war. In his autobiography, he recalls with pride the role the unit played in reducing training times and contributing to the war effort.<sup>186</sup> He also argues that the soldiers in his unit “understood better than a civilian” what war was like, as they edited the “millions of feet of raw” combat footage to avoid presenting disturbing images to the public.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me?*, 72.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*.

Reagan saw that images of fighter planes “in flames” with “the pilot vainly trying to get out of cockpit” could not receive a wide viewership.<sup>188</sup> The violent, disturbing, reality of war could undermine popular support for the nation’s efforts. Instead, the war effort demanded that the unit produce a triumphalist narrative of the war that, while not bloodless, did nothing to shock American sensibilities. Reagan also starred in *This is the Army*, a sequel to Irving Berlin’s World War I musical *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*. Featuring Kate Smith’s iconic performance of “God Bless America,” the entire effort was to raise funds for Army Emergency Relief and build popular support for the war. Reagan believed strongly in the benefit of the work he and his unit did during the war, and believed that no similar unit “has ever been so successful in fulfilling its mission.”<sup>189</sup> However, he would come to regret at least one part of his unit’s success.

Hollywood’s role in building public support for World War II included presenting a more acceptable face of the Soviet Union to the public. The entry of the Soviet Union into an alliance with the United States and Britain was an abrupt shift, born of existential necessity, from a quarter century of mutual suspicion and antagonism. Convincing Americans that Joseph Stalin and Russians were now “friends,” as propaganda posters throughout the country claimed, was a difficult sell. Reagan played a role in convincing an initially skeptical public.

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

During a 1944 radio broadcast aimed at selling war bonds, Reagan played an infantryman on the frontlines. He encounters Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, who assures him that the “final surrender” of Germany and Japan will be “complete and unconditional.”<sup>190</sup> Reagan initially seems unsure of the Secretary’s assurance but is assuaged when Morgenthau informs him that he would find the “answer in Russia” and that the Soviet Union would provide the “final assurance of the future of free men.”<sup>191</sup> The broadcast served to reassure Americans that their Soviet allies were acting in the name of justice and freedom in the Eastern Front. Morgenthau credits the Russians with “removing some of the worst stains from the face of the earth.”<sup>192</sup> By “stringing the ringleaders of hate up,” the Red Army proved itself as a righteous force, acting in the greater good.<sup>193</sup>

Morgenthau intentionally provided an overly positive appraisal of Soviet actions and intentions. The reality of Russian behavior saw the wholesale slaughter of not only the “ringleaders of hate,” but also the deliberate killing of millions of innocents throughout Eastern Europe.<sup>194</sup> The Roosevelt administration was loosely aware of the mass war crimes of their Soviet ally, but drawing attention to the crimes would make Stalin a less palatable partner in the eyes of Americans.<sup>195</sup> Winning the war was more

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<sup>190</sup> Kiron Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, (New York: Free Press, 2003), 132.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 411.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

important than holding the Soviets accountable, an arguably impossible task, and as a result, the administration consciously chose to push the fictional narrative of the Red Army as a righteous and moral force. Radio programs like those that Reagan acted in played a large part of this propaganda, and Morgenthau would even write the actor telling him that his show was the “most effective program of its kind since the beginning of the war.”<sup>196</sup>

Hollywood did more than paint the actions of the Red Army in a favorable light during World War II; it also sought to portray Soviet system more positively. Reagan was not directly involved in these projects. However, his studio and boss, Warner Brothers and Jack L. Warner, were involved, giving Reagan a unique insight and familiarity with the process. Warner Brothers produced the movie *Mission to Moscow*, based on Roosevelt confidant Joseph Davies’ experience as the US ambassador to the Soviet Union during the purges. The resulting movie portrayed Stalin and the Soviet Union so favorably that it would earn the nickname *Submission to Moscow*, and Davies personally presented a copy of the film to Stalin, who approved it for distribution throughout the Soviet Union.<sup>197</sup>

There is no indication that Reagan objected to his or Hollywood’s role at the time. However, he later noted how *Mission to Moscow* and films like it hurt the U.S. over the long term. He likened the movie to “agitprop” and lamented that someone “in the story

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<sup>196</sup> *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 132.

<sup>197</sup> Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 127-28.

department approved a script... without lookin' too closely at what was written between the lines."<sup>198</sup> Speaking with Jack Matlock and other advisors, Reagan argued that the soft-focus of the Soviets provided by Hollywood during World War II created a deep reluctance on the part of political leaders to speak frankly about the Soviet Union for fear of souring Americans on the notion of working cooperatively with them.<sup>199</sup> *Mission to Moscow* was on Reagan's mind as he prepared to meet Gorbachev for the first time at Geneva in 1985. Just prior to departing, he spent much of his interview with Edmund Morris, his official biographer, discussing the biography. Morris took the anecdote as a sign of Reagan's disinterest in a testy exchange between Gorbachev and Shultz earlier in the day. While this may be true, it is likely that given the context of how Reagan viewed the movie, his anecdote spoke to his intention to maintain a firmer line with the Soviets and continue to speak frankly about his views on the Cold War.

Reagan's World War II experience in Hollywood reinforced his beliefs in the importance of prioritizing message over fact, and the ability of popular culture to have a lasting influence on the population. It also showed the difficulty in overcoming the prevailing narratives. Reagan saw both the monumental combined effort of the government and Hollywood to create "Uncle Joe," and how long that construct lasted despite overwhelming evidence of its inaccuracy. Fiction again overrode reality.

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<sup>198</sup> Morris, 542-43.

<sup>199</sup> Jack Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*, (New York: Random House, 2005), 6.



Following the war, Reagan would undergo a gradual political transformation. Over a nearly twenty-year period, he would transition from identifying as a New-Deal Democrat to a Goldwater Republican. The two are remarkably apart on the political spectrum, making the shift an unusual one. Although Reagan often noted he did not “leave the Democratic Party, the party left me,” this is not the case. His political beliefs changed dramatically during the late-1940s and 1950s, and once again, personal experience and fictional narratives proved a decisive factor.

However, despite the shifting political allegiances, Reagan’s focus on the individual would not change. The “hero-worship” of characters like John Carter and the emphasis on individual action taken from *That Printer of Udell’s* continued to inform how Reagan looked at the broader world. As Reagan’s politics changed, he still sought out narratives that embraced these familiar themes. Fiction like the westerns of Louis L’Amour, the military stories of James Michener, and the anti-communism of Arthur Koestler paired with the real-life spy stories of Whitaker Chambers and Reagan’s own experiences with communists in Hollywood to solidify how Reagan viewed the world and the role of the United States in it.

## **Chapter 2 Friendly Witness: Politics, Belief, and Narratives**

While receiving the Patriot Award at the annual Medal of Honor Society Convention in December of 1983, Reagan sought to combat the idea that the United States and Soviet Union were morally equivalent. Addressing a crowd of 650, including several recipients of the nation's highest honor, he reflected on how awards like the Medal of Honor reveal national values.<sup>200</sup> Reagan believed this because the awards recognized individual actions and demonstrated the type of person each nation valued. In his view, the criteria for decorations spoke to the “great difference” between the Cold War rivals. They revealed that the US was “morally strong with a creed and vision” and the USSR was not.<sup>201</sup>

Reagan recalled a news article from the mid-1960s about a Spaniard who received recognition as a Hero of the Soviet Union, the USSR's highest award. He could not see what the recipient had done to merit such an honor. The man was an interpreter who had only been in Moscow for a short period at the time prior to that lived in Cuba for eight uneventful years. Only after reading another article did Reagan learn the cause for the award. The man in question was Ramon Mercader, who assassinated Leon Trotsky in Mexico City. Reagan felt the Soviets giving “their highest honor to a political assassin” indicated a morally insidious society.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> “Daily Diary of President Ronald Reagan,” December 12, 1983 Reagan Library

<sup>201</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society in New York City,” December 12, 1983.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

He contrasted Mercader's story with one of a Medal of Honor recipient from World War II he recalled reading while serving in the army during the Second World War. Reagan told of a doomed B-17 returning to England from a bombing run over the continent. As the plane lost altitude, the crew decided to bail out over the English Channel. The belly-gunner, a young man too badly wounded to escape cried out as the last members prepared to parachute to safety. The pilot heard the gunner's cry and recognizing his fear of dying, chose to sit on the floor next to him saying, "never mind son, we'll ride it down together."<sup>203</sup> Reagan paused a brief moment before adding, "Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously awarded."<sup>204</sup> To the president, that the US would give its highest honor to a "man who would sacrifice his life simply to bring comfort to a boy who had to die" spoke to the exceptional "moral and spiritual character" of the country.<sup>205</sup> It showed the "bedrock of [American] strength" that a nation with assassins for heroes could not match.<sup>206</sup>

The contrast between award recipients dramatically and effectively made Reagan's point. The only problem with the story was the B-17 of his account never existed. No pilot earned a Medal of Honor during World War II for bringing comfort to a dying boy.<sup>207</sup> According to biographer Lou Cannon, it is likely Reagan first came across

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> ibid

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> A number of pilots and crewmembers did receive Medals of Honor for refusing to bail out of planes that contained crew members too wounded to bail out. These include Major Horace Carswell, Major Donald Pucket, 1LT Donald Gott, and Sergeant Archibald Mathies. However, in each case the citation notes the pilots attempted to make an emergency landing, implying the intent was to save rather than

the anecdote in an issue of *Reader's Digest*.<sup>208</sup> Despite Reagan's claim in the speech, he discovered the story years after World War II, and knowingly fabricated that detail to personalize his narrative.

That Reagan chose a fictional account when he could make a similar point using the heroics of members of the audience he was addressing seems odd but was in keeping with Reagan's character. It reinforces the idea that Reagan cared less about the factual accuracy of his stories than the larger message. It also demonstrates his preference for familiar tales. Once Reagan found an appealing story, it became a touchstone for him. He would remember it and retell the story to emphasize a larger point. The account of the doomed B-17 was an example of this. Reagan's bomber spoke to the values he viewed as most important. The pilot of his story did not earn recognition for completing his mission and killing enemy soldiers, rather he earned it sacrificing himself to comfort another. His pilot freely chose to die to comfort another, placing his friend above himself. The selfless actions spoke to Reagan's sense that individual freedom would produce bonds and community that could transcend fear and tyranny.

Reagan first read the story as he was becoming more politically active and incorporated it into his early speeches. While addressing the 1952 graduating class of William Woods College, a women's college in Fulton, Missouri, Reagan used the B-17

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comfort. Similarly, there are citations which note pilots giving their parachutes to wounded comrades, including those of 2LT David Kingsley and 2LT William Metzger. In the case of Kingsley, the plane was unrecoverable when he gave his parachute up. Metzger attempted to crash land unsuccessfully.

<sup>208</sup> Lou Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 59.

story in a manner nearly identical to his 1983 address.<sup>209</sup> While some minor details are different, the message Reagan attempts to impart is the same. He believed the imagined crew of the plane represented the best of the United States and embodied the values of the nation. In the commencement address, the future president exhorted the women in his audience to embrace the sort of “momism” needed to raise such men.<sup>210</sup> He told them that by embracing the values shown by the pilot’s sacrifice they would “strike a match” to “help push back the darkness.”<sup>211</sup> He closed with the hope that in doing so they would help more people to realize the U.S. represented “the last best hope of man on earth.”<sup>212</sup>

The rhetoric and imagery of Reagan’s address at William Woods College is strikingly close to that of the speech that launched his political career. In “A Time for Choosing,” his 1964 speech on behalf of the Barry Goldwater campaign, Reagan exhorted his audience to action in order maintain the US as “the last best hope of man on earth,” or risk taking “the last step into a thousand years of darkness.”<sup>213</sup> The casting of the Cold War as a Manichean struggle of light and darkness defined Reagan’s public comments about the conflict. Reagan consistently framed the Cold War in this manner from the 1950s through the end of his presidency, reflecting the importance and the scale of the conflict in his mind and the special place for the United States in the world.

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<sup>209</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Commencement Address at William Woods College” in *Echoes From the Woods* June 1952. Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” Televised Speech, 27 October 1964.

Reagan's rhetoric drew heavily upon the work of his personal hero among the founding fathers, Thomas Paine.<sup>214</sup> Intellectual historian John Patrick Diggins argues in *Ronald Reagan: Fate Freedom and the Making of History* that reading Paine strongly influenced the future president's conception of freedom and liberty.<sup>215</sup> Diggins notes that Reagan "liked to quote Paine to prove that the government had become alienated from the people," even though Paine was referring to a monarchy rather than a democracy.<sup>216</sup> Reagan believed the purest expression of freedom came at the individual and small community level. Domestically, this underpinned Reagan's conception of how government should work and helped spur his calls to trim the bureaucracy. More tellingly, Reagan also applied Paine's philosophy of the sanctity of individual rights to his foreign policy.

Throughout Reagan's political career he spoke of the United States as "the last best hope of man," using the phrase in his commencement address to William Woods, in "A Time for Choosing," his 1983 Address to the National Association of Evangelicals, better known as the "Evil Empire Speech," and his Second Inaugural Address in 1985.<sup>217</sup> The phrase expanded on one used by Lincoln in his Second Annual Address to Congress in December of 1862. In that speech, Lincoln called for a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery by the turn of the century. Lincoln argued that by "giving freedom to the

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<sup>214</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), xviii.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>217</sup> Woods Commencement, A Time for Choosing, Address to the National Association of Evangelicals, Second Inaugural Address

slave” Congress would “assure freedom to the free.”<sup>218</sup> The decision in front of Congress was to “nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope of earth.”<sup>219</sup>

The phrase used by Reagan and Lincoln channeled the urgency of Tom Paine’s demand from *Common Sense* that Americans “receive the fugitive” freedom and “prepare in time an asylum for mankind.”<sup>220</sup> The powerful imagery of Paine revealed an opportunity for greatness, which Reagan embraced wholeheartedly. He repeatedly quoted Paine, arguing that Americans had it within their “power to begin the world again.”<sup>221</sup> Reagan typically noted that the quote came from the “dark days of the American Revolution, when it didn’t seem possible that the nation would come into being.”<sup>222</sup> He would then explicitly link the Americans of those “dark days” with those he had meet on the campaign trail who were “disturbed but not dismayed” with the present state of the country.<sup>223</sup>

Historian Steven Hayward argues that Reagan’s frequent use of Paine’s thought was evidence of his “idiosyncratic and unorthodox” conservatism.<sup>224</sup> Diggins agrees, believing that Reagan loved the “blasphemous rebel” because “Paine saw freedom as the birth of the new and the death of the old.”<sup>225</sup> Reading Paine encouraged Reagan to

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<sup>218</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “Annual Address to Congress,” Washington D.C, 1 February 1862

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Thomas Paine *Common Sense* 1776.

<sup>221</sup> Reagan to Otis Carney, November 1979

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address Accepting the Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit,” Detroit, Michigan, 17 July 1980.

<sup>224</sup> Steven Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution, 1980-1989*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>225</sup> Diggins, xviii-xix

believe in “hope, experiment, and freedom,” rather than the “history, precedent, and order” of traditional conservatives.<sup>226</sup> This is largely accurate. Throughout his presidency Reagan expressed optimism in the boundless creativity of a free people to overcome any challenge. If unencumbered, he felt the ingenuity and ideology of Americans would usher in a golden age. Only the Soviet Union and its totalitarian ideology threatened his vision.

Reagan’s embrace of the language of the Revolution and Civil War demonstrate the vast significance he placed on the Cold War. In the President’s view, the conflict represented nothing less than an existential struggle, the outcome of which would determine the future of American ideology and freedom as Reagan defined it. He arrived at this belief because of the convergence of his post-war experiences and personal reading. During the late 1940s and 50s, Reagan encountered communists in his professional life in Hollywood and in his personal life on the pages of books by Arthur Koestler and Whitaker Chambers. The similarities in his own experiences and the synthetic ones of the books left him with no doubt that “there could be no security anywhere in the free world” unless the United States was willing to refuse a deal with the “slave masters” in Moscow and resist the temptations of appeasement and accommodation.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>227</sup> Reagan, *Where’s the Rest of Me*, 311.



## First Battles

Reagan came to view Communism and the Soviet Union as an existential threat in the earliest years of the Cold War. While in the Army during World War II, he viewed Stalin and the Soviets as crucial allies. Reagan actively participated in government efforts to turn the ruthless dictator into “Uncle Joe.” He appeared with Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau in a 1944 bond drive entitled *Let’s All Back the Attack*.<sup>228</sup> In the radio spot, Reagan, playing a soldier, asks the Secretary about what is going to “happen to the apes that started this thing.” Morgenthau responds that Reagan would find his “answer in Russia” which was “removing some of the worst stains from the face of the earth.”<sup>229</sup> The Treasury Secretary’s argument that Soviet actions were the “final assurance of the future of free men” is darkly ironic given the atrocities of the Red Army as it moved west and stands in stark contrast to Reagan’s future assertions of Soviet “slave masters” leaving the US as “the last best hope of man on Earth.”<sup>230</sup>

However, Reagan viewed his activity as a success at the time. Morgenthau wrote to him personally in the week after the program in thanks, stating that show “was the most effective program of this kind since the beginning of the war.”<sup>231</sup> Although Reagan would “remember well” the bond drive in later years, he came to deeply regret his, and

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<sup>228</sup> *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 132

<sup>229</sup> *ibid*

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*, *Where’s the Rest of Me* 311, “Address Accepting the Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit” Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands: Europe Between Stalin and Hitler* provide excellent context about the mass-rapes and killings committed by the Red Army as it moved west.

<sup>231</sup> *A Life in Letters*, 132.

Hollywood's, role in softening the public image of the Soviets.<sup>232</sup> This touchstone moment showed him the power of popular culture to influence public opinion.<sup>233</sup> It further convinced Reagan of the ability of fiction to contribute to policy.

It was his experience in Hollywood immediately after the war that brought about this revelation and shift in his geopolitical views. Writing to his counselor, Fred Fielding, in 1985, Reagan stated his experiences during the 1947 Hollywood strike “opened [his] eyes” to the true nature of communism.<sup>234</sup> He encountered communists in two ways during this period. The first was through his work in the Screen Actors Guild, which he became president of in 1947, holding the position for over ten years and six terms in office.<sup>235</sup> Reagan's SAG presidency came during a tumultuous period for Hollywood. Divisions between labor and management, and intra-union competition led to a series of strikes from 1945-1948 touching on nearly every aspect of film production and mirroring the significant labor unrest of the post-war period.<sup>236</sup>

Two unions, the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU) and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (ISATE), became embroiled over an arbitrator's decision to award jurisdiction of site erection to ISATE.<sup>237</sup> *Time* characterized the strike as “like an old-fashioned serial.”<sup>238</sup> It noted that CSU leader Herb Sorrell's “politics

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<sup>232</sup> Reagan to Henry Morgenthau III, 2 February 1982 in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 132.

<sup>233</sup> Jack Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2005), 6.

<sup>234</sup> Reagan to Fred F. Fielding, 4 March 1985, in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 133.

<sup>235</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 176.

<sup>236</sup> Brands, 72.

<sup>237</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 149

<sup>238</sup> “Hold Your Hats, Boys,” *Time*, 7 October 1946, Vol 48, Issue 15.

[were] of the far left,” and accusations of communist sympathies swirled around the former prizefighter.<sup>239</sup> Sorrell addressed these directly while testifying before a subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor in 1948, denying all allegations of communist involvement in his Union. Sorrell referred to the charges of communist membership as “phony” and something intended to “tangle [him] up.”<sup>240</sup>

During his testimony, Sorrell did express admiration for those who publically announced that they were Communists and then held to the declaration. This was an unusual and risky statement to make given the anti-Communist fervor embroiling Washington. Sorrell attempted to walk a line in his testimony, affirming that while personally “he had no use for communism,” he also did not understand the utility of seeking to “eliminate the Communist.”<sup>241</sup> He admitted that he was aware of a number of communists in the CSU but insisted that the strike was “not communist inspired nor communist-directed.”<sup>242</sup> However, Sorrell also allowed that the communists in the CSU “come out and whip the whole membership into line” in a manner that was “very efficient,” unintentionally implying an outsized influence of the ideology over the union.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> “Jurisdictional Disputes in the Motion-Picture Industry. Hearings before a special subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, Eightieth Congress, first session” (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1948), 1990.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid. 1973.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 1972.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 1977.

In his testimony, Sorrell admitted, “Communists... helped us substantially with contributions.”<sup>244</sup> This support came from a number of communist-front organizations with links to Sorrell.<sup>245</sup> The CSU also received support from Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the leader of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, who had established ties to Soviet Intelligence agencies.<sup>246</sup> Max Silver, the “organization director” of the Communist Party in Los Angeles testified to the way the party viewed the CSU.<sup>247</sup> According to Silver, the “Communist Party was very much interested in the success” of the CSU, and wanted to make it “a nerve center” that would provide a way for “party policy and party people” to wield influence in Hollywood.<sup>248</sup>

The Screen Actors Guild attempted to mediate the dispute, sending a group of representatives to talk with the labor leaders. As part of the delegation, Reagan found the leadership of both sides intractable but made special note of accusations that Sorrell was working to advance communism.<sup>249</sup> The strike descended into violence. Striking CSU members “scattered tacks in the path of movie star’s automobiles,” “threw coffee in faces” of line-crossers, and “stoned buses of rival A.F.L. workers.”<sup>250</sup> Strikers in front of Warner Brothers Studios made use of “clubs, chains, bottle, bricks, and two by fours” to

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<sup>245</sup> David Saposs, *Communism in American Labor Unions* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1956), 47.

<sup>246</sup> Peter Schweizer, *Reagan’s War: The Epic Story of His Forty-Year Struggle and Final Triumph Over Communism*, (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 9.

<sup>247</sup> *Communism Activities Among Professional Groups in the Los Angeles Area-Part 1, Hearings Before the House Un-American Activities Committee, House of Representatives, Eighty-Second Congress, Second Session*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1952), 2450.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me*, 152

<sup>250</sup> “Hold Your Hats, Boys”

enforce the picket line.<sup>251</sup> Attacks extended beyond the immediate picket line, as CSU strikers vandalized the homes of IATSE members and “ambushed and slugged” workers far from the studio.<sup>252</sup>

The CSU-IATSE dispute exposed an ideological divide in SAG. As Reagan prepared a report on the strike for the next SAG meeting, his friend Bill Holden informed him a group of communists and fellow travelers in the guild were meeting to plan their next moves. The meeting was to take place at the home of actress Ida Lupino, a mutual friend of Holden and Reagan, and the two decided to crash it. Greeted warmly by Lupino, who was not “one of Them,” Reagan found a chillier reception from the meeting’s attendees.<sup>253</sup> He felt compelled to “spike their guns with regard to brainwashing,” by delivering a draft version of his strike report and argue against efforts to support the CSU.<sup>254</sup>

The prominent role Reagan played in working against CSU efforts to gain SAG support made him a target of abuse. After delivering his report, a fellow actor accosted Reagan calling him a “fascist” for refusing to support the strikers.<sup>255</sup> More ominously, anonymous phone calls to the set of *Night unto Night* threatened violence against Reagan. The caller informed Reagan that a group was going to deal with him and ensure he would never be able to act again. Upon returning to the studio, Reagan met with the police who

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<sup>251</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me*, 155.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

provided him with a pistol amid concerns the group would seek to throw acid on the actor's face.<sup>256</sup> The threat of violence had a powerful impact on Reagan, convincing him that communists would use any means to advance their interests.

He also encountered communists through his work with advocacy groups. After World War II, Reagan joined the American Veterans Committee as a part of its board. He liked the group's slogan, "citizens first, veterans second," and "expected great things" of the organization.<sup>257</sup> However, Reagan gradually came to recognize that the group's ideology did not match his own, and he feared it was a communist front. When he included anti-communist rhetoric in one address to the group's membership pledging to "speak out as harshly against communism as [he had] against fascism" the crowd's response chilled him.<sup>258</sup> The audience went from enthusiastic to silent as Reagan denounced communism as a "threat to all the we believe in and stand for," demonstrating how deeply communist sentiments ran in the organization.<sup>259</sup>

Shortly after the chilly reception to his speech, Reagan found more telling proof of "communist infiltration."<sup>260</sup> He identified a radio hall to hold a group meeting for 750 members, but others on the board overrode this and instead booked a hall that could only hold 75. Even though the larger venue was available for free, a majority of the board preferred only having enough room in the hall for "a small, working majority."<sup>261</sup> When

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>257</sup> Brands, 62.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 165

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

Reagan arrived for the meeting, he found hundreds of AVC members “milling about outside, unable to get in.”<sup>262</sup> Inside, 73 members voted for the entire membership to picket a studio in the uniform of their services. Reagan believed this to be “an old communist trick,” giving the illusion of democratic choice to actions that only a small minority desired.<sup>263</sup> Following the incident, he resigned from the AVC, and tried to prevent the employment of similar tactics in SAG.

Reagan’s experience on the board of the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of Arts, Sciences, and Professions (HICCASP) was like that of his time in the AVC. He initially felt “honored” to join the board of a group with “more jewel-like names than a crown tiara,” but these feelings soured at the first meeting he attended.<sup>264</sup> The meeting descended into chaos after Reagan’s friend Jimmy Roosevelt asked the board to release a declaration denouncing communism. In response, a musician offered to recite the constitution of the USSR to show it was more democratic than that of the US. A screen writer went even further and declared he would volunteer for Russia in the event of war between the USSR and US. Dalton Trumbo, one of screenwriters later blacklisted, led the group in denouncing the proposal and heaped scorn on Roosevelt and Reagan.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>265</sup> Reagan to Hugh Hefner, 4 July 1960, in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 148.

Reagan and a small group of board members still sought to craft a resolution for the organization to denounce communism. Presenting a draft at a later meeting, they again ran into vocal dissent. John Howard Lawson, another of the Hollywood Ten, yelled that the group would never endorse a resolution that sought to endorse “free enterprise and repudiate Communism.”<sup>266</sup> Reagan’s group wanted to put the issue to a secret ballot of the group’s membership, rather than leave it up to the board. Lawson responded that the group was not “politically sophisticated enough to make this decision.”<sup>267</sup> Instead, the issue went before the executive committee, a sub-set of the board, which had only one of Reagan’s allies, Olivia de Haviland. The resolution failed, and Reagan’s group resigned that evening.<sup>268</sup>

The resentment Reagan felt over the experience with HICCASP lingered, and he remained vocally opposed to the Hollywood Ten long after the end of McCarthyism. In 1960, *Playboy* published an article by Trumbo that alleged that the blacklist of the Hollywood 10 was a witch-hunt, no different from 17<sup>th</sup> century Salem.<sup>269</sup> Trumbo argued that Americans’ need to hunt witches was “an instinct as deep as the sexual drive, almost as fun, and often safer.”<sup>270</sup> He believed that Hollywood naturally carried everything to extremes and therefore allowed “the sport” to flourish “to the point of obsession.”<sup>271</sup> Casting himself as a victim, Trumbo argued the blacklist was “like a shroud” over

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<sup>266</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me?* 168

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> Dalton Trumbo, “The Oscar Syndrome” *Playboy*, April 1960.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*



Hollywood and revealed a hypocritical, vapid industry that tried to turn its betters into a “good and faithful servant.”<sup>272</sup> However, Trumbo, as one of the betters, knew there was no true integrity in the industry and instead disdained its laurels.

Reagan read the article and disagreed vehemently with Trumbo’s framing of himself and the industry. Still angry over the events of the late-1940s, he exchanged letters with Hugh Hefner to explain why he felt Trumbo’s ouster from Hollywood was not a blacklist, but rather the rational response to the demands of “millions of moviegoers.”<sup>273</sup> Instead of engaging in free speech, Reagan believed Trumbo championed the use of “subversion and stealth” to impose rule “on an unwilling people,” in the same way small groups subverted the will of the AVC and HICCASP.<sup>274</sup> Reagan described Trumbo as a “traitor” who “looked upon the death of American soldiers in Korea as a victory.”<sup>275</sup>

Reagan’s experiences left him convinced that communism was antithetical to freedom, and its adherents would resort to any tactic, including violence, to ensure it prevailed. His personal experience taught him that the ideology would trample individuals while claiming to speak for them. His certainty about the nature of communist tactics solidified as he began to read the work of Arthur Koestler. Reagan met the author at a 1948 event hosted by Henry Fonda, James Cagney, and Joan

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Reagan to Hefner, 147.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 148

Fontaine.<sup>276</sup> He found the anti-Communist message Koestler presented matched his own experience and sought out Koestler's books. In *Darkness at Noon* and Koestler's essay in *The God That Failed*, Reagan found realistic narratives about Communism that matched his personal experience and reinforced his belief that the ideology was the most serious threat to the US and the idea of freedom as Reagan conceptualized it.

### **Darkness At Noon**

Koestler, a Hungarian-born British citizen, joined the Communist Party in Germany in 1931. He joined because of his disgust about the "disintegrating society" of the Weimar Republic and witnessed the collapse of his family's middle-class lifestyle.<sup>277</sup> In the wake of personal and societal collapse, the turn towards communism was a natural one for Koestler. He eventually became active in a local cell, working to sell "the World Revolution like vacuum cleaners."<sup>278</sup> During a visit to the USSR, he toured the country and received lavish advances for his first book aimed at convincing him the Soviet Union was an "artist's paradise."<sup>279</sup> Upon his return, the Soviets expected Koestler to spread propaganda about the treatment of artists and authors in the USSR. However, Hitler's rise to power forced Koestler to move to Paris where he took a job covering the Spanish

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<sup>276</sup> Schweizer, 18.

<sup>277</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The God That Failed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949) 15, 18.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 57

Civil War. Franco's forces captured him, and he spent four months in a Spanish prison.<sup>280</sup> His time in prison led him to break with Communism, as he realized "men cannot be treated as units in operations of political arithmetic."<sup>281</sup>

Koestler was not the only prominent author to turn against Communism and the Soviet Union due to the Spanish Civil War. George Orwell also became a vocal critic of Stalin and the USSR due to his experience as a member of the POUM, a Trotskyist militia. Orwell witnessed the decision of Stalinist forces to turn on their allies. Rather than cooperate and work against the fascist forces of Franco they sought to purge the ideologically impure militia, forcing Orwell to flee Spain or face arrest and execution. The experience left Orwell with "memories that are mostly evil," and led him to spend the remainder of his life as a strident critic of Stalinism.<sup>282</sup>

Unlike Orwell, Koestler's break with Stalin was not the result of factionalism amongst communists. Instead, it was "pity for the Andalusian and Catalan peasants," that he shared time with in prison.<sup>283</sup> Their plight humanized the sins of the Communist Party for Koestler and led him to realize that "man [was] a reality" and "mankind [was] an abstraction," ideas that were "incompatible with the Communist faith" he previously held.<sup>284</sup> Like Reagan, he became appalled by how communism forced the subjugation of

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>282</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, (Orlando: Harvest, 1952), 230.

<sup>283</sup> *The God That Failed*, 67.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 68.

individual agency to party dictate. Koestler's realizations in prison started a slow process leading to his departure from the party and vocal criticism of the ideology.

Koestler was unable to escape his past though. French authorities arrested him in 1939 due to his past work on Soviet propaganda.<sup>285</sup> He remained in an internment camp for several months, before the intervention of British officials again secured his release. It was during this period of internment that he began work on *Darkness at Noon*, a fictional narrative he used to explore the reasons for his own departure from the party. In it he leveled a harsh critique of how communism destroys the very people it purports to defend.

The book centers on the arrest, interrogation, and execution of Nicolas Rubashov, a hero of the 1917 Revolution and high-ranking Soviet official. Rubashov is not surprised by his detention and was in fact dreaming of his first arrest years before in Germany, when the secret police arrive. In Rubashov's dream three "Praetorian guards of the German Dictatorship" arrest him, and the waking world reveals three members of the People's Commissariat.<sup>286</sup> Both troikas are menacing with "grotesquely big pistols" and a "brutality was no longer put on, but natural."<sup>287</sup> Throughout the novel, Koestler equates the Soviets with the Nazis. Rubashov's experience in the two nation's prisons are mirror images and Koestler's time living under each regime lent credibility to the work.

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<sup>285</sup> F Flagg Taylor IV, "Arthur Koestler's Trail of Darkness," *Modern Age*, October 2016, 31.

<sup>286</sup> Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, 3.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, 3, 6.

Betrayal is prominent throughout *Darkness at Noon*, reflecting Koestler's own emotional experience. The regime betrays Rubashov and his peers. He frequently remanences about a photo depicting the "delegates to the first Congress of the Party" who sought "power with the object of abolishing power."<sup>288</sup> However, most of the men in the photo die on the orders of Stalin. Each man guilty of disagreeing with the party, an irredeemable fault.

While in prison, Rubashov's own betrayals haunts him. His actions on behalf of the state and to protect himself destroy those foolish enough to believe in the Party and USSR. He turns on young idealists, seasoned revolutionaries, union organizers, and lovers for increasingly cynical reasons. The variety of those destroyed allowed Koestler to deliver a powerful message. He that communism will eliminate all freedoms and flow "inert and unerring" as a river towards its goal, leaving only mud and the "corpses of the drowned" behind.<sup>289</sup> True adherents knew that "the Party can never be mistaken" and accepted its will.<sup>290</sup> Rubashov cannot escape either. He confesses all charges and at his trial does not seek to revert his execution. Instead he seeks to strengthen the Party, arguing "history treads into dust" those like him who resist.<sup>291</sup>

Gletkin, Rubashov's interrogator, does provide the doomed man with one piece of solace. Guilty of his own betrayal when he turns on his superior out of ambition, Gletkin

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid 59.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, 254.

tells Rubashov that “one day when it can do no more harm, the material of the secret archives will be published.”<sup>292</sup> History will rehabilitate Rubashov and the “older generation” that the younger feasted upon to gain power.<sup>293</sup> The words of Koestler’s fictional jailer proved surprisingly prescient, though not in the way Gletkin envisioned it. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, historians used the formerly secret archives to explore the causes of the purges of the 1930s.

In particular, the show trial and execution of Nikoli Bukharin in 1938 shows the purges as an artificial construction that used ideology to mask Stalin’s power grab. In Bukharin’s final letter from prison, he wrote Stalin that the purge was a “great and bold idea.”<sup>294</sup> Historians J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov note that Bukharin’s letter “explicitly recognized that the campaign against enemies was constructed and not reflective of political reality.”<sup>295</sup> Despite the lack of real enemies, Bukharin still confessed, even knowing it would lead to his execution. He assured Stalin that he had “no intention of recanting anything” even as he swore he was “innocent of those crimes which [he] admitted at the investigation.”<sup>296</sup> Though he pled for mercy, Bukharin admitted it “would be petty” to weigh his life against the “universal-historical tasks” undertaken by the Party.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 227.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Nikoli Bukharin to Josef Stalin, 10 DEC 1947 in *Road to Terror*, 220

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 221

Bukharin confessed his own role in the enabling the purge. He acknowledged the Soviet government cast a wide net that took in “1) the guilty; 2) persons under suspicion; and 3) persons potentially under suspicion.”<sup>298</sup> The approach ensured that the vast majority of those killed in the purges committed no crime. Rather than decry such violence in the name of ideology, Bukharin noted that it was instead reflective of “great plans, great ideas, and great interests” which rightly took “precedence over everything.”<sup>299</sup> He also argued that being aware of the innocence of the vast majority made the entire affair a noble effort. To execute them, and himself, believing they were actually guilty would instead amount to “wittingly committing an evil,” which “could never be justified.”<sup>300</sup> It was better for the Party to knowingly consign millions of innocents to death, as they would then be martyrs for the Party. He proudly told Stalin that the entire process “could not have been managed without me.”<sup>301</sup>

The presence of the letter in archives allowed historians to understand the purges in a completely different manner than the official Soviet narrative. It explicitly confirmed previous arguments that the motivation for slaughter was not fear of enemies, but rather the consolidation of power. It is remarkable that Koestler’s fictional interrogations bear so many hallmarks of Bukharin’s experience. The author did not have

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

access to the archives; instead, he used his own experiences and understanding of the regime to craft a compelling and accurate narrative.

Koestler's focus on the duplicitous nature of Communism appealed to Reagan. The portrayal of a Party that sought to limit individual thought and eagerly used violence matched Reagan's experience with Communists and fellow travelers in Hollywood. *Darkness at Noon* and *The God That Failed* allowed him to take what his personal experience taught him about Communism beyond Hollywood and apply it to the ideology as a whole. The books helped Reagan conceptualize the goals and methods of the Soviet Union in a way that permanently cast the nation as the archenemy of freedom.

Koestler's work and life story also likely laid the framework for the nuanced way that Reagan viewed those under the sway of communism. Throughout Reagan's public life, he made a distinction between the ideology, which was irredeemable, and its practitioners, who were not. Koestler, himself, stood as an example of someone turning back. After reading *Darkness at Noon* and *The God That Failed*, Reagan began working with the Motion Picture Industry Council to rehabilitate Communists.<sup>302</sup> The most prominent of those Reagan worked with was Edward Dmytryk, one of the Hollywood Ten.

Dmytryk confessed to joining the Communist Party in 1944, and viewed himself as one of 150 "intellectual communists" in Hollywood.<sup>303</sup> His desire to "make honest

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<sup>302</sup> Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A memoir of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1999), 291.

<sup>303</sup> Richard English, "What Makes A Hollywood Communist?" *Saturday Evening Post*, 19 May 1951, 30-31.



pictures about people” led to a number of meetings with Communist-affiliated groups and over a period of several years, they recruited him into the party.<sup>304</sup> His membership was short-lived, as he conflicted with the Party for refusing to make changes to a movie he was working on. However, he refused to cooperate with HUAC, which then charged him and nine others with Contempt of Congress. After fleeing briefly to England, he returned in 1950 and served a six-month sentence. While in prison, Dmytryk expressed shock at the “conditioned thinking” of his compatriots, who insisted that the Korean War began due to South Korean aggression.<sup>305</sup> After the Chinese entered the war, he changed course and signed a full affidavit of his actions and upon release returned to Hollywood seeking to resume his career.

In his *Saturday Evening Post* confessional, Dmytryk expressed a desire for a “sort of an Ex-Communists Anonymous” to help people trying to quit the Party.<sup>306</sup> This was the intention of the MPIC Committee started by Roy Brewer and Reagan.<sup>307</sup> Reagan felt that Dmytryk’s recognition that the “humanitarian trappings” of Communism only masked an “ugly reality” was “heroic.”<sup>308</sup> Dmytryk’s cooperation with the authorities and work with MPIC led to a backlash, as communist groups sought to discredit him. Reagan took this as further proof about the controlling nature of the ideology and through MPIC released a letter. In it, the group noted that it took “courage and desire and time

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 147

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>307</sup> *Dutch*, 291.

<sup>308</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me?* 163.

for an American to work free of the tentacles of the Communist Party” and that they could not do so alone.<sup>309</sup> However, MPIC was willing to help and wanted people seeking an exit to know that “you too can be free men again.”<sup>310</sup>

Reagan’s desire to allow people to “be free men again” extended beyond those who consciously chose to embrace communism. He increasingly articulated a gap between the Soviet system and the people under it. Koestler’s work also furthered this sentiment. In *Darkness at Noon* Rubashov’s porter Vassilij stands in for the millions of people who live under Communism but retain doubts about the system. Vassilij served with Rubashov and remembers him as a “little bearded Partisan commander” capable of soaring rhetoric on the battlefield.<sup>311</sup> He continues to follow his commander’s career, but expresses dismay that he “could never manage to find” the Rubashov he knew in the “long and difficult to understand” speeches of Party congresses.<sup>312</sup> Vassilij’s loyalty is to the man, not the Party.

He also holds to religion. At the end of each speech as the speaker wishes long life to the international, the revolution, and Stalin, Vassilij turns it to a prayer by inaudibly adding an un-Marxist “amen.”<sup>313</sup> He follows by making the sign of the cross in secret, fearful that his true believer daughter will see. Vassilij also believes that Rubashov’s early speeches would have made the Holy Madonna of Kazan smile on them,

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<sup>309</sup> Lee Zhito, “Picture Business” *Billboard* 16 Jun 1951, 2.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> *Darkness At Noon*, 5.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

implying a religious element to the revolution.<sup>314</sup> Even at the end, as his daughter reads Rubashov's testimony at the show trial Vassilij keeps to his religion, silently praying that "thy will be done" before adding an Amen and going to sleep.<sup>315</sup> The message Reagan took from this was that religion was a key factor in defeating communism.

### **Resistance and Redemption**

Reagan viewed religion as the key to the fight against Communism. He believed that faith would provide the will necessary for people across the world to come together and fight against the hostile ideology, regardless of the sinister tactics communists would employ. Speaking to the Conservative Political Action Conference in 1981, Reagan cited Whittaker Chambers' argument that the Western world already had the answer to the "problem" of Communism: "its faith in God and the freedom He enjoins."<sup>316</sup> The line was a favorite of Reagan's and it would appear in many his speeches throughout his presidency, including his "Evil Empire" speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando.<sup>317</sup> Chambers exerted a powerful influence on how Reagan viewed Communism and how he sought to defeat the Soviet Union. During staff meetings, Reagan would often quote Chambers' book *Witness* verbatim. Those around

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>316</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner," Washington DC, March 20 1981

<sup>317</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Address to the National Association of Evangelicals," Orlando FL, 8 March 1983.

the president knew he used the quotations to demonstrate the reasons for his enmity of communism and desire to defeat the ideology.<sup>318</sup>

Chambers came from a solidly middle-class background. Like Reagan, his boyhood reading would do much to shape his future beliefs. Chambers read Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* as an eight-year-old, and returned to the work throughout his life.<sup>319</sup> He found the book to be a "great act of human spirit" and it provided the "forces that carried [him] into the Communist Party" as well as the ones which would lead him out.<sup>320</sup> This is because the work "taught [Chambers] about two seemingly irreconcilable things- Christianity and revolution."<sup>321</sup> Chambers would pursue revolution first, and shortly after leaving Columbia joined the Communist Party, due to its intellectual appeal and his own disillusionment with his family and suburban life.<sup>322</sup> In 1932, the GRU, the intelligence arm of the Red Army, recruited Chambers as a spy.

Chambers initially remained in New York City, where his cell provided little of value to Soviet intelligence. A 1936 move to Washington DC led to the recruitment of more fruitful sources. Chambers helped turn State Department employees Alger Hiss and Julian Wadleigh as well as economist Harry Dexter White into sources for the GRU. Hiss and White were particularly useful as each would rise to high positions in government during World War II. After recruitment, his primary responsibility was to

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<sup>318</sup> Thomas Reed, *The Reagan Enigma, 1964-1980*, (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2014), 13.

<sup>319</sup> Sam Tanenhaus, *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography*, (New York: Modern Library, 1998), 11

<sup>320</sup> Whittaker Chambers, *Witness*, (New York: Regnery History, 1952), 101.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>322</sup> Tanenhaus, 44.

photograph the information sources provided him and deliver it to his handler in New York.<sup>323</sup>

As the Party turned on itself during the Spanish Civil War and the purges in the Soviet Union, Chambers became increasingly paranoid about his and his family's safety. Boris Bykov, the Soviet resident in New York, took "a special delight" in antagonizing Chambers about the purges and the events in Moscow hung ominously over the two men's meetings.<sup>324</sup> Bykov questioned Chambers about the fate of Bukharin even before the Soviet Union announced the death of the "Communist Party's leading theoretician" and used the event to identify any "Communist heresies" Chambers may be guilty of.<sup>325</sup> The interrogations and way that the Purge generated fear reached even New York City, led Chambers to increasingly question the correctness of the Party.

By 1938, Chambers resolved to leave the Party and his work as a spy for the GRU. He skipped a planned meeting with Bykov, and took his family to Florida, fearful that Soviet agents would find and kill him. Forced to return alternatively to Washington and New York to seek employment, Chambers began sleeping with a rifle by his bed and scanned the streets for agents of the Soviet secret police.<sup>326</sup> Chambers eventually landed a job with *Time* writing book reviews, a role that soon expanded into a role writing cover stories and handling reports from overseas. Despite the economic security, Chambers

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>324</sup> Chambers, 49.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Tanenhaus, 147

still felt at risk from the NKVD. The likely assassination of his friend Walter Krivitsky only added to his fears. He even attempted to arrange a pardon in exchange for exposing the Soviet underground, though these efforts largely failed to bear results in the early 40s. Instead, Chambers used his role at *Time* to attack fellow travelers and criticize the Stalinist regime, even after the US had entered the World War II and allied with the Soviet Union.<sup>327</sup>

Chambers came back to the attention of US authorities in 1947 amid efforts to find communists throughout government. The testimony of his replacement as courier, Elizabeth Bentley, led to his subpoena to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee.<sup>328</sup> In his testimony, he confirmed much of what Bentley told the committee and identified members of the US government who had passed him classified information. He also detailed how the organization handled funds, forged documents, and recruited new members.<sup>329</sup> Most importantly, Chambers identified Harry Dexter White and Alger Hiss as individuals involved in passing information through his network. He also firmly denied that the men were exploited without their knowledge. Instead, both were part of achieving the “paramount objectives” of the Communist Party, the ability to wield “power and influence” within the US government.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, 211

<sup>329</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities, “Investigation of Communist Espionage Activities,” 25 Aug 1948, 571.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

In the time since Chambers' defection from the underground, Hiss had risen to a senior role in the State Department advising Secretary of State Dean Acheson. He denied all the accusations, setting the stage for a series of dramatic hearings pitting Chambers against Hiss and eventually leading the committee chair to declare, "certainly one of these witnesses will be tried for perjury."<sup>331</sup> Hiss' attempts to deny knowing Chambers failed to sway the committee, and they planned his prosecution. A resulting effort by Hiss to silence Chambers through a slander suit failed when Chambers produced classified documents provided to him by Hiss nearly two decades before.<sup>332</sup> Due to the hearings, a jury found Hiss guilty of perjury and he served three years in a federal penitentiary. While he maintained his innocence to his death, the archives of Soviet Intelligence agencies revealed his code name, ALES, and that while at Yalta, Soviet agents met with him secretly to express their appreciation of his work.<sup>333</sup> Chambers also provided substantial evidence of Harry Dexter White's role as a spy for the Soviet Union.<sup>334</sup> White was a leading economist and the author of much of the US' plans for the post-war economic order and its lead negotiator at Bretton Woods. He appeared before the committee in August of 1948 to deny his role and suffered a fatal heart attack before a second session.<sup>335</sup> Like Hiss, Soviet archives exposed White's espionage.

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid, 1076

<sup>332</sup> Tanenhaus, 291.

<sup>333</sup> Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 134.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, 312.

<sup>335</sup> Benn Steil, *The Battle of Bretton Wood: John Maynard Keynes, Harry Dexter White, and the Making of a New World Order*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 322.

The revelations from the HUAC investigation and series of resulting trials caused *Time* to dismiss Chambers as he had held secrets from the company. He initially sought to return to the magazine once the legal proceedings finished, but instead began work on memoir. *Witness*, published in 1952, told the story of why Chambers became a Communist, his actions in the underground, and why he left the Party. The *Saturday Evening Post* paid a staggering 75,000 dollars for the serialization rights, and published the first chapter in an issue that eschewed a cover illustration for the first time in its history.<sup>336</sup> Within two months of publication, the book topped *The New York Times* bestseller list, and would become the ninth best-selling book of 1952.<sup>337</sup> Reagan read the book shortly after publication, and it cemented his view of both the threat from the Soviet Union and the way to he felt the US needed to fight it.

Chamber's narrative reads as a non-fictional spy thriller and provided Reagan with a story that he could easily imagine himself in. The portrayal of GRU and NKVD agents as ruthless, exploitive assassins fit Reagan's experience. Both Chambers and Reagan felt the need to literally arm themselves in order to stave off communists. The threats against Reagan left him feeling paranoid, in a manner not unlike Chambers own fears after defecting. He recalled answering the door on a rainy day to a man who identified himself as a striker. Fear struck Reagan, as he had left his gun upstairs and was certain that the man intended to attack him.<sup>338</sup> Though the man turned out to be

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<sup>336</sup> Tanenhaus, 461.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, 463.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid, 184.



sympathetic and had resolved to turn against Sorrell, the flash of fear shows how deeply fearful Reagan was about the prospect of communist-directed violence against him. The figures of Herb Sorrell, the leader of the CSU, and Boris Bykov, the Soviet resident in New York share a number of characteristics. Chambers portrays Bykov as a figure obsessed with control and settling accounts. During the period of defection, Chambers describes him as a man with rude manner and deep cynicism.<sup>339</sup> He deliberately harassed the members of the underground, and delighted in his power over them. Eventually, Chambers gives up on finding anything human about the Soviet colonel, concluding that he was a “caricature” of a communist.<sup>340</sup> The only thing that brought him close to pleasure was “brutality” and had a “vengeful and malicious” character.<sup>341</sup> This description of the natural brutality of Bykov bears striking resemblance to that of Koestler’s Gletkin.

Reagan viewed Sorrell similarly. His descriptions of the labor leader consistently show an obnoxious, cynical, and rude man, filled with “delusions of grandeur.”<sup>342</sup> Physically, Sorrell was “a large and muscular man,” reflecting his past a boxer, who displayed a “most aggressive attitude.”<sup>343</sup> He also demonstrated no regard for those under him, repeatedly showing his willingness to sacrifice their pay and well-being for his own power. In Reagan’s view, Sorrell shared Bykov’s love of brutality, as he not

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<sup>339</sup> *Witness*, 355.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, 375

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid*, 376.

<sup>342</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me?* 152.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

only refused to stop his union's violent attacks but also appeared to revel in them. Sorrell also shared Bykov's view that subordinates were like "ammunition—easily expendable."<sup>344</sup> Sorrell and Bykov both deceived their followers, using their loyalty and good faith to turn them into "cannon fodder in this war" of competing ideologies.<sup>345</sup> Similarly, the Chambers' depiction of educated American communists fit Reagan's perceptions and experience. Chambers argued that Hiss could not or refused to see the weakness of Bykov's character due to the "transforming power of anything Russian" to the intellectual.<sup>346</sup> When Chambers sought to criticize Bykov, he found Hiss dismissive of both the complaint and Chambers' intellect. Over time, Chambers realized that Hiss was one of those "who affected to act, think, and speak" for the "plain men and women of the nation."<sup>347</sup>

The condescension he exhibited stemmed from his own overconfidence that the Party could do no wrong and that he, by virtue of his role in the party, was best equipped to guide intellectual inferiors. Hiss exploited his peers, many of whom "snapped their minds shut" to the possibility of his guilt.<sup>348</sup> The refusal to acknowledge the possibility that someone with the skills and gifts of Hiss could work for the Soviet Union was, for Chambers, a sign that the nation could not distinguish between fact and fiction. He

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>346</sup> Chambers, 358

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, 701

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

resented that “the forces of enlightenment” would both dismiss the “Communist danger” and stoop to “calling every allusion to it a witch hunt.”<sup>349</sup>

Reagan saw Dalton Trumbo in a similar light as Hiss. His encounters with Trumbo in HICCASP reflected what Reagan viewed as the snobbery and undemocratic elitism of communists. He was similarly taken aback when Edward Dmytryk revealed several of the Hollywood Ten expressed sympathy for the North Koreans and revealed in the death of American soldiers.<sup>350</sup> Reagan also resented efforts to portray anti-Communist efforts as a witch-hunt. Trumbo’s 1960 *Playboy* article infuriated Reagan for this reason. The communist writer’s insistence that he had committed no sins and his insinuation that Reagan and others were shamelessly hunting witches prompted Reagan’s forceful rebuttal to Heffner and the disingenuous claim that there was no blacklist. Reagan thought Chambers a “tragic and lonely” figure who believed he had left “the winning side” in the name of what was right.<sup>351</sup> Although Reagan admired the strong moral sense that led the writer to cease supporting an evil cause, he found himself “too optimistic to agree” that the West would not prevail.<sup>352</sup> He did agree with Chambers that the fight would not be an easy one however. Reagan learned firsthand of the “fierce vindictiveness of [Communism’s] revolutionary temper” when he faced increasingly vocal opposition on his General Electric speaking tours.<sup>353</sup> Reagan’s use of the

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Reagan to Heffner

<sup>351</sup> *Where’s the Rest of Me*, 268.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, 271.

Tennessee Valley Authority as an example of government waste, led to demands that GE forbid Reagan from referencing the program again or risk losing government contracts valued at fifty million dollars or more. Although GE's chairman backed Reagan, he still opted to remove the reference from his speech. Reagan noted in his autobiography that there were "a hundred examples of overgrown government" he could use instead, but the incident showed how late the moment was to "save freedom," echoing Chambers' dark words.<sup>354</sup>

Organized labor also increasingly targeted the former SAG leader during this period. The AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education included Reagan in a "one-hundred-dollar book" which "gave the lowdown on Right-Wing extremist speakers."<sup>355</sup> The committee urged its affiliated unions "to head off and prevent the appearance... of speakers listed in the book."<sup>356</sup> A teacher's union in St Paul, Minnesota complied, passing a resolution before a Reagan address demanding that he not be allowed to speak. The statement declared him a "controversial personality" whose appearance would not be beneficial to the school assembly.<sup>357</sup> The speech took place as planned, but the union then demanded the school host Ben Davis, the party secretary of the US Communist Party, on the grounds of providing equal time.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid, 270.

<sup>355</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Are Liberals Really Liberal?" draft speech circa 1962 in Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 1 in Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> *Where's the Rest of Me?* 270.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid

The AFL-CIO backed resistance in Minnesota, and their labeling of Reagan as an extremist was particularly galling to Reagan given his personal history. One of the earliest partisan messages Reagan recorded was on behalf of the AFL. In a 1948 radio broadcast sponsored by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which had an affiliation with the AFL, Reagan stumped for Hubert Humphrey. Reagan presented Humphrey as his “friend from Minneapolis” and a staunch opponent of the Taft-Hartley Act.<sup>359</sup> The strident opposition from a group Reagan had previously worked with, in a state where he campaigned on their behalf reinforced his belief that leftist groups did not value free speech. Instead, in Reagan’s view, they sought unquestioning acceptance of the party line. This revelation was a confirmation of Chambers’ view of the vindictiveness of communism.

Chambers’ experience left him pessimistic about the prospect of the US prevailing in its fight against communism. He believed the world was at a turning point that would determine “whether the whole world was to become free” or if it would be “completely destroyed or completely changed.”<sup>360</sup> While Chambers believed the West had the answer to the problem, he feared that it did not realize the solution and would therefore fall. Chambers’ rhetoric about the world facing a pivotal moment mirrored Reagan’s sense that freedom was under siege. In 1952, the same year *Witness* debuted;

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<sup>359</sup> “Transcript of a 1948 Radio Broadcast” in Ronald Reagan Subject Collection Box No 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>360</sup> *Witness*, intro

Reagan addressed the graduating class at William Woods College and identified the US, for the first time, as “the last best hope of man on earth.”<sup>361</sup>

Over his political career, Reagan cited Chambers’ sense of the challenge to freedom frequently. Addressing CPAC in 1982, Reagan quoted Chambers passage about “whether the whole world is to become free” directly.<sup>362</sup> Reagan then linked the current struggle back to the Revolutionary War and founding of the United States. He argued that modern Americans had the same opportunity that the founding fathers had to preserve the “sacred fire of liberty” through “the darkest and coldest nights.”<sup>363</sup> Reagan’s reading of *Witness* strengthened his belief that US ideology was revolutionary and world-changing.

Chambers was more than a rhetorical tool for Reagan employed as red meat for conservatives. Instead, the author’s work was emblematic of his strategic vision. While developing National Security Decision Directive 32, one of the key policy documents outlining Reagan’s Cold War strategy, he would discuss Chambers with his aides.<sup>364</sup> He used *Witness* with his staff to argue the US was in a pivotal moment in history.<sup>365</sup> The resulting policy clearly evoked this view and provided the strategic basis for the US to

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<sup>361</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Commencement Address at William Woods College” in *Echoes From the Woods* June 1952. Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>362</sup> Paul Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 80.

<sup>363</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at a Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner,” February 26, 1982.

<sup>364</sup> Thomas Reed interview with author

<sup>365</sup> Thomas Reed, *The Reagan Enigma, 1964-1980*, (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2014), 13.

take aggressive action “to contain and reverse” the Soviet Union and communist ideology.<sup>366</sup>

The president also created a minor political controversy when he honored Chambers in 1988. His regard for *Witness* led him to propose recognizing Chamber’s Pipe Creek as a national historic landmark. Reagan’s pushed for the recognition over the unanimous dissent of his advisors and the objections of a National Park Service advisory board.<sup>367</sup> At Reagan’s urging, Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel overruled the board and granted landmark status, the only time in the history of the program a secretary ignored a unanimous vote by the board.<sup>368</sup> Critics alleged the decision represented “an unprecedented politicization” of the program and “an unwise mix of ideology and history.”<sup>369</sup> There is validity to their argument, as Chambers’ contribution to Reagan’s anti-communism was through his writing rather than the geographic importance of a Maryland pumpkin patch.

Reagan identified strongly with *Witness* for more than its proclamation that communism was the “concentrated evil” of its time.<sup>370</sup> Importantly, Chambers also offered insight into how the US could win its struggle. He argued that since communism was “man’s second oldest faith” and the “vision of Man without God” that religion and

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<sup>366</sup> NSDD-32

<sup>367</sup> Kenneth deGraffenreid, interview with the author, telephone, West Point, NY, 05 September 2017. David Anderson, “Chambers’ MD. Farm Rejected as Landmark,” *The Washington Post*, 27 April 1988.

<sup>368</sup> Bruce Craig, “Whittaker Chambers’ Pumpkin Patch,” *The Washington Post*, 22 May 1988.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> *Witness*, Foreward

faith in God offered the path to defeating communism.<sup>371</sup> Chambers felt that “political freedom as the Western world has known it” was derived from the Bible, and that the concepts of religion and freedom were indivisible.<sup>372</sup> The emphasis Chambers placed on religion as the decisive factor in the conflict with communism appealed to Reagan, who viewed religion in a similar way.

Reagan also strongly identified with the way Chambers found his faith. Both Chambers and Reagan credited fictional characters in defining their religious beliefs. Dick, the protagonist of Harold Bell Wright’s *The Printer of Udell’s*, offered a “role model” to Reagan and “set [him] on a course” that the President was “always grateful” for.<sup>373</sup> For Chambers, it was Victor Hugo’s Bishop of Digne from *Les Miserables* who modeled Christianity. Chambers recalled being thrilled by the story of the Bishop trading his palace for a hospital to better care for the sick.<sup>374</sup> Even after Chambers disavowed religion and became active in the Communist Party, the Bishop’s imprint on him remained. The character “was invisibly present” as Chambers broke with communism.<sup>375</sup> The similarities between Chambers’ religious development and his own, increased the affinity Reagan felt for *Witness*. It provided another point of convergence between his own story and the author’s, making the work more immersive and allowing the future president to imagine and live a higher stakes struggle against communism.

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Reagan to Jean B Wright, 13 March 1984 in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 6.

<sup>374</sup> *Witness*, 101.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, foreward.



Chambers' powerful description of how God led him to reject the party imprinted onto Reagan and became hallmarks of his speeches. Chambers described realizing the "immense design" of his infant daughter's ears as beginning his rejection of communism.<sup>376</sup> In that moment, Chambers believed that "the finger of God was first laid upon [his] forehead."<sup>377</sup> Reagan found this passage moving, and used it frequently when discussing the Cold War.<sup>378</sup> He favored the passage to such an extent, that when speechwriters included different sections of *Witness* in his speeches, he would cross them out and instead hand write the anecdote of Chambers and his daughter's ear instead.<sup>379</sup> Reagan favored that story because it conveyed a powerful idea in a manner that was short, memorable, and easily understood.

Reagan most prominently defined his view of the religious nature of the Cold War in his address to the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983. In it, he labeled the Soviet Union "an evil empire."<sup>380</sup> The speech enraged Soviet leaders, though longtime Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin allowed that in it Reagan was simply "giving them a dose of their own medicine."<sup>381</sup> The Soviets perceived the speech as part of Reagan's "uncompromising new ideological offensive" and indicative that he was "deliberately and persistently" seeking "a break with the past."<sup>382</sup> The Soviet perception

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Remarks at a Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner

<sup>379</sup> Kengor, 85.

<sup>380</sup> Address to the National Association of Evangelicals

<sup>381</sup> Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents*, (New York: Times Books, 1995), 527.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid, 477, 480

matched Reagan's intent. He intended his words to challenge the notion of moral equivalency in the Cold War.

The "Evil Empire" speech was more than red meat for his political base and an attack on the USSR. Reagan used it to challenge what he felt was the complacency of American evangelicals. During his remarks he referenced C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*. Reagan accused the audience of allowing the titular demon to tempt them into "blithely declaring yourself above it all and label both sides at fault."<sup>383</sup> He highlighted the ongoing popularity of the Nuclear Freeze Movement among church groups as evidence of the group acting immorally and irreligiously giving in to "the temptation of pride."<sup>384</sup>

Reagan sought to use his address in Orlando and other speeches to counter those who would place "the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority" to the Soviets.<sup>385</sup> He also made it clear that the latter was more important, and that "the real crisis" of the Cold War was a spiritual one.<sup>386</sup> Reagan again quoted Chambers, noting that the only way to prevail over communism was to ensure that western world's "faith in God and the freedom He enjoins" was greater than that of "communism's faith in man."<sup>387</sup> Reagan then segued into his favorite Thomas Paine quote about the power of

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<sup>383</sup> Address to the National Association of Evangelicals.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

the US “to begin the world over again,” linking the Founding Father’s ideas to Chambers’ and Reagan’s own conception of the Cold War.<sup>388</sup>

The works of Arthur Koestler and Whittaker Chambers helped Reagan to broaden his personal experiences with communists and apply them to the Cold War. The two authors held each other in high regard, with Koestler declaring *Witness* a book which if “unwritten would leave a hole in the world,” and Chambers’ holding Koestler in a higher esteem than other former communists due to Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*.<sup>389</sup> Upon the death of Chambers, Koestler noted that “the witness is gone; the testimony will stand,” an epitaph that Reagan borrowed when he posthumously award Chambers the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1984.<sup>390</sup> Reagan also recognized James Cagney in the ceremony for his work in the movie industry. Cagney was also one of Reagan’s allies in SAG during the late 1940s and involved in his resistance against communist elements in the union. It was Cagney who introduced Reagan to Koestler at an event at his Hollywood home.<sup>391</sup> Reagan noted in presenting the awards, that the Medal of Freedom was for those “who changed the face and the soul” of the nation, something he certainly believed Chambers succeeded in.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Tanenhaus, 470, 509.

<sup>390</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medal of Freedom” 26 March 1984.

<sup>391</sup> Schweizer.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

### **Chapter 3 Cowboy Values: Fighting the Right Way**

During his farewell address, Reagan worried over the state of patriotism in America. His “proudest” accomplishment over two terms was “the resurgence of national pride, that [he] called the new patriotism.”<sup>393</sup> However, even though “this national feeling [was] good” Reagan feared it may not last.<sup>394</sup> He believed Americans over the age of thirty-five grew up in a different country and he and older generations “absorbed, almost in the air, a love of country and appreciation of our institutions.”<sup>395</sup> The commonness of military service and popular culture created the patriotic air of Reagan described.

While Reagan believed patriotism started in the home, he recalled that children of the 1950s could look to their neighborhood and the “father down the street who fought in Korea or the family who lost someone in Anzio” to see the importance of sacrifice and the value of America.<sup>396</sup> Failing that, popular culture would fill the void. Reagan believed the movies and television of his generation “celebrated democratic values and implicitly reinforced the idea that America was special.”<sup>397</sup> Reagan identified the mid-1960s as a turning point, and feared that as the US entered the nineties, young parents no longer believed “unambivalent appreciation of America [was] the right thing to teach modern

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<sup>393</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Farewell Address to the Nation,” Washington DC, 11 January 1989.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

children.”<sup>398</sup> Due to this, “well-grounded patriotism [was] no longer the style” of popular culture.<sup>399</sup> The passage of the speech revealed how Reagan viewed patriotism. Although claiming he desired “an informed patriotism,” his view was one that lacked nuance.<sup>400</sup> He expected largely uncritical celebrations of both American history and the US military.

In *The New American Militarism*, historian Andrew Bacevich argues Reagan “beguiled himself and his supporters” through his depiction of “soldierly ideals” which offered a “trove of instructive and inspiring anecdotes.”<sup>401</sup> The administration created a “sanitized version of US military history and fostered a romanticized portrait” of those in the armed forces.<sup>402</sup> The sanitized narrative that Bacevich described came from Reagan’s genuine belief in both the virtue of military service and that American military forces during his administration fought on a new frontier. In his view, they served on the edges of civilization, holding back a gulag, expansionist state that viewed “issues as freedom and human rights very differently.”<sup>403</sup>

Reagan believed in an idealized version of the American frontier. Throughout his political career he spoke in glowing terms about the American West of the post-Civil War era. Reagan, in many ways, believed the settlers and military force that extended federal control to the Pacific embodied the best of America. However, his view of the west did

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 106.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid

<sup>403</sup> Reagan, “Farewell Address to the Nation”

not come from a careful study of history, which would reveal not only the development of a post-war national identity, but also a deeply problematic racial legacy. Instead, Reagan's mythical west came from the adventure stories and westerns he read as a young man and in his Hollywood years. These stories showcased a moral system that Reagan respected and sought to emulate.

He also paired his view of the American West with his reading of the imperialist literature of his youths. The "Tommy" of Rudyard Kipling became indistinguishable from Burrough's John Carter or a cavalry trooper in a western. Reagan also linked the missions of each nation, equating British military action in India, Afghanistan, and Sudan with the American West. In his mind, both nations extended freedom and civilization to otherwise neglected regions. The open embrace of the idea of the "White Man's Burden" would become a major component of his foreign policy, both in dealing with the Soviet Union and Europe and in how he approached issues in the developing world. Reagan's understanding of the frontier directly impacted his policy approach, as the stories he read dictated a code and set of actions he believed universally applicable. The values he took from stories of the frontier provided a roadmap Reagan believed he could use to defeat communism.

## Sage of the West: Louis L'Amour, Hondo, and the Frontier

In the same ceremony he recognized Whitaker Chambers, Reagan celebrated the work of another author who influenced his worldview; Louis L'Amour. As he presented the Medal of Freedom, Reagan noted L'Amour “played a leading role in shaping our national identity.”<sup>404</sup> His westerns “portrayed the rugged individual and the deep-seated values” of the frontier.<sup>405</sup> L'Amour's books reminded Americans of their “potential as an exploring, pioneering, and free people.”<sup>406</sup>

These remarks echoed the ones Reagan made two years previously, when awarding L'Amour the Congressional Gold Medal, a first for a novelist. Presenting the award at a barbeque for rodeo cowboys on the South Lawn, Reagan felt “the men and women of the Old West” possessed a “certain integrity of character” that still appealed to Americans.<sup>407</sup> L'Amour and the cowboy attendees represented the “great tradition of the American West” to Reagan and he stressed how much the group meant to America.<sup>408</sup> The repeated references to western values in the two ceremonies Reagan hosted honoring L'Amour speaks to the importance of the mythologized West in defining his values and global outlook.

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<sup>404</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medal of Freedom” 26 March 1984.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at a White House Barbecue for the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association,” 24 September 1983.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

Few brought the mythos of the Wild West to more Americans than Louis L'Amour. Over the course of his career, he wrote over one hundred books, and at the time of his death, nearly two hundred million copies remained in circulation.<sup>409</sup> A South Dakota native born in 1908, four years before Reagan, L'Amour was particularly proud of his unconventional education. He left school halfway through the 10<sup>th</sup> grade at the age of fifteen due to a combination of financial necessity and a sense that he could achieve a superior education through reading books.<sup>410</sup> L'Amour recalled growing up in a family that "was constantly reading" and credits the works of H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw, and other noted authors as his teachers.<sup>411</sup>

As a boy, he became fascinated with stories of the west, seeking to learn about the Sioux peoples, which had killed and scalped his grandfather in 1862.<sup>412</sup> His maternal grandfather told stories of his own experiences in the Civil and Indians Wars that stayed with the future author and inspired fascination with the West. Like Reagan, L'Amour discovered Burroughs' John Carter stories as a boy and delighted in the depictions of Mars. Burroughs received special mention in L'Amour's official website biography and in his memoir *Education of a Wandering Man*, where he noted that the Carter stories drove him to read more science fiction and non-fiction.<sup>413</sup> Many of L'Amour's protagonists

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<sup>409</sup> James Barron, "Louis L'Amour, Writer, Is Dead; Famed Chronicler of West Was 80," *New York Times*, 13 June 1988.

<sup>410</sup> Louis L'Amour, *Education of a Wandering Man*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), ch 1

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*



would bear strong resemblance to Carter. They straddle the worlds of white and native societies and follow a moral code strongly evocative of Burroughs' lost Virginian.

L'Amour's young adulthood was like Burroughs', each traveled widely working a variety of jobs. Between 1930 and the publication of his first novel, L'Amour worked in ports, timber camps, mines, and on freighters, and compiled 51 wins as a professional boxer.<sup>414</sup> The outbreak of World War II led to him to join the Army, and he attended Officer's Candidate School at Camp Hood in Texas. The possibility of "movement and action" led to his selection of service with tank destroyers, the modern equivalent of the cavalry of the post-Civil War West.<sup>415</sup> He landed at Normandy on D-Day in his tank destroyer, and would earn four Bronze Stars for his actions in combat.<sup>416</sup> After returning, he moved west and to continue his career as a writer, finding intermittent success selling short stories to pulp magazines.

His big break came after the publication of "The Gift of the Cochise" in a 1952 issue *Collier's*. L'Amour's short story focuses of an Apache warrior, a pioneer woman, and a "lean angry man" and the slow burning romance of the latter two.<sup>417</sup> John Wayne read the story and purchased the rights to make it into a movie, entitled *Hondo*. As part of the agreement, L'Amour received the opportunity to write the novelization of the screenplay, which greatly expanded on the themes and characters of the original short

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<sup>414</sup> Barron

<sup>415</sup> *Education of a Wandering Man*

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, Meyer Berger, "Painter Relives Tragic Parting Each Year at Station Door—L'Amour From West" *New York Times* 14 Feb 1955.

<sup>417</sup> Louis L'Amour, "The Gift of the Cochise," *Colliers* 5 July 1952.

story. The successful novel, declared one of the top 25 westerns by the Western Writers Association of America, launched L'Amour's career as a popular writer and started him on the path of becoming the most-read author of Westerns in the world.<sup>418</sup>

*Hondo* takes place amid escalating tensions between the Apache tribes of Arizona and New Mexico and the settlers in the area. Hondo, a scout working with the army, comes across an isolated farmstead after narrowly escaping the Apache. There, he meets Angie Lowe and her son, Johnny. He takes an immediate liking to both and assists with masculine duties that Angie's missing husband had not fulfilled. After he departs the ranch, an Apache war party led by Vittorio arrives. Vittorio adopts Johnny into the tribe after the boy shows courage in trying to fight the warriors. Hondo eventually returns to the ranch, but only after killing Ed Lowe when the latter tries to ambush him as revenge for a bar fight. Angie, unaware of the nature of her husband's death, claims Hondo is her husband to stave off Vittorio's demand that she marry an Apache warrior. As war between the Apache and the army breaks out, the ranch tries to remain neutral but eventually Hondo and Angie side with the Army and help defeat the Apaches before riding off as a family to Hondo's ranch in California.<sup>419</sup>

Throughout the book, Hondo exhibits a strong moral compass and follows a set code. He initially helps Angie and Johnny with the ranch not out of desire for gain but because it needed to be done. Hondo admires that the ranch reflected "good solid work

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<sup>418</sup> Michael Marsden, "Louis L'Amour's *Hondo*: From Literature to Film to Literature" in *Literature Film Quarterly*, 1 January 1999

<sup>419</sup> Louis L'Amour, *Hondo* (New York: Bantam Books, 2016).

that a man could be proud of” and felt compelled to help restore it.<sup>420</sup> Similarly, he returns to the ranch at great risk because “no right kind of man would ever leave a woman alone” under threat from the Apache.<sup>421</sup> Typically straightforward and honest, Hondo hates a lie but acknowledges there were times “a man has to lie if it makes it easier for someone.”<sup>422</sup> This becomes relevant when Angie intervenes in a conversation between Hondo and Johnny to prevent Hondo from revealing that not only did Ed Lowe not die well, but that it was Hondo who killed the boy’s father.<sup>423</sup>

The continuation of the lie about Lowe’s death fits into Hondo’s code because it allows him to remain on the ranch. He can marry Angie, protecting her and becoming the father that Johnny needs. While this also clearly benefits Hondo, his original willingness to throw away his own desire in service of the truth shows how seriously Hondo takes his code and reveals his motivation to be a good man regardless of consequence. Only after Angie presents a case that the lie would be in service of a greater good does Hondo relent.

The morally driven protagonist who seeks no reward but the accomplishment of “good” is a staple of both L’Amour’s work and westerns in general. The simple morality of the western appealed strongly to Reagan, who believed that “the brief post-Civil War era when our blue-clad cavalry stayed on a wartime footing against the plains and desert

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid, 26

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid, 156, 198.

Indians” were the American equivalent of Kipling’s India “for color and romance.”<sup>424</sup> As an actor, Reagan frequently lobbied to star in westerns to no avail. John Wayne became a close friend, who staunchly supported Reagan during the strikes of the late 40s, and likely introduced Reagan to L’Amour’s stories.<sup>425</sup>

The author quickly became Reagan’s favorite and remained so throughout Reagan’s life. As he was recovering from cancer surgery in 1985, Reagan took the opportunity to read L’Amour’s newest book, *Jubal Sackett*, in his hospital bed. The president’s love of the author was widely known, and he would often receive copies of L’Amour novels as gifts, which he enthusiastically accepted.<sup>426</sup> When presenting the Congressional Gold Medal to the author, Reagan showed his familiarity with the honoree’s work. When it came time to give the award, Reagan sought out L’Amour not realizing the author was already beside him. Surprised to see the author standing there, Reagan quipped that L’Amour “sneaked up on [him] just like Bowdrie,” a Texas Ranger that featured in many L’Amour short stories.<sup>427</sup> The off the cuff use of the character reflected Reagan’s deep knowledge of the author’s work. Upon Reagan’s death, the only books that Nancy Reagan kept rather than donate were five by L’Amour. Nancy explained that she saved them for herself “because Louis L’Amour was [her] husband’s favorite author.”<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Ronald Reagan, *Where’s The Rest of Me?*, (New York: Van Rees Press, 1965), 204.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid*, 279.

<sup>426</sup> Reagan to Dr. and Mrs. Norman Sprague Jr, 13 Aug 1984 in *A Life in Letters*

<sup>427</sup> “Remarks at a White House Barbecue for the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association” 24 September 1983

<sup>428</sup> John Miller, “Western Civ,” *National Review*, 4 May 2009

Westerns provided more than escapist entertainment for Reagan. The values of characters like Hondo and Bowdrie were ones that Reagan sought to emulate both in his personal actions and in the policy of his administration. While working on the National Security Council, Thomas Reed recalled that the President would often use books and movies as a shorthand to describe the policy outcomes he desired. Reed argues that this was because Reagan “developed a few beliefs that worked quite well for him,” and using well-known pieces of popular culture to explain them allowed his staff to understand these beliefs fully and immediately.<sup>429</sup>

Reagan’s habit of communicating beliefs through stories and culture also reveals how he thought about issues. Books and movies provided a creative space for Reagan to work through his own beliefs and to measure against his own experiences. A favorite policy touchstone for Reagan was Marshal Kane from the movie *High Noon*.<sup>430</sup> In the movie, Kane opts to defend from a recently released group of bandits. Despite his stature as a popular figure and his years protecting the town, no one rises to Kane’s calls to fight an obvious evil. Instead, the townspeople encourage him to leave, and even blame him for the oncoming violence. Rather than flee, Kane remains, and with the help of his new wife, defeats the bandits before dropping his star in the dust and riding away from the ungrateful townspeople.

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<sup>429</sup> Thomas Reed, *The Reagan Enigma, 1964-1980* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2014), 248.

<sup>430</sup> Thomas Reed interview with the author

For Reagan's staff, a reference to Kane was a "code."<sup>431</sup> It meant that the President wanted to "do what's right; deal with the risks; leave the recognition for others."<sup>432</sup> Reagan saw the US as the Marshal Kane of the Cold War. His experiences and reading into communism left him convinced that it was a moral evil, and a good man, or in this case a good nation, had no choice but to oppose and vanquish it. That many argued that the USSR and US were morally equivalent appalled him but also played into Reagan's sense of morality. His administration would stand alone against the bandits and after prevailing, would ride off into the sunset content that it had done the greatest good.

Reagan's view of *High Noon* partially explains his administration's actions in Central America. In 1979, the Sandinistas, a communist guerilla movement backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, overthrew the dictator of Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza Debayle. US aid to the Somoza Regime dated back to the 1930s, when Anastasio's grandfather Augusto Cesar Sandino used the US Marine-trained Nicaraguan National Guard to stage a coup. By the 1970s the regime was internationally known for its corruption, with some US columnists labeling Somoza as "the world's greediest dictator."<sup>433</sup> Somoza employed increasingly authoritarian and violent methods to defeat the Sandinista insurrection before eventually acceding to Sandanista demands to release prisoners and schedule free elections. The brutal murder of ABC correspondent Bill

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<sup>431</sup> *The Reagan Enigma*, 248

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>433</sup> Steven Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980*, (New York: Forum, 2001), 561.

Stewart by government forces forced a final suspension of US aid to Nicaragua and expedited the victory of the Sandinistas.<sup>434</sup>

Reagan largely refused to acknowledge US complicity in supporting the Somoza regime and could not empathize with why Nicaraguans may view the Sandinistas as a better option. He strongly criticized Carter's approach to the situation and viewed the situation as a repeat of Cuba.<sup>435</sup> Reagan feared a communist government in the country would serve as a beachhead, leading to an expansion of the ideology in the region and placing it on the borders of the US. In a speech, he argued that "Nicaragua is closer to Miami, New Orleans, San Antonio, Los Angeles, and Denver" than Washington DC.<sup>436</sup> The prominence of leftist movements in El Salvador, where communists took power in 1979, Guatemala, and Honduras seemed to confirm his fears.

Reagan believed Moscow backed communist movements throughout Latin America and as a result amalgamated the conflicts in the region as part of the broader Cold War. A State Department issue paper from January of 1981, identified that the USSR was aware of Reagan's concern over their involvement in the region and argued that while the Soviets would "not gratuitously undertake provocative actions" they would "probe...US tolerance of their political-military initiatives in the region."<sup>437</sup> The paper

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ronald Reagan to Earl Smith, 29 June 1979 in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 488.

<sup>436</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate Freedom, and the Making of History*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 257.

<sup>437</sup> "Issue Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research," 30 January 1981, in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1981-1989 volume III, Soviet Union January 1981-January 1983* edited by James Graham Wilson. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2016.

also concluded that the Soviets likely provided aid to communist insurgencies throughout the region.

One week later, Soviet support for communist insurgencies was the topic of a National Security Council meeting. During the meeting, Reagan continued his pre-election criticisms of Carter and argued that the administration need to “change the attitude of our diplomatic corps.”<sup>438</sup> He argued the US was too quick to “throw out our friends because they can’t pass the ‘saliva test’ on human rights.”<sup>439</sup> Reagan wanted to “see that stopped” and advocated for lending more support for regimes like Allende’s in Chile, without worrying about their domestic actions.<sup>440</sup>

Both popular opinion and the legislative branch disagreed. Congress passed a series of Boland Amendments which limited the ability of the administration to support the Contras, who operated out of Honduras and sought to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Charles Hill, an advisor to Secretary of State George Shultz, believe that congressional action prevented Reagan from having any leverage over Nicaragua.<sup>441</sup> He felt the action stemmed from a broader anti-war movement that existed not due to legitimate moral opposition, but rather from general anti-military and anti-American sentiment.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> “Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting,” 6 February 1981 in in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1981-1989 volume III, Soviet Union January 1981-January 1983* edited by James Graham Wilson. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2016.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Charles Hill, interview with author, telephone, West Point, NY, 3 April 2016.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.



Reagan believed the amendments originated due to an organized lobbying effort backed by the Sandinistas. Writing to a retired Marine general in 1985, Reagan argued that a “sophisticated lobbying job” that was a “well-funded operation” backed by the Sandinistas prevented the administration from acting as aggressively as it wanted to in the region.<sup>443</sup> He was not the only one to suspect illicit Nicaraguan activity behind the Boland Amendments. Prescott Bush Jr, the brother of Vice-President George Bush, wrote CIA Director William Casey in 1984 to ask that he investigate Connecticut Senator Chris Dodd. Bush believed that Dodd’s relationship with Bianca Jagger, ex-wife of Rolling Stone lead singer Mick Jagger was suspicious. He alleged Jagger “was trained in Cuba by the Cuban equivalent of the KGB” to work with the Sandinistas.<sup>444</sup> Dodd’s relationship with the human rights activist and actress explained “Dodd’s hand-ringing [sic] dovish attitude on the Salvadoran situation,” as Bush felt Jagger was the source of the “considerable amount of disinformation” he believed Dodd operated under.<sup>445</sup> Casey responded to Bush that the proposed operation was “somewhat out of our bailiwick” and referred him to FBI Director Bill Webster.<sup>446</sup> The conspiracy theories around the Boland Amendments ignored the real reasons for the restrictions. Congress acted out of fears of executive overreach leading to another Vietnam, the absence of viable partners in the

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<sup>443</sup> Reagan to LTG (RET) Victor Krulak, 11 March 1985, in *A Life in Letters*

<sup>444</sup> Prescott Bush Jr to William Casey, 5 April 1984, in The Personal Papers of William J Casey, Box 321, The Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> William Casey to Prescott Bush, 9 July 1984, in The Personal Papers of William J Casey, Box 321, The Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

region, and a sense that the administration exaggerated the nature of the communist threat.

Reagan agonized over how to bring down the Sandinistas. In an October 1981 diary entry, he referenced a meeting of the National Security Policy Group on the Caribbean and Central America that “left [him] with the most profound decision [he had] ever had to make.”<sup>447</sup> He described Central America as the “world’s next hotspot” and Nicaragua as “an armed camp supplied by Cuba and threatening a communist takeover” of the region.<sup>448</sup> He felt the amendments wrongly restrained the ability of the US to take actions he viewed as morally right and essential to the preservation and expansion of freedom.

During a NSC meeting in November, worried that the US would be unable to “solve this problem with Congress and public opinion being” against direct intervention and aid.<sup>449</sup> He speculated about taking covert action and specifically requested the members of the NSC identify potential operations that “would be truly disabling and not just flea bites” against Nicaragua.<sup>450</sup> Reagan stated bluntly he did not want to back down or accept defeat on the issue.<sup>451</sup> His belief in the need to support anti-communist groups led to the creation of the Reagan Doctrine in 1985. During his State of the Union

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<sup>447</sup> Ronald Reagan, 16 October 1981, in *The Reagan Diaries* edited by Douglas Brinkley, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 44.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> “National Security Council Meeting: Strategy Toward Cuba and Central America,” 10 November 1981, thereaganfiles.com

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

Address, Reagan argued the US could “not break faith with those who are risking their lives... to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth.”<sup>452</sup> In both his public comments and internal meetings, Reagan identified support to the Contras as a moral necessity.

Reagan’s frequent reference to *High Noon* as an exemplar of policy and his declarations about the imperative of anti-Sandinista action sent a clear signal to many in the administration. John Poindexter, one of Reagan’s National Security Advisors, recalled the president “had very simple straightforward principles” which he used to provide policy guidance.<sup>453</sup> Reagan did not concern himself with specifics and “put great trust and confidence in his staff to care of the details.”<sup>454</sup> On the issue of the Contras, Poindexter and others on the NSC took Reagan’s statements as an imperative to act and illegally circumvented the Boland Amendments to provide aid to the rebel forces. Once publicly revealed, the Iran-Contra scandal threatened to bring down the entire administration.

While Reagan correctly viewed the Sandinista regime as an autocratic regime with strong ties to Cuba, he failed to acknowledge that the Contras were not morally better. The groups engaged in terrorist activity, committed human rights violations, and raised much of their funds through drug trafficking. They were not the white hat allies of a marshal or innocent villagers needing protection from a heroic figure. Similarly,

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<sup>452</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” Washington DC, 6 February 1985.

<sup>453</sup> John Poindexter, interview with the author, Skype, West Point, NY 19 August 2017.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

Reagan administration support for authoritarian and violent regimes like that of Rios Montt in Guatemala demonstrated a hypocrisy inherent in his rhetoric and value system.

Reagan was fundamentally unable to see past the Cold War to empathize with and understand the issues facing Latin Americans. As a result, the administration, believing it was acting as a moral and stabilizing force, did great harm. Reagan's use of westerns to guide policy in this area was also racially problematic given the genre's frequent villainous portrayal of indigenous and Spanish-speaking peoples.

The importance of *High Noon* to Reagan is somewhat ironic, given the environment surrounding its production. Carl Foreman, the screenwriter, expected that *High Noon* would be his last movie, due to his appearance before HUAC.<sup>455</sup> Marshal Kane's character represents those facing the blacklist and the bandits are the members of HUAC. The townspeople who refuse to help stand in for the broader Hollywood community. In Foreman's script, Reagan, as head of SAG, would not be Marshal Kane, but rather one of the cowardly townspeople who quietly abet the bandits. John Wayne took a starkly different view of the final scene of the movie than Reagan. He described the site of Gary Cooper dropping and stepping on a marshal's star as "the most un-American thing" he had ever seen, very different from Reagan's view of it as the western ideal.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 146.

<sup>456</sup> Whitfield, 149.

Reagan's misinterpretation, or ignorance, of the allegory Foreman inserted into *High Noon* shows the risk inherent in becoming over reliant on fiction as shorthand. It opened the possibility of misunderstanding between himself and his staff, as those he worked with could have an entirely different interpretation of the work referenced. While longtime advisors, like Thomas Reed, would know how Reagan interpreted the story, those without years of experience and personal knowledge had more difficulty. David Stockman, Reagan's Director of the Office of Management and Budget, expressed frustration with the constant use of the "presidential anecdote."<sup>457</sup> *The New York Times* review of Stockman's memoir, *The Triumph of Politics*, noted that Reagan's use of stories typically reflected that he had "totally misunderstood the preceding conversation."<sup>458</sup> Reagan's reluctance to engage in a nuanced policy discussions became a source of frustration to those outside his immediate circle, and the lack of clear guidance caused staffers to interpret his words and stories in the way most favorable to their project.

### **The Korean Frontier and Hills to Die On: Reagan and Heroic Sacrifice**

Another aspect of westerns that Reagan demonstrated a fondness for was the heroic last stand. Many of the moments he referenced from these novels involved

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<sup>457</sup> David Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics: How the Reagan Revolution Failed*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 319.

<sup>458</sup> Michael Kinsley, "In the Land of the Magic Asterisk," *The New York Times*, 11 May 1986.

cavalrymen dying heroically and exhorting their brethren to greater heights. When addressing cadets at the United State Military Academy in 1981, Reagan referenced a story by James Warner Bellah. Although he was most famous for his work as screenwriter of the John Wayne films *Rio Grande*, *Fort Apache*, and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, Bellah also worked with Reagan on a project entitled *Battle Mountain* and wrote an episode of *General Electric Theater*.<sup>459</sup> In addition to his work in Hollywood, Bellah also found significant success writing western novels.

In his speech to the cadets, Reagan referred to Bellah as “our Rudyard Kipling because of his stories of our Army on the frontier.”<sup>460</sup> The characterization of the post-Civil War era in this light matches Reagan’s autobiographical musing that the period was America’s version of Kipling’s romanticized British Empire. In his speech, Reagan drew on Bellah’s tale of a dying commander who passes his command to a subordinate. As he hands command over in “a poignant scene,” the dying man tells his subordinate to be prepared to “do the nasty job that has to be done...or forever after there will be the taste of ashes in your mouth.”<sup>461</sup> Reagan equated the fictional passing of command to the “torch of leadership” that the graduating cadets were receiving.<sup>462</sup> In linking the two, the president sought to impart the same morality he took from westerns to the new officers.

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<sup>459</sup> Hedda Hopper, “Looking at Hollywood: An Empty Camera Slices Ham Off an Egotistical Film Actor,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 8, 1953.

“Lash of Fear,” *General Electric Theater*, NBC, October 16, 1955.

<sup>460</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address at the Commencement Exercises at the United States Military Academy,” 27 May 1981.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*

He also sought to link the new officers to the British Army of the late-1800s. As a boy, Reagan's mother introduced him to the poetry of Kipling, which he took a strong liking too. "If," Kipling's paean to British values, became Reagan's favorite.<sup>463</sup> The poem captured the ethic that Reagan would later find romantic and appealing in westerns. In "If," Kipling offered advice on how to not only win "the Earth and everything in it," but also how to "be a Man."<sup>464</sup> He exhorts the reader to keep confidence in themselves and their actions, even "when all men doubt you," to do what is right regardless of the cost and perception of others.<sup>465</sup> Reagan wanted the graduates of West Point to adopt the frontier mentality of Kipling and Bellah, believing that confidence in themselves and their code would help them in their career and to serve in confusing and treacherous environments.

Intention and action were critical to Kipling. His poems are frequently bittersweet, showing British soldiers in impossible positions, but praising their willingness to do what they have to do. He extended this sentiment to Americans. In "The White Man's Burden," Kipling argued that the US should venture into the world and take on colonies even though it would only yield "the blame of those ye better, the hate of those ye guard," and in all likelihood, "sloth and heathen folly" would bring the endeavors to failure.<sup>466</sup> However, doing so would end America's childish days" and

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<sup>463</sup> "Reagan's Country" July 2012, ReaganFoundation.org accessed 07JUL17.

<sup>464</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "If"

<sup>465</sup> Kipling, "If"

<sup>466</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden: Or the United States in the Philippines"

prove the nation's readiness to assume a role as a great power.<sup>467</sup> For Kipling, it was more important to do what was expected than succeed. The honor was in the attempt. The poet's descriptions of British soldiers valiantly struggling on the frontier of the empire captured Reagan's imagination in the same way Burroughs' John Carter stories did. He could easily substitute British infantry in Afghanistan or the Sudan with US cavalymen fighting on the plains. Poems like "Gunga Din" and "Fuzzy Wuzzy" entranced him with their mix of heroic sacrifice, respect for foes, and defending civilization.

Reagan enjoyed this, though likely missed the bittersweet tone of much of Kipling's work. He clearly expected honorable attempts to yield positive results in a way that Kipling did not. In a speech to administration officials in 1988, Reagan noted that as he prepared to leave office he felt "that what Kipling said of another time and place [was] true today for America."<sup>468</sup> The nation stood "at the opening verse of the opening page of the chapter of endless possibilities."<sup>469</sup> However, here he was taking a quote from Kipling somewhat out of context. The poet was not referring to the British Empire, but rather to airplanes.<sup>470</sup> The romantic way Reagan viewed Kipling's work only captures a part of the author's intent but spoke to the how Reagan saw the role of America. He, in

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Remarks to Administration Officials on Domestic Policy" 13 December 1988, Washington DC.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> "Airisms From the Four Winds" *Flight*, 20 Jan 1921.



many ways, embraced the “civilizing” mission that Kipling charged the US with in “The White Man’s Burden” as the natural and rightful job of Americans.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt argued that Kipling was the “author of imperialist legend” whose work had little to do with the “realities of British Imperialism.”<sup>471</sup> She accuses Kipling of knowingly engaging in “hypocrisy or racism” in propagating the “White Man’s Burden” and that, “only those who had never been able to outgrow their boyhood ideals” would take him seriously.<sup>472</sup> The result was the infantilization and preservation of western ideals.<sup>473</sup> Reagan did have difficulty escaping his boyhood values, though the critique that this was infantile is perhaps unfair. He did reappraise throughout his life but consistently arrived at the same conclusion. Part of the reason for this is that the works of Bellah, L’Amour, and others owe a large debt to Burroughs and Kipling and speak to the same ideas. Reagan’s narrow selection of readings led to affirmation bias. The reaffirmation of his own experience and thoughts led him to continue to view Americans in a consistent way, and as a result, he maintained an unchanging view of what the right actions of a man were.

The narrow reading also led to unconscious identification with the racial undertones of Kipling, Burroughs, and westerns. Typically, the works portrayed non-whites as villains or simple victims who required rescue. A common thread between Burroughs’ Barsoom, Kipling’s India, and the American West was that the protagonists

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<sup>471</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1951), 208-09.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, 208, 211.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

engaged in a “civilizing” mission, often directly against the desires of indigenous peoples. However, the stories’ heroes were confident in their code and believed the local peoples would eventually be grateful for the intervention and development. They effectively suppressed local agency in the name of ideology.

Reagan displayed a similar tendency when engaging in foreign policy outside of Europe and the Soviet Union. In dealing with Soviet Union, Reagan’s policy and rhetoric displayed a subtle understanding and nuance that was absent in his administration’s approach to Latin America and Africa. Reagan’s actions with regard to apartheid regimes in southern Africa demonstrated an embrace of the “White Man’s Burden” rhetoric and a hypocritical denial of freedom in the name of broader Cold War objectives. In his syndicated newspaper column, Reagan frequently raided the issue of apartheid in Rhodesia and South Africa. He consistently advocated for movement towards majority rule but criticized “high voltage rhetoric by the left” and their demands for immediate transition.<sup>474</sup>

Reagan was accurate in his belief that the ZANU-PF of Rhodesia and ANC of South Africa had ties to communism and the Soviet Union, but wrong about the extent of those ties and the popularity of the movements. In a 1977 radio broadcast, Reagan argued that Robert Mugabe, the leader of the ZANU-PF, could not win an election and had “no substantial following among black Rhodesians.”<sup>475</sup> He used his syndicated

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<sup>474</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Rhodesia and Majority Rule,” 4 March 1977, Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 9, The Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

<sup>475</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Reprint of a Radio Program Entitled Rhodesia,” Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 9, The Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

column to continue the attack, alleging Mugabe and his party rejected “all conciliatory moves by the Ian Smith government” on orders from Moscow.<sup>476</sup> The attack greatly overstated the relationship between the Soviet Union and Mugabe and failed to recognize why black nationalist parties would rightly doubt Smith’s intention and dedication to giving up power. Reagan was correct in his belief that Mugabe cared only about personal power, as after the elections Mugabe ruled until 2017 and led an autocratic, corrupt, and violent regime. However, his misreading of the influence of the Soviet Union on the region led him to favor a gradualist approach that would have extended the life of the racist and autocratic rule of Smith.

As president, Reagan reacted in a similar fashion with regards to South Africa. He called Bishop Desmond Tutu “naïve” for requesting the US suspend aide to the apartheid state.<sup>477</sup> In a letter to South African President Pieter Botha, Reagan pushed the leader to implement change but also asserted the country “must not become a playing field for Soviet ambitions.”<sup>478</sup> The letter struck a sympathetic tone and Reagan promised to do more to publicly support Botha and publicly credit him with moving towards reform. Reagan’s words indicate a willingness of to allow Cold War priorities to take precedent over individual freedom in a region on the periphery of the conflict.

In 1986, Reagan addressed the nation and attempted to prevent Congress from passing sanctions on South Africa. While acknowledging that South Africa fell “terribly

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<sup>476</sup> “Rhodesia and Majority Rule.”

<sup>477</sup> Ronald Reagan, “December 7, 1984,” in *The Reagan Diaries*

<sup>478</sup> Ronald Reagan to Pieter Botha, 4 January 1986, The Margaret Thatcher Foundation

short on the scales of economic and social justice,” Reagan argued that imposing sanctions would play into the interests of the Soviet Union.<sup>479</sup> He expressed fears that immediate transition or revolutionary violence would lead to a communist government and give the Soviets access to “vital minerals... for which the West has no other secure source of supply.”<sup>480</sup> Reagan’s efforts failed, and Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 over his veto. Republicans held the majority in the Senate at the time, indicating Reagan was out of step with his own party on the issue.

Reagan’s language and actions regarding southern Africa indicate an acceptance of “White Man’s Burden.” He believed in individual freedom for the people of the region, but only on a timeline dictated by US success in the Cold War. Black South Africans and Rhodesians would need to delay exercising their rights until the US completed its global mission of civilization. Reagan felt patience and sacrifice would lead to stability and eventually gratitude on the part of Africans towards the US.

Sacrifice was a frequent theme of Reagan’s speeches. He often used stories that ended in death. The doomed B-17 from his addresses at the Medal of Honor Society in 1983 and at the 1951 commencement of William Woods College offer examples of this. Soldier’s deaths were also a theme of his own writing as a young man. A short story he wrote entitled “Killed in Action,” ends with the death of a World War I veteran. The story focuses on an exchange between two men, David Bering the doomed man, and

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<sup>479</sup> Ronald Reagan, “South Africa and Apartheid,” Washington DC, 23 July 1986

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

James Edward, another soldier. Edward speaks ill of the war and its purpose, while Bering insists the cause is just and describes the future he put on hold to fight. Upon learning that Bering delayed finishing his degree at Harvard and marrying his hometown sweetheart, Edward is moved by “the talk of sacrifice and glory” but curses that the world demands such sacrifice.<sup>481</sup>

Combat erupts at the end of the conversation, and in the ensuing battle Bering saves Edward’s life before suffering a wound in a gas attack. Edward is unable to find Bering after the battle and hears nothing of him until reading about Bering’s death in a newspaper years later. In the intervening years, Bering became a tramp and died under the wheels of a train he was trying to board. Upon his death, no one claims his body, leading to his burial in a potter’s field. While the story ends tragically, Reagan’s writing puts the focus on the nobility of Bering’s sacrifice rather than the wasted potential and destruction of life. Edwards lives because of Bering, and is able to honor the life and sacrifice as a result. In Reagan’s telling, Bering’s actions are heroic and like a hero from a western, he needs no reward beyond the personal knowledge that he acted as a good man.<sup>482</sup>

While on the surface, it would seem odd for Reagan, who avoided conflict and disliked sad stories, to use and talk about military death as often as he did. However, he viewed those anecdotes of heroic sacrifice as happy endings. They were the fulfilment of

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<sup>481</sup> Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan*, (New York: Viking Press, 2001), 34.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*

the masculine ideal he gleaned from the works of Burroughs, Kipling and others. Dying in the name of the right cause, with honor preserved, was desirable and worthy of celebration in Reagan's eyes. It appealed to his romanticism and stems in part from his readings of science fiction, westerns, and other adventure stories. His frequent use of James Michener's *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* shows how Reagan viewed the members of the American military and the nobility of the last stand.

Michener's novella focuses on a carrier group in the Korean War with the mission of destroying a group of bridges critical to the efforts of the Chinese to support the war on the peninsula. The targets were in "a deadly combination of mountains and narrow passes and festering gun emplacements" which made destroying the bridges an exceptionally difficult mission.<sup>483</sup> Admiral George Tarrant, the task force commander, believes that the destruction of such a fortified target will not only hurt the supply lines of the Chinese, but also "convince the Reds we'll never stop... never give in... never weaken in our purpose."<sup>484</sup> The double blow to the communist's means and will would hasten American victory in the war.

Lt. Harry Brubaker, a fighter pilot and the primary protagonist, lacks the admiral's confidence. He was recalled to active service against his will, leaving behind a successful law practice, wife and two daughters in Denver. However, despite the coerced nature of his service, he performs superbly and is one of the top pilots in the squadron.

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<sup>483</sup> James Michener, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, (New York: Fawcett Books, 1952), 36.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*

While Brubaker does his job well, he still harbors resentment towards the American people, noting that “in Denver nobody even knew there was a war on.”<sup>485</sup> When questioned about why, despite regulations prohibiting it, he encouraged his wife to visit him on the upcoming shore leave in Japan, Brubaker argues that “she couldn’t take America anymore... we gave up our home, my job, the kids. Nobody else in Denver gave up anything.”<sup>486</sup>

Admiral Tarrant dislikes the excuse, referring to it as “rubbish,” and noting that “society is held together by the efforts... and sacrifices of only a few.”<sup>487</sup> However, Tarrant is fond of Brubaker, who reminds him of his sons who died in WWII, and allows Brubaker to avoid punishment and even makes a point to talk with Nancy Brubaker about what her husband does while on leave. The conversation with Tarrant prompts Nancy to discuss the war in detail with Harry and “whispered until dawn... talking of a war so terrible that for them it equaled any in history.”<sup>488</sup> By morning, they still can find “no explanation of why they had been chosen to bear the burden of war” and continue to express resentment for the apathy of Americans towards the Korean War.<sup>489</sup>

That morning the family goes to a bathhouse and while bathing nude are startled by a Japanese family that enters and disrobes as well. The initial awkwardness fades because of the warmth of the room and the openness of the Japanese and the two families

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid, 67.

socialize despite the language barrier. Watching the children, Harry reflects that in 1944 he “hated the Japanese and had fought valiantly against them” but over time “hatreds dissolved.”<sup>490</sup> The realization helped him understand a small piece of why he had to fight.

Upon returning from shore leave, Brubaker serves as the wingman to the squadron commander on a reconnaissance of the bridges. Seeing the defenses in person led to a rebirth of the fear he felt about the war. Only after a sleepless night, spent writing to Nancy and in the piston room of the carrier is Brubaker able to control his fear and embark on the mission. The squadron successfully destroys the bridges, but while engaging a secondary target Brubaker’s plane takes damage to its fuel tank forcing him to land behind enemy lines. Communist forces surge into the area and Brubaker dies in the resulting firefight. At the exact moment of his death, he thinks of his girls and then “understands in some fragmentary way the purpose of his being in Korea.”<sup>491</sup>

The news of Brubaker’s death shakes Tarrant, and he is unable to find the right words to write to Nancy. After challenging the squadron commander about the correctness of hitting a secondary target, and becoming convinced it was a good mission, Tarrant reflects on the men who serve under him. Watching another flight leave, he asks himself “why is America lucky enough to have such men” and wonders “where did we get such men” who were able to risk their lives for little recognition and without fully

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid, 123.



understanding what they were fighting for.<sup>492</sup> Michener's novella resonated strongly with Reagan, and Admiral Tarrant's closing question of "where did we get such men" became a staple of his speeches addressing service members.

In February of 1981, just a month after taking office, Reagan presented the Medal of Honor to Master Roy Benavidez in a ceremony at the Pentagon. Reagan intended the event to set a different tone in civil-military relations from that of the Carter administration. Harold Brown, Carter's Secretary of Defense, had planned to give the award in a quieter ceremony, without presidential involvement.<sup>493</sup> In elevating the profile of the presentation and by personally reading the citation, a presidential first, Reagan was seeking to bridge the divide between the military and broader population caused by the Vietnam War.

The event would show that "the American people as a whole... respected honored and appreciated" the military.<sup>494</sup> In his remarks he draws on Michener's book, which explored themes of the civil-military divide, and Reagan talks of how the author wrote "movingly of the heroes who fought in the Korean conflict."<sup>495</sup> Reagan then quotes Admiral Tarrant's question of "where did we get such men," and noted he "asked that same question when our POW's were returned from savage captivity in Vietnam."<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>493</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 52.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez" 24 Feb 1981, Arlington, VA.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

Reagan, unlike Tarrant, arrived at an answer. America got such men where it had “always found them, in our villages and towns, on our city streets, in our shops, and on our farms.”<sup>497</sup>

Reagan offered the same anecdote about Michener’s “commanding officer who thinks about self-sacrifice” during his remarks to the nation for Armed Forces Day in both 1981 and 1982. He also provided the same answer to Tarrant’s question in his 1982 remarks that he did at the ceremony honoring Benavidez.<sup>498</sup> During a 1983 ceremony to honor Hispanic Americans in the military, Reagan again used Michener’s words to speak to the “lonely and sometimes thankless life endured by those who wear their country’s uniform.”<sup>499</sup> That there are no Hispanic characters in *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* make it an odd reference for Reagan to employ, especially given that every other anecdote in the speech directly referenced Hispanics in the military. However, his use of the story in this context, despite its lack of diversity, showed how important he felt its message was and that the core moral was universally relatable.

It is unsurprising that Reagan felt drawn to *The Bridges of Toko-Ri*. Much like *Hondo*, it became a successful Hollywood film that starred a friend of Reagan’s, William Holden. Holden was the best man, and one of only two guests, at Reagan’s wedding to Nancy. However, despite the film, and Reagan’s personal connection to it, he always

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Statement on Armed Forces Day,” May 16, 1981, Washington DC.

Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Armed Forces Day,” May 15, 1982 Washington DC.

<sup>499</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at a White House Ceremony Honoring Hispanic Americans in the United States Armed Forces,” 16 September, 1983 Washington DC.

took care to cite Michener when introducing the story of Admiral Tarrant's lonely vigil. This speaks to Reagan's appreciation of the author, and Michener's role as a voice that strongly supported the US in the Cold War.

Historian Christina Klein argues in *Cold War Orientalism* that Michener "put his writing in service to the government."<sup>500</sup> He outspokenly supported US policy and served as a "paraphraser," who translated "Cold War rhetoric into popular narrative."<sup>501</sup> Michener's writing made the US Government's position in the Cold War readily understandable and brought it into the homes of millions of Americans, making him an invaluable resource for US leadership. While serving in the House of Representatives, Medal of Honor recipient Daniel Inouye argued that Michener was "one of our most effective anti-Communist weapons in the worldwide struggle."<sup>502</sup> His writing had, in the eyes of the future senator, made many parts of Asia immune to the danger of Communism. Michener did this not only through his fiction, with novellas like *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, but also through his work as a journalist.

Michener served as a war correspondent during the Korean War and his dispatches typically chronicled the heroism and struggle of the military personnel in general, and the Navy in particular. One 1952 dispatch told his readers about the exploits of Commander Paul Gray, a Navy pilot with the call sign "Bald Eagle." Describing Gray as "completely bald, handsome, and apparently without fear," Michener recounts how the

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<sup>500</sup> Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 125.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>502</sup> Daniel Inouye, "James A. Michener," *Congressional Record-House*, September 17, 1962

pilot had been shot down three times and forced to bail out into the ocean, “where exposure kills a man in less than 20 minutes.”<sup>503</sup> Admiral Perry, the commander of the task force Gray serves in, decides to ground the pilot, noting no man was “required to risk his life more than four times in a row.”<sup>504</sup> However, before Gray gets word of his grounding he departed on another mission where he was shot down for a fourth time. Despite this, he still demanded to return to the *Essex* hoping to fly again, but Michener noted “from now on paper work” would comprise the commander’s responsibilities.<sup>505</sup>

Michener also depicted the new technology employed by the US military in its wars. His article about the B-52 introduced the venerable platform to the American public for the first time.<sup>506</sup> In *Toko-Ri* he describes the latest jet fighters in poetic terms. The “singing beauty of the jet” allows it to speed “almost silently” and as a result cheat death by flying in “the vast upper reaches of the world.”<sup>507</sup> This technology turns the war-torn landscape of Korea into something else, as the ability of Brubaker to defeat the “savage, cheated mountains” containing the bridges lets him look on Korea “with a kindlier eye.”<sup>508</sup> The jet puts him beyond the war, giving the illusion, later shattered, that it cannot touch him.

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<sup>503</sup> James Michener, “Bald Eagle of the Essex has Wings Clipped: Four Narrow Escapes are Called Enough,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 Feb 1952.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>506</sup> Klein, 125.

<sup>507</sup> *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, 75

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

The depiction of helicopters in Michener's journalism and fiction also builds a sense of American power and inevitability. Commander Gray was rescued from the grip of frozen waters on five occasions to fly again. The character of Mike Forney in *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, wears a Kelly-green scarf and hat as he flies search and rescue missions, allowing the hypothermic pilots to put a human face to the marvel of technology coming to save them. Michener combined advanced technology with American character to showcase the "powerful assembly" that was a carrier group.<sup>509</sup> In doing so, he sought to build in Americans minds a sense that with the right men and technology, the United States could do anything.

Michener's approach helped Reagan expand his view of American power and capability. The character of Brubaker fit into the mold of a cowboy protagonist, who does the right thing for its own sake regardless of consequence. After flying the reconnaissance mission, Brubaker receives several opportunities to ground himself and not fly against the bridges. He chooses not to because while in the Navy, you "could weasel out at any time, but within the essence of your conscience lived the memory of other men no less afraid" who would still carry out the mission.<sup>510</sup> This sentiment is the same uttered by Bellah's fallen cavalryman and provided a tangible link for Reagan between modern servicemen, and those of his idealized frontier.

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, 82

Michener evoked the works of Kipling and the authors of westerns by portraying those serving in the American military as a small, noble group sacrificing themselves in the name of civilization. Tarrant explicitly argues in *Bridges at Toko-Ri*, that it is the efforts and sacrifices of the few that hold together society. The world, according to Tarrant, depends on “the voluntary men.”<sup>511</sup> The use of the term “voluntary” is telling, given the widespread conscription of the Korean War, and the fact that Brubaker is a conscript of sorts in the novel. Michener used the idea of “voluntary men” to describe an expectation of behavior and the sense that being a man was more than biology. It required honor as well, which Michener, through Tarrant, defined that as the willingness to sacrifice in an unnecessary but inevitable war.<sup>512</sup> This also evokes Kipling’s “If,” where the poet tells the reader that if he can achieve a seemingly impossible list of things “you’ll be a Man, my son.”<sup>513</sup> The capitalization of “Man” in the poem adds an emphasis, implying that manhood stems from action rather than biology and age.

The role of women in Michener’s view was to define civilization. Again, through Tarrant, he noted a man fought to defend civilization, which was “composed mainly of things that women and children want.”<sup>514</sup> Women were “invariably right,” even though it was “bright, lovely” women who wanted to end the war.<sup>515</sup> However, they would also be responsible for goading their husbands into fighting for freedom, and thus defined peace

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid, 58

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Kipling, “If”

<sup>514</sup> *Toko-Ri*, 52

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, 51.

as “no more war... but no humiliation” as would come from an unjust peace or occupation.<sup>516</sup> The portrayal of men’s and women’s roles in this manner matches the works of Kipling, Burroughs, and others Reagan read in the consistent portrayal of women as the embodiment of civilization. They also shared the notion that the role of a true man was to fight and sacrifice, even if the threat was obtuse, distant, or unclear.

Much of Reagan’s 1952 commencement address at William Woods College could as easily come from Michener. Addressing the all-female graduating class in Fulton, Missouri, site of Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech,” Reagan lauded the heroism of soldiers fighting in Korea. He told the women that “the boys your age [were] tonight standing...in Korea” and General Ridgway “spoke of their courage” recently when Ridgway took over the role of Supreme Allied Commander of NATO from Dwight Eisenhower.<sup>517</sup> While it was likely there were boys the girl’s age in Fulton, it was those in Korea that the graduating class “was going to marry” and “teach, and heal, and mother” the sons of.<sup>518</sup> This is because, those serving were Michener’s “voluntary men” who were sacrificing for civilization. The women in the audience could help “push back against the darkness” as well, though through birthing and raising sons of those men rather than dying for a cause.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>517</sup> Reagan, Ronald. “Commencement Address at William Woods College” in *Echoes From the Woods*, June 1952. Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

In the speech, Reagan also noted that many at the time were decrying the “momism” that led to a high number of men who “have been unable or unwilling to face the test of war in behalf of their country.”<sup>520</sup> He responds by telling a series of anecdotes about men who met the call and died doing so. The audience could combat the bad sort of “momism” by meeting their own feminine responsibilities to choose men who had fought and support them in their fight. This debate reflected in part the same civil-military discord reflected by Michener when he detailed how most in the US avoided talking about the Korean War even as men died on their behalf.

The civil-military relationship appeared with increasing frequency in books during the late 1940s and early 1950s, in large part due to the vast expansion of both the military and the US role in the world. Michener’s work stands with classic political science texts like Samuel Huntington’s 1957 work *The Soldier and the State* and science fiction like Robert Heinlein’s 1959 *Starship Troopers* in debating what service meant and what the role of the military was in safeguarding a free society. It is likely Reagan read both while traveling via train to General Electric plants and found himself in agreement with the need to defend civilization and utilize “objective control” which grants significant autonomy to the military.

Reagan found ideas of voluntary sacrifice noble as evidenced by his support of the All-Volunteer Force. Bacevich argues in *The New American Militarism* that Reagan’s vocal and consistent support for it reflected his sense that those who serving

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid.



were patriots, heroes, idealists.<sup>521</sup> He viewed the issue as a moral one. Amid calls to reinstate the draft, Regan wrote to Senator Hatfield that “only in the most severe national emergency [did] the government had a claim to the mandatory service of its young.”<sup>522</sup> Historian H.W. Brands notes Reagan made similar statements at the height of the Vietnam War. Speaking on an ABC television show, *Issues and Answers*, Reagan admitted he “questioned the whole business of the draft” and feared it would make the “uniform a symbol of servitude.”<sup>523</sup> While he believed in the justness of the call he felt the US government had the responsibility to make service desirable through financial and moral compensation.

In a 1979 article entitled “Do Your Kids Belong to Uncle Sam,” Reagan wrote against restoring the draft or establishing a program of universal service. He noted that American service members were “experts” in “understanding the cause and effects of inflation” due to the paucity of their pay.<sup>524</sup> Increasing pay and benefits would draw people into the military. Increased public regard for the military would have a similar effect. Bacevich notes Reagan’s language about the military established a “new standard of civic responsibility” by encouraging the public to speak positively about the military.<sup>525</sup> This undemanding standard would not “entail sacrifice on the part of the

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<sup>521</sup> Bacevich, 108.

<sup>522</sup> Ronald Reagan to Mark Hatfield, 5 May 1980, Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 3, The Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>523</sup> H.W. Brands, *Reagan: The Life*, (New York: Doubleday, 2015), 154.

<sup>524</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Do Your Kids Belong to Uncle Sam?” 13 February 1979 Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, Box 9, The Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>525</sup> Bacevich, 108.

average American,” but did create a public environment favorable to the building and employment of military strength.<sup>526</sup> The expansion of the rhetoric of “supporting the troops” did much to restore confidence in the military after the prominent failures of the 1970s, but also simplified how Americans interacted with their armed forces. The shift to the all-volunteer force and forced patriotic rhetoric excused Americans from thinking critically about the military’s role in society and the use of American force throughout the world. Reagan set a precedent future administrations built upon with detrimental effects to the civil-military relationship and US foreign policy.

The ability of authors like Michener and Heinlein to put theoretical concepts into narrative form helped Reagan to both understand them and to project his own experiences and beliefs onto a larger stage. Reagan felt a kinship with Kipling’s soldiers, Bellah’s cavalymen, L’Amour’s cowboys, and Michener’s pilots because of his own service. In the author’s work, he saw that the principles he believed in were universal and timeless. He believed the same core values linked the frontiers of India, the American West, and Korea and indelibly connected those who served on the frontier despite the passage of time. In each case, they were a small band and the fate of the world rested upon them doing the “right thing.” To Reagan, the willingness of these men to do so, with what he viewed as insufficient reward, reflected the strength of western civilization; the ability to raise men who will sacrifice everything for other’s sake. His reading of fiction, solidified this personal belief into one of the core components of his political message

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

## Creative Spaces and Projection

Much as he did with Whitaker Chambers and Louis L'Amour, Reagan took time in 1983 to honor James Michener accomplishments. He could not award the writer the Presidential Medal of Freedom, since Gerald Ford had done so before leaving office in 1977.<sup>527</sup> Instead, Reagan proposed the establishment of new medal, modeled on the National Science Medal, to honor both those who create art but also those who support it financially.<sup>528</sup> Michener received recognition for his grants to the Iowa Writers Workshop hosted by the University of Iowa, the same workshop which helped propel Kurt Vonnegut to fame.<sup>529</sup>

In his remarks at the luncheon, Reagan spoke of why arts and humanities were worthy of honoring. He argued that they “teach us who we are and what we can be,” in addition to providing “the core of culture” and “the foundation” from which the US reaches out to the world.<sup>530</sup> These comments captured what books meant to Reagan. In a period that saw his political allegiances shift and then harden, the printed words of others played an essential role in both affirming Reagan’s own experience and beliefs and provided a foundation to engage with others in a broader, but meaningful way.

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<sup>527</sup> Gerald Ford, “Remarks Upon Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom” 10 January 1977, Washington DC.

<sup>528</sup> Irvin Molotsky, “Reagan Calls for Medal for Leaders in the Arts,” *New York Times* 18 May 1983.

<sup>529</sup> There is some irony that Michener’s grants would help launch Vonnegut as a writer, given that Vonnegut often took a fatalist view of American power and became one of the most-prominent anti-war authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>530</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at a Luncheon for Recipients of the National Medal of Arts” 18 June 1987.

Reagan experienced communist infiltration of unions and advocacy groups in the late 1940s. He came to view them as subversives, who sought to restrict free speech and expression, operate against the will of the majority, and prone to violence when events turned against them. The words of Chambers and Koestler showed him that his experiences, far from being outliers, were the norm for communist movements. They demonstrated the scale of the problem in a way that Reagan did not necessarily grasp before, helping to shift his rhetoric from the generic anti-communism expected of a Hollywood actor in 1950 to that of existential struggle seen in his 1952 commencement address and then throughout his political career.

Chambers also built upon Reagan's childhood reading of Harold Bell Wright. Though Chambers credits *Les Miserables* the actions of the Bishop in the book are indistinguishable from Reagan's sense of the "practical" Christianity in *That Printer of Udell's*. That acts based Christianity sparked Chambers to leave communism, taught Reagan that faith could be more than the rallying point suggested by the civic religion of the 1950s. It could be a powerful weapon to rollback communism. It underpinned not only the harsh rhetoric of his "Evil Empire" speech, and pursuit of closer relations with Vatican, but also his constant pressure on smaller issues like the evangelicals in the US embassy basement that the Soviets continually denied exit visas too.

Fiction in the 1950s also reinforced and expanded Reagan's sense of honor and masculinity. Raised on the works of Kipling and Burroughs, he maintained a romantic sense about what self-denial and sacrifice meant. The works of Michener and L'Amour

built upon this foundation by continuing to present Reagan with heroes who consistently chose the obvious right despite the cost to themselves. For him, this meant the need to talk about sacrifice in the context of the Cold War as he viewed the US as clearly morally superior to the USSR and therefore on the side of right. This also meant that any policy which contributed to the downfall of the Soviet Union was a worthy one, regardless of its popularity. Those it aided would recognize afterward, perhaps after the US had departed, and realize they were better off.

Stories helped Reagan understand both what he was, and what he could be. They afforded the creative space for him to think about complex ideas and apply his limited experience to a greater stage. They also served as the foundation for his communication. The use of parables, jokes, and other anecdotes were his method of sharing his vision. At its best, such as with the Soviet Union, this led to a common understanding and an administration that could act in flexible, unexpected ways. Other times, such as in Nicaragua, it led to confusion and the creation of policy with disastrous consequences for the people of the region and broader US goals.

Popular culture in the 1950s was an essential part of forging Reagan's political identity. Reagan was conscious of the influence of stories and culture, a sentiment expressed throughout his presidency. However, the cultural environment shifted drastically by the end of the 50s, towards an embrace of moral equivalency in the Cold War. This shift deeply concerned Reagan, as it ran counter to his political ideology and

left him worried that it would turn a generation away from fighting communism at a critical moment.

## **Chapter 4 Up From the Depths: The Means and the Will**

Looking out on the assembled cadets of West Point, Reagan told the future officers the United States was amid a great revival. The “hunger on the part of the people to once again be proud of America” produced a “new spirit” and ended “the era of self-doubt.”<sup>531</sup> Reagan viewed his audience as a critical part of this spirit. The cadets and the military in general were the “prime ingredient” ensuring the freedom of Americans. Drawing on West Point’s history, Reagan contrasted his audience with the great chain used during the academy’s time as a Revolutionary War fortification. He told the cadets that as the original chain existed to deny British use of the Hudson, they were part of a “chain holding back an evil force that would extinguish the light we’ve been tending for 6,000 years.”<sup>532</sup>

However, Reagan contended that in recent years the military lacked both the public regard and compensation it deserved. He catalogued the ills plaguing America’s armed forces, including low pay, the diminishment of the GI Bill, and “widespread lack of respect for the uniform” due to the Vietnam War.<sup>533</sup> Too often “young men and women volunteered for duty” only to find that the only reward they could expect was “patriotism,” and even in that “they were shortchanged.”<sup>534</sup> Reagan felt those in uniform

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<sup>531</sup> Ronald Reagan “Address at the Commencement Exercises of the United States Military Academy,” West Point, NY May 27, 1981.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> *ibid*

deserved better and supporting them was essential to maintaining America's role in the world.

He listed with pride the accomplishments of his young administration. In just five months they raised pay, established a task force to expand GI Bill benefits, and made more funds available for readiness and new equipment. These changes put the military and its personnel on "better than a bare subsistence level."<sup>535</sup> Reagan argued that the new policies already had contributed to strengthening the military. He pointed to increasing rates of enlistments and reenlistments, and more importantly, saw a "decided rise in quality" of those entering service.<sup>536</sup> While his administration's efforts explained part of this, Reagan also believed Americans had "rediscovered how much there is to love in this blessed land."<sup>537</sup> The American people were rejecting the arguments of moral equivalency and viewing their country in a favorable light.

Reagan charged his audience to go forth and "restore the sense of pride our men and women [were] entitled to have in wearing the uniform."<sup>538</sup> Restoring military honor was a key objective for Reagan in his first term, and his exhortation to the cadets captured the message he wanted the audience to take away from the speech. He believed that without widespread public regard for the military, it would be impossible for America's armed forces to accomplish his administration's ambitious Cold War goals. In

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.



his first months in office, Reagan took every opportunity to shore up public support for the military, and his speech at West Point offered a highly visible way to do this. He noted in his diary there were few things “more stirring than a West Point graduation,” and clearly hoped the pride he felt as he “shook 900 hands” in the graduating class would extend to the nation.<sup>539</sup>

Prior to the speech, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger wrote to Reagan noting it must “increase the appreciation and honor the American people feel for the uniformed services.”<sup>540</sup> The topic was one the two had “discussed before,” as both men worried about the generally negative public perception of the military that existed as they took office.<sup>541</sup> Weinberger suggested Reagan use part of his speech to encourage the American public to do as their predecessors did during the Civil War and the World Wars and express “deep appreciation and honor” for the military in every way they could.<sup>542</sup> He felt Americans must to augment service member’s pay with “psychic income” in the form of earnest public appreciation.<sup>543</sup>

While Reagan and his speechwriters opted not to use Weinberger’s language, the President shared his Secretary of Defense’s beliefs. Both men felt that “the United States lacked the will to regain the military strength necessary” to achieve their policy

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<sup>539</sup> Ronald Reagan, “27 May 1981,” *The Reagan Diaries Volume 1*, edited by Douglass Brinkley, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007)

<sup>540</sup> Memorandum, Caspar Weinberger to Ronald Reagan, April 17, 1981, Folder: “West Point Speech and Back Up File (1)”, Box 8 Speechwriting, White House Office Of: Research Office, 1981-1989, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

goals.<sup>544</sup> Historian Gail Yoshitani argues in *Reagan on War* that the administration entered office realizing they needed to build the “will and spirit” of Americans to meet the nation’s national security challenges.<sup>545</sup> Without it, they would be unable to increase the size, capability, and mission of the US military. Popular will was an essential component of national power, and Reagan’s rhetoric alone could reverse negative perceptions of the military and the Cold War. Popular culture mattered as well. The depiction of the military in books and film shaped the public’s will to support both the military and the administration’s foreign policy.

An early draft of Reagan’s West Point speech, established this link explicitly. It argued the “ingratitude and lack of respect shown to those in a military uniform was a national disgrace.”<sup>546</sup> In particular, “the film industry’s pandering to this anti-American and anti-military sentiment was reprehensible.”<sup>547</sup> In the margin, it listed *Coming Home*, *Deer Hunter*, and *Apocalypse Now* as examples. Each were best picture nominees at the Academy Awards and all three depicted the Vietnam War in a harshly negative light. The films depicted members of the military as mentally damaged and morally compromised. The passage did not make the final draft of Reagan’s speech due to concerns of senior White House staffers about the tone and antagonizing Hollywood needlessly.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon*, (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 15.

<sup>545</sup> Gail Yoshitani, *Reagan on War: A Reappraisal of the Weinberger Doctrine, 1980-1984*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 11.

<sup>546</sup> Draft of Reagan’s Commencement at West Point, Folder: “West Point Speech and Back Up File (1)”, Box 8 Speechwriting, White House Office Of: Research Office, 1981-1989, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Representative Dana Rohrabacher, interview with author, telephone, West Point, NY, 18 July 2017.

However, it still revealed how the White House viewed the contemporary cultural environment. The administration felt that Hollywood and television believed that the Cold War “was an exaggerated concoction of a president halfway between stupid and crazy.”<sup>549</sup> Reagan “felt personally about the movies,” given his own background.<sup>550</sup> He felt that over the course of the previous two decades, cultural portrayals of the military and the US government were unfairly negative. He wrote the producer of *Patton* in 1970, to praise the film for countering the “pernicious and constant degrading of the military.”<sup>551</sup> As president, Reagan hoped to reverse American’s belief in moral equivalency in the Cold War. In *Morning in America*, Gil Troy argues the administration merged politics and culture seeking to “resurrect the grandeur” the nation.<sup>552</sup> Restoring the grandeur of the nation required Americans to view those in uniform in a positive light. Reagan’s administration actively cultivated narratives favorable to the military. They wanted to ensure Americans routinely encountered depictions of the military that showed its people as the best the country had to offer and its capabilities as more than able to handle the gravest threat.

Major sporting events became one venue to build support. There was a long relationship between organized sports and military remembrance. Many the America’s largest and most famous sporting venues such as the Coliseum in Los Angeles and

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<sup>549</sup> Charles Hill, interview with author, telephone, West Point, NY, 3 April 2016.

<sup>550</sup> Rohrabacher interview

<sup>551</sup> Reagan to Frank McCarthy, 10 March 1970, in *A Life in Letters*, 151.

<sup>552</sup> Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11.

Soldier Field in Chicago also serve as memorials for soldiers killed in combat. College stadiums like Camp Randall in Madison and Darrel K. Royal Stadium in Austin incorporate monuments dedicated to service. Military leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Douglass MacArthur argued sports were part a masculine ideal that made better soldiers, an association that many Americans agreed with. The long-standing relationship between athletic competition and the military made it a good area for the Reagan administration to rebuild American's positive view of the military.

In September of 1982, a Reagan supporter and donor wrote Michael Deaver, the President's deputy chief of staff, with an idea to use NFL games as "an informal structure to promote patriotism."<sup>553</sup> The supporter suggested Reagan record a message of support that NFL teams could play at halftime of their games on Veteran's Day. The message should encourage "a standing ovation to the veterans," enticing the crowd to publicly and enthusiastically demonstrate support for the military.<sup>554</sup> Deaver liked the idea, but the NFL was engaged in a strike he feared tying the administration to the unpopularity of both the strike and the replacement players.<sup>555</sup> Instead, they would work with the NCAA and recorded a message for college football games. Millions of Americans heard the President proclaim veterans and those on active duty were "an elite group of men and

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<sup>553</sup> Letter, Ernest Marshall to Michael Deaver, September 3 1982. Folder: NCAA Football Halftime Address, Box 66, Speechwriting, White House Office of: Research Office, 1981-1989, Ronald Reagan Library

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Letter, Ernest Marshall to William Sadler, October 6, 1982, Folder: NCAA Football Halftime Address, Box 66, Speechwriting, White House Office of: Research Office, 1981-1989, Ronald Reagan Library

women” who even in times of peace keep the country “secure from foreign threats.”<sup>556</sup>

Seeking to destigmatize Vietnam, Reagan equated service there with that of veterans of the World Wars and Korea, stating all four conflicts made the US “safer and freer.”<sup>557</sup>

The lack of distinction about the causes, methods, and outcomes were an attempt by Reagan to construct belief in universal goodness of military service.

In addition, the military increasingly used sporting events to highlight new technology. The use of flyovers and displays outside stadiums helped build a belief in the superiority of American military technology and diminish doubts raised by military failures in the 1970s. Over time, these actions solidified links between sport and the military in many Americans minds and events such as Super Bowl XXV, played in the wake of Operation Desert Storm in 1991, became a “multilayered patriotic display.”<sup>558</sup> Americans increasingly had to cheer for both their favorite sports team and the US military at games. While in some ways this was a revival of a link exhibited during both World Wars, sporting events by the 1980s were bigger in size and cultural importance than in the past. The advent of television also expanded their reach, bringing military fueled spectacle into the homes of most Americans.

Reagan’s administration worked directly with authors who favored their policies. Allen Drury, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his 1959 novel *Advise and Consent*, enjoyed

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<sup>556</sup> “Presidential Taping: Salute to Veterans for NCAA Football Halftime November 8, 1982” Folder: NCAA Football Halftime Address, Box 66, Speechwriting, White House Office of: Research Office, 1981-1989, Ronald Reagan Library

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

<sup>558</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 252.

a close relationship with the administration. When published, the anti-communism and conservative bent of Drury's *Advise and Consent* stood in stark contrast with the emerging themes of popular culture. The book displayed Drury's "belief that American liberalism was actively abetting international communism," a theme that appealed to both Reagan and Weinberger.<sup>559</sup> Weinberger, moonlighting as a book reviewer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, glowingly reviewed it and Drury's other works.<sup>560</sup> After Reagan took office, the author sent the president one of his books, which Reagan happily reported helped him in "learning how to be president."<sup>561</sup> Reagan appointed Drury to two three-year terms on the National Council of Arts, which oversaw the National Endowment for Arts.<sup>562</sup> He hoped that the author would promote art favorable towards the administration. By 1984, Drury wanted to take a more active role.

He wrote Weinberger requesting a meeting to pitch his idea for a new novel.<sup>563</sup> Drury believed that the administration would want to know about the topic and seek to support it. Entitled *Pentagon*, it would show the "sickness in the building" caused by years of neglect.<sup>564</sup> Weinberger liked the idea and granted Drury's request to shadow

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<sup>559</sup> Thomas Mallon, "Advise and Consent at 50," *The New York Times*, 25 June 2009.

<sup>560</sup> William Hogan, "A Bookman's Notebook Clark Kerr Speaks on the University," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 October 1963.

<sup>561</sup> Ronald Reagan to Allen Drury, 15 July 1981, in *Ronald Reagan: A Life in Letters* ed Kiron Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, (New York: Free Press, 2003), 284.

<sup>562</sup> Phil Gailey and Warren Weaver, "Briefing: Weinberger's Faith," *The New York Times*, 23 August 1982.

<sup>563</sup> Allen Drury to Caspar Weinberger, January 5, 1984, Box 600, The Papers of Caspar Weinberger, The Library of Congress.

<sup>564</sup> Allen Drury, *Pentagon*, (New York: Doubleday, 1986), Afterword.

him for a day. He also arranged a special pass for the author providing over a month of access to the Pentagon.<sup>565</sup>

Released in 1986, the book received poor reviews and did not sell well. It also failed to capture the tone and themes the Reagan administration desired. The conclusion that the Pentagon suffered from a “fundamental weakness” that prevented the “greatest concentration of brains and ability in [the country] or anywhere,” did not fit with the positive messaging of the administration. Even worse to Reagan, Drury’s argument that “the Kremlin has two enormous advantages on its side—history’s greatest arsenal and the innate weakness of [the Pentagon]” were diametrically opposed to how he and his administration viewed the Cold War in 1986.<sup>566</sup> Despite the official support given to Drury as he wrote the novel, the administration ignored the book and did nothing to draw attention to it.

Even as Drury began research for *Pentagon*, another author was poised to assume Drury’s desired role as the Reagan administration’s favored author. In July of 1984, the Naval Press Institute released *The Hunt for Red October* the debut novel of Tom Clancy. Reagan’s love of the book, and its influence on him, helped make Clancy one of the best-known voices in national security.

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<sup>565</sup> Weinberger to Drury 9 February 1984 Box 600, The Papers of Caspar Weinberger, The Library of Congress.

Drury to Weinberger, 12 April 1984 Box 600, The Papers of Caspar Weinberger, The Library of Congress. Weinberger to Drury, 24 April 1984 Box 600, The Papers of Caspar Weinberger, The Library of Congress.

<sup>566</sup> *Pentagon*, 583.

## The Rise of Tom Clancy

Clancy was an unlikely person to become a prominent voice in national politics. He graduated from Loyola College in Baltimore with a major in English and minor in physics. Unable to join the military due to extremely poor vision, he instead began working with his wife at a small insurance agency in Owings, Maryland.<sup>567</sup> The agency's location between Annapolis and Washington, resulted in the firm having many naval officers as clients. Clancy's conversations with them helped further his interest in the Navy and build the technical knowledge his books would become famous for. He also learned about naval tactics and procedures through playing *Harpoon*, a tabletop miniature game designed by former naval officer Larry Bond. After purchasing and playing the game, Clancy wrote to Bond that "after digesting" the rules it would be easy to explain the concepts of modern naval warfare to anyone.<sup>568</sup>

Politically, Clancy was a lifelong Republican and strong supporter of Ronald Reagan. He requested a signed photo of Reagan through his Congressman, William Broomfield, shortly after Reagan took office. Broomfield sent the request to the White House along with a note that identified Clancy and another constituent as "faithful Republicans."<sup>569</sup> The White House rewarded Clancy's stalwart support with a photo

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<sup>567</sup> Author interview with Larry Bond and Chris Carlson, Springfield, Virginia, October 20, 2014.

<sup>568</sup> Tom Clancy to Larry Bond, February 19, 1982. Personal papers of Larry Bond.

<sup>569</sup> Representative William Broomfield to Max Friedersdorf March 17 1981. WHORM Subject File Public Relations PR 005-01 008386-018157 Box 37, Ronald Reagan Library.



inscribed to him and his wife, Wanda.<sup>570</sup> Clancy noted in a letter to a friend after the he had voted for Reagan four out of the five times he could, the only blemish a vote for George H.W. Bush in the 1980 primary.<sup>571</sup> He then asked for God’s forgiveness and ruefully acknowledged, “NOBODY’S perfect.”<sup>572</sup> It is unsurprising that his positive feelings for both Reagan and the military led him to intentionally integrate many of the President’s messages as he began work on *Hunt for Red October* in early 1982.

The plot centered on a Soviet submarine captain attempting to defect and deliver his new, advanced submarine to the US. Clancy drew on the *Storozhevoy* mutiny of 1975 to develop the idea.<sup>573</sup> In the mutiny, a Soviet political officer and group of enlisted men took over the ship, a destroyer, and planned to defect to Sweden. While they did gain control of the ship, Soviet aircraft disabled the ship’s rudder as it traversed the Baltic Sea preventing the defection. Soviet authorities tried and executed the leader of the revolt and handed down long jail sentences for the other mutineers.<sup>574</sup> Clancy adapted the real-life events slightly and changed the setting to a submarine, adding dramatic tension to the novelized mutiny. The blending of historical and contemporary events with increased

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<sup>570</sup> “PR 005-01 850327” WHORM Subject File Public Relations PR 005-01 008386-018157 Box 37, Ronald Reagan Public Library.

<sup>571</sup> Tom Clancy to Susan Richards, March 8 1985

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Interview with Larry Bond.

<sup>574</sup> Gregory Young, “Mutiny on the *Storozhevoy*: A Case Study on Dissent in the Soviet Navy” Naval Postgraduate School, March 1982, 29. The author later expanded the thesis into a book with co-author Nate Braden entitled *The Last Sentry: The True Story that Inspired the Hunt For Red October* published by the Naval Institute Press in 2013.

fictional stakes would become a hallmark of Clancy's books and a driver of their popularity.

As he wrote his first novel, Clancy entertained a grand vision for his future as a writer. He saw *The Hunt for Red October* as the middle book of a trilogy and created outlines for what would become *Patriot Games* and *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*.<sup>575</sup> By late 1982, he completed the draft of *Hunt*, the outlines, and early chapters of *Patriot Games*. In addition, he began work on outlines for two books that would stand apart from the Jack Ryan trilogy, *The Panache Procedure* and *The Pandora Process*.<sup>576</sup> The former would center on a Coast Guard cutter and the latter around a terrorist attack utilizing a nuclear weapon. Clancy later adapted plot elements from these outlines into *Clear and Present Danger* and *The Sum of All Fears*. That he completed all these drafts and outlines in a little over a year hinted at his future prolific output.

Clancy began his project without any publisher interest or personal knowledge of the industry. Instead of seeking a literary agent, he simply provided the draft manuscript unsolicited to the Naval Institute Press, a small publisher located on the grounds of the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. He selected them not due to their status in the publishing world, but because they published a letter in their journal, *Proceedings*, that Clancy hand delivered to the editor. This marked the first time anything Clancy wrote appeared in a publication, and the success of his informal approach encouraged

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<sup>575</sup> Clancy to Richards, 5 February 1983.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

him to try the same technique again.<sup>577</sup> The decision to provide the manuscript to the Naval Institute Press was odd, as they had never published original fiction before.

At the time, the publisher's best-known work was *The Bluejacket's Manual*.<sup>578</sup> The Navy provided a copy of the manual to every recruit since 1902. It also published previously out of print naval stories, and its journal, *Proceedings*, examined contemporary naval issues. Fortunately for Clancy, the board of directors had recently decided to publish new fiction, if it was "wet."<sup>579</sup> In order to defray the costs of publishing, they sold the paperback rights in advance. The rights sold to Berkley Books, a division of Putnam, for \$35,000, an amount Clancy's editor Deborah Grosvenor viewed as middling for a first-time author.<sup>580</sup>

*The Hunt for Red October* appeared on bookshelves in July of 1984, with most stock going to stores in Washington DC and New York City. When Clancy first began the project, he wrote a friend that "the odds of becoming the next Frederick Forsythe are...somewhere between merely exponential and astronomical-incredible."<sup>581</sup>

Mentioning, "Writers normally die poor," he stated that he would happily settle for a "book-jacket with [his] name on it."<sup>582</sup> Early sales of *Hunt* seemed to vindicate Clancy's belief. While the initial run of 16,000 copies sold out by November, interest in the book

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<sup>577</sup> Author interview with Deborah Grosvenor, Austin, Texas, November 11, 2014.

<sup>578</sup> Robert Andrews, "'Tugboat' Surprises the Battleships of New York Publishing Industry," *The Associated Press*, March 11, 1985.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>580</sup> Interview with Deborah Grosvenor

<sup>581</sup> Clancy to Richards 5 February 1983.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*

was only regional. It did well in DC, making the local bestseller list but generally failed to expand beyond that.<sup>583</sup>

The book received mixed reviews. *The Wall Street Journal* found that Clancy's work rewarded the reader "quite satisfactorily" in a thriller that was "great fun."<sup>584</sup> A reviewer for *The Los Angeles Times* was less effusive. The review, entitled "Adrift with Subplots," stated Clancy had a talent for making "arcane information of US and Soviet submarines approachable," but the "cardboard characters" left much to be desired.<sup>585</sup> Overall, the book was a success but six months after publication there was little to indicate it would launch a multi-media empire that would leave Clancy with an 82 million dollar estate at the time of his death thirty years later.<sup>586</sup>

### **Reagan and Clancy**

While traveling to visit the US ambassador to Argentina, Nancy Reynolds, who had served as Reagan's assistant for electronic media when he was governor, read a copy of *Hunt for Red October* she received as a gift from a DC reporter.<sup>587</sup> Reynolds knew of Reagan's love for books, the President told her previously that "if you have a book around, you never lack for friends," and realized that Clancy's novel was one that Reagan

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<sup>583</sup> Clancy to Richards 1 November 1984.

<sup>584</sup> John Alden, "Bookshelf: The Cold War at 50 Fathoms," *The Wall Street Journal* October 22, 1984.

<sup>585</sup> Richard Setlowe, "Adrift with Subplots," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1984.

<sup>586</sup> Scott Dance and Justin George, "Tom Clancy 82M Estate focus of tussle between widow, lawyer," *The Baltimore Sun*, September 18, 2014.

<sup>587</sup> Clancy to Richards, 5 Feb 1985.

would enjoy.<sup>588</sup> She gave a copy to Reagan as a Christmas gift, and he enthusiastically read a third of the book that day.<sup>589</sup> He continued reading it throughout the week, at one point confessing to his staff that he was tired at the meeting since he had been up until three in the morning reading *Hunt* the night before.<sup>590</sup>

He also began publicly praising the book. During a news conference, when asked what he was reading Reagan called the book “the perfect yarn” and later told *Time* that it was “unputdownable.”<sup>591</sup> His staffers realized that the book was something Reagan viewed in a special manner and began to read it as well. After the President praised it so fulsomely, Kenneth Adelman, one of the lead negotiators on arms control, decided to buy a copy and read it himself. As of January of 1985, the book remained relatively difficult to find though Adelman eventually located a copy which was misfiled as a non-fiction, technical work.<sup>592</sup>

The efforts that Reagan’s staff went to read the book showed their awareness of how fiction could influence him. It also implied Reagan praised more than the entertainment value of the book. Longtime staffers knew of Reagan’s tendency to use fiction as policy shorthand and their efforts to procure and read *Hunt* to some extent demonstrates an expectation on their part that the book could play a similar role as *High*

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<sup>588</sup> Thomas Reed, Interview with the author, Austin, Texas, 16 October 2014.

<sup>589</sup> Clancy to Richards, 5 Feb 1985.

<sup>590</sup> Kenneth Adelman, Interview with the author, Austin, Texas

<sup>591</sup> Interview with Deborah Grosvenor

Patricia Blake, “One of Their Subs is Missing: An Insurance Broker’s Novel has the White House Reading,” *Time*, March 4, 1985.

<sup>592</sup> Interview with Ken Adelman

*Noon and Witness*. The *Time* magazine profile of the book hinted at this and noted that Clancy's book impressed Reagan with its technical accuracy.<sup>593</sup> *The Hunt for Red October* provided a relatable narrative of arcane technical detail which likely increased its appeal to Reagan and would allow him to use it as a substitute for the sort of wonky, detailed language he disdained. Kenneth deGraffenreid, who served as Senior Director of Intelligence Programs for the NSC, reflected that reading Clancy reinforced "a lot of what we might assume was in Reagan's head."<sup>594</sup>

The endorsement from Reagan drew increased media attention to Clancy's book, leading to a spike in sales. Over the next two months, total sales surpassed 75,000, more than triple what it sold in the first six months on shelves.<sup>595</sup> A March 1985 profile in *Time* which noted that the Soviet Embassy "reportedly bought several copies, presumably for shipment to Moscow" added intrigue.<sup>596</sup> Over the next two weeks, Clancy's book would become a *New York Times* bestseller, and he would get the opportunity to visit the Oval Office to meet the man who helped put the book there.<sup>597</sup>

Clancy's visit to the Oval Office left him awestruck. He recalled the experience of stepping into it as being like Dorothy going from "the wrecked house into Munchkinland."<sup>598</sup> Reagan exceeded the author's expectations, he was "a Mensch" with

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<sup>593</sup> Blake, "One of Their Subs is Missing"

<sup>594</sup> Kenneth deGraffenreid, interview with the author, telephone, 5 September 2017.

<sup>595</sup> Clancy to Richards, 8-19 March 1985.

<sup>596</sup> Blake.

<sup>597</sup> Edwin McDowell, "Publishing: Doing Right by a Book," *New York Times* 22 March 1985.

<sup>598</sup> Clancy to Richards, 8-19 March 1985.

charisma an “order of magnitude” more than Clancy expected.<sup>599</sup> The President could “charm the fangs off a cobra” and his personality “envelopes you like a cloud.”<sup>600</sup> The two men discussed *Hunt for Red October* and Reagan asked how Clancy could get so many technical details right. Clancy demurred, insisting the characters were the hard part. Reagan asked about Clancy’s next book, and upon hearing it was about World War III, wanted to know who won. The author replied, “the good guys.”<sup>601</sup>

Reagan then went to a lunch with Henry Kissinger to discuss the death of Chernenko two days prior and what the ascension of Gorbachev meant for US-Soviet relations.<sup>602</sup> After meeting the President, Clancy was confident that Reagan would be able to charm “Garbage-ov” or failing that “Ronnie [could] probably drive him into the pavement.”<sup>603</sup> The meeting left both men confident they had read the other correctly. It further convinced Clancy that his work was valuable and that he needed to incorporate Reagan’s policy into it. He wrote Reagan afterwards, effusing that the meeting was one of three things “more important than monetary success to him.”<sup>604</sup> The other two were his son recognizing his picture on the dust jacket and receiving the twin dolphin badge of a submariner at the Pentagon. Clancy assured the President that “he would deem it a privilege” if he could “ever be of the slightest service” to him.<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, (New York; Harper, 2009), 435.

<sup>603</sup> Clancy to Richards, 8-19 March 1985

<sup>604</sup> Letter, Tom Clancy to Ronald Reagan, March 14, 1985, WHORM Subject File Public Relations PR 005-01 008386-018157 Box 37, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

Although he never expressed it to the author, Clancy did more than slightly serve the administration. Reagan was impressed with the writer's personality, identifying with Clancy's middle-class background, and pleased that the author depicted service members in the gallant way that Reagan saw them.<sup>606</sup> The President became a dedicated, lifelong fan and Clancy's books had a clear impact on the way he spoke about policy and developed his strategy.<sup>607</sup>

### *The Hunt for Red October*

*The Hunt for Red October* begins with a murder. Soviet Captain Marko Ramius helms the USSR's newest and most advanced submarine, the *Red October*, on its maiden voyage. As he and the ship's political officer prepare to open their orders, Ramius assaults and kills the commissar. Ramius then substitutes fake orders for the political officer's copy and convinces the crew they are bound for Cuba after silently lurking off the eastern seaboard. He and his senior officers actually intend to defect and deliver their ship into American hands in Norfolk, Virginia. The submarine's nearly silent engines should make this an easy task, but Ramius' ego caused him to inform Soviet leadership about his intentions in a letter, triggering a massive movement by the Soviet Navy to interdict their wayward submarine.<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> Interview with Rohrabacher

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> Tom Clancy, *The Hunt for Red October*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984).



As this unfolds, Jack Ryan, a CIA analyst and historian, flies to Washington DC to share images of the *Red October* acquired by British intelligence, and after what is supposed to be a brief meeting, buy a Christmas present for his daughter. However, the massive westward movement of the Soviet Navy triggers a crisis, and Ryan quickly finds himself drawn into a White House meeting. There he explains to the National Security Council that the CIA believes Ramius is attempting to defect which explains the movement, rather than the Pentagon's fear that it represents war. As tensions escalate, the president charges Ryan to work with the British and American fleets to verify the theory and, if it is true, aid in the defection of Ramius and his officers.<sup>609</sup>

Thanks to a combination of advanced American SONAR technology and the keen ears of a vastly over-qualified sailor, an American submarine identifies the noise profile of the *Red October*. This allows them to track it and for Ryan to contact Ramius. After confirming the defection theory, they position the *Red October* over a deep trench and fake a radiation leak which forces the crew off the ship. The officers remain aboard, ostensibly to protect the Soviet secrets, and the crew witnesses what they believe to be the torpedoing of the submarine before they are rescued by a US destroyer.<sup>610</sup>

However, a protegee of Ramius does not believe the ruse and finds the *Red October*. Seeking to sink it, he fires a torpedo and damages the submarine badly but not fatally. Ramius then uses the much larger *Red October* to ram and destroy the attacking

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid

submarine. The *Red October* sails into a hidden harbor in the United States, giving the Americans access to its new technology. At the close of the book, the US has won an important secret battle of the Cold War and left its opponent unsure of exactly what happened.<sup>611</sup>

### **Reagan's Reading of *The Hunt for Red October***

Clancy's book was almost tailor made for Reagan, and it is likely the book would have been a favorite of the President's even without its political utility. As a protagonist, Jack Ryan strongly resembles those of traditional western, science fiction, and adventure stories. He lives by a strong moral code not out of desire of a reward, but due to the intrinsic value of doing the right thing. Ryan, though working for an intelligence agency, dislikes misdirection. When his cover forces him to wear a Navy uniform with the rank of commander, he apologizes to an admiral at his first opportunity as he does not "like pretending to be what [he's] not."<sup>612</sup> Much like Hondo, Ryan is willing to lie but only in the service of a much greater good.

Ryan's refusal to accept reward resembles the characters Reagan loved from westerns. At the end of the novel, Ryan refuses to meet with the president to receive praise for his successful mission. Instead, he flies home to London, falling asleep on the

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<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> *The Hunt for Red October*, 102.

plane holding the skiing Barbie doll which marks the completion of his original goal. For Reagan, this scene strongly resembled that of Marshal Kane in *High Noon* leaving town with his star gleaming in the dust behind him.

The way Clancy depicted sex and violence also fit the framework of Reagan's favorite stories. Writing to a friend about the book, Clancy detailed six action sequences in the book, with a death toll of a little over two hundred people.<sup>613</sup> However, even though many people die violently in the book, Clancy did not engage in graphic descriptions of their deaths. Language describing wounds bordered on clinical, imparting a picture of violence as relatively clean. Similarly, there are only hints of sex in *Hunt*. The most explicit comment in the book is about Ryan's friend Skip Taylor, and his "zest for life" represented by he and his wife's many children.<sup>614</sup> *The Wall Street Journal* review recognized the absence of sex, describing that the only positive trait of Ryan's not mentioned was "his undoubtedly impressive technique in bed."<sup>615</sup> This is true of most Clancy books, though the author did consider writing a romance novel while on hiatus from the Ryan series, as the genre was "where the real money was."<sup>616</sup>

The clean violence and lack of sex in *The Hunt for Red October* increased its appeal to Reagan. He disliked the explicitness of much contemporary pop culture. Writing in 1970, he lamented "Good and inspirational stories... are too often tarnished by

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<sup>613</sup> Clancy to Richards, 5 February 1983.

<sup>614</sup> *Hunt for Red October*, 45.

<sup>615</sup> Alden.

<sup>616</sup> Interview with Larry Bond

dialogue laced with profanities and vulgarities.”<sup>617</sup> Similarly, “inevitable bedroom scenes” which left “little to the imagination” hurt the quality of film.<sup>618</sup> His reaction to *An Officer and a Gentleman* demonstrated his view. The film contained many of the themes Reagan promoted. Historian Andrew Bacevich argues that it showed that “service in uniform...was a worthy aspiration,” and that joining the military “offered a way to be *somebody*.”<sup>619</sup> However, Reagan disliked it, believing it was “a good story spoiled by nudity, language, and sex.”<sup>620</sup>

Reagan did not mind violence in movies nearly as much. He viewed *Rambo: First Blood Part II* shortly after its release and recorded in his diary that everyone “had a good time.”<sup>621</sup> He joked with reporters that because of the movie he would “know what to do” the next time there was a hostage crisis.<sup>622</sup> Reagan showed his appreciation of the film to Stallone by inviting him to a state dinner in October of 1985, one of two such functions Stallone attended.<sup>623</sup> Compared with *Rambo*, the violence in *Hunt for Red October* was both tame and imagined rather than seen. Additionally, it was of the sort of

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<sup>617</sup> Reagan to George, undated draft, in *A Life in Letters*, 150.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 111.

<sup>620</sup> *Reagan Diaries*, 150.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid, 477.

<sup>622</sup> “Reagan Gets Idea From Rambo for Next Time,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 01 June 1985.

<sup>623</sup> “President Reagan talking to actor Sylvester Stallone with his wife Sasha Czack and Joan Clark during a White House party and film “Victory” showing in the Red Room, photograph, 24 July 1981, Ronald Reagan Library, C3215-6, Ronald Reagan Library  
“President and Nancy Reagan posing with actor Sylvester Stallone and Brigette Nielsen during a state dinner for Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore,” photograph, 8 October 1985, C31323-10, Ronald Reagan Library.

military combat that Reagan sought out in fiction, placing the book easily into the range of what he found acceptable in modern culture.

The president of *Hunt* is unnamed, but Clancy intentionally modeled the character on Reagan.<sup>624</sup> The positive portrayal of himself was likely something that Reagan greatly enjoyed. The character is an effective communicator, who as a prosecutor could earn convictions through “sheer rhetoric.”<sup>625</sup> The fictional president had “dazzling charm” which could “turn on and off like a spotlight.”<sup>626</sup> Clancy based this on the Reagan he saw on television and heard in speeches, and later confirmed his image of the president in their Oval Office meeting.

The president’s adversaries in the book also cannot help but respect him. The Soviet ambassador views the president as “a strange man, very open, yet full of guile,” whose friendliness made it “easy to underestimate” him.<sup>627</sup> He was also “always ready to seize the advantage.”<sup>628</sup> The fictional Soviets’ frustration matched their real-life counterpart’s exasperation. Gorbachev frequently expressed disbelief and frustration with Reagan’s ability to “pocket concessions” without having to give much back.<sup>629</sup> Clancy saw these traits in Reagan. As they met, Clancy observed that Reagan displayed the “twitchy alertness of a fox” despite his “soft voice” and “very relaxed manner.”<sup>630</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> Interview with Larry Bond

<sup>625</sup> *The Hunt for Red October*, 140.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid*, 96

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid*, 140, 184

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>629</sup> George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*

<sup>630</sup> Clancy to Richards, 8-19 March 1985

The movie version of the novel also hints at Reagan as the inspiration. In the penultimate scene, a triumphant president eats jellybeans, Reagan's favorite snack, as the Soviet ambassador realizes the magnitude of the USSR's defeat.<sup>631</sup>

While the familiarity of the story and the positive portrayal of himself appealed to Reagan, they were not why he promoted. In general, Reagan disliked talking about reading fiction, a trait encouraged by Nancy Reagan who felt that if the public knew of his less than literary tastes they would view the president poorly. Lou Cannon, a reporter who covered Reagan in Sacramento and DC and the author of two biographies on the president, believed that part of the reticence came from Reagan's "reader's conceit that books were secret, personal treasures."<sup>632</sup> Such a conceit meshes well with Reagan's statement to Nancy Reynolds about books being like friends. The term implied intimacy and trust which Reagan would be loath to publicly violate. However, *The Hunt for Red October* also played an important role in shaping how Reagan viewed the success of the first term and he felt it could shape public opinion about the military in the administration's desired direction.

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<sup>631</sup> *The Hunt for Red October*, film, John McTiernan, Paramount

<sup>632</sup> Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 293.

## Combatting Vietnam Syndrome

Reagan intended his West Point address to “declare that the Vietnam syndrome was over.”<sup>633</sup> He personally drafted much of the speech and wanted to present the military as gallant.<sup>634</sup> Ideally, he could make the American people view their military as romantic, chivalric, dedicated and brave like Kipling’s Tommy and the cavalry of the American West. In Reagan’s first inaugural, he criticized those who argued “there are no heroes,” insisting “they just don’t know where to look.”<sup>635</sup> Reagan explicitly intended this to reference the military.<sup>636</sup>

Throughout his first five months in office, Reagan sought out opportunities to extol military service. He concluded his Inaugural Address with the story of Martin Treptow, a doughboy killed in World War I, whose diary contained the pledge to work, save, sacrifice, endure, and do his utmost to ensure an American victory.<sup>637</sup> A month later, he presented the Medal of Honor to MSG Roy Benavidez. During his remarks, he heralded the courage of MSG Benavidez, which the previous administration had “overlooked or buried for several years.”<sup>638</sup> Reagan used the opportunity to highlight the “incurable humanitarianism of our troops” during the Vietnam War.<sup>639</sup> He highlighted

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<sup>633</sup> Interview with Congressman Rohrabacher

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

<sup>635</sup> Ronald Reagan, “First Inaugural Address,” 20 January 1981, Washington DC.

<sup>636</sup> Rohrabacher interview

<sup>637</sup> First Inaugural Address

<sup>638</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Roy P Benevidez,” 24 February 1981, Arlington, Virginia.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

the efforts of Army soldiers in 1969, which resulted in the construction of “1253 school and 597 hospitals and dispensaries” and noted they contributed over “\$300,000 from their own pockets” to help the Vietnamese.<sup>640</sup> For Reagan, Vietnam veterans “fought as bravely and as well as any Americans” in history, and “came home without a victory” not through their own failures, but “but because they’d been denied permission to win.”<sup>641</sup>

Reagan consciously helped the development of an alternate public history of the Vietnam War, somewhat akin to the “Lost Cause” ideology of the American Civil War. He helped build a narrative about US failure of decision-making. Historian Mark Lawrence argues Reagan believed “a failure to commit fully to war” prevented US victory.<sup>642</sup> While campaigning in 1980, he stated that he felt it was time for Americans “recognized that ours was, in truth, a noble cause.”<sup>643</sup> The comment sparked immediate condemnation in the media with some commentators accusing Reagan of trying to “open up national wounds that had scarcely healed.”<sup>644</sup> Historian Steven Hayward argues in *The Age of Reagan* that the comments demonstrated “Reagan could be said to be ahead of his time” as he was challenging the conventional cultural portrayal of the war and foreshadowing the more favorable portrayal of the conflict in popular culture during the

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

<sup>642</sup> Mark Lawrence, “Policymaking and the Uses of the Vietnam War,” in *The Power of the Past: History and Satecraft* edited by Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri, (Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2015).

<sup>643</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Peace: Restoring the Margins of Safety,” Chicago, Illinois, 18 August 1980.

<sup>644</sup> Steven Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980*, (New York: Forum, 2001), 679



1980s.<sup>645</sup> However, Reagan was not a prophet in this regard, instead he cultivated a politically favorable narrative of the war to rebuild support for the military.

In *The Invisible Bridge*, Rick Perlstein argues that for Reagan it was not the “the Vietnam War revealed an America that suddenly knew sin, but that it helped reveal once more that America was a nation that redeemed everything it touched.”<sup>646</sup> Reagan knew the US presence in Vietnam was not humanitarian, and that while some units did do charitable work, many others committed atrocities. Writing about the My Lai massacre in 1971, he argued “the Calley affair” was “one of the most complex problems we had.”<sup>647</sup> He conceded that Calley “did wrong,” but felt that society “must accept that some men become brutalized by war.”<sup>648</sup> Regardless, the enemy “had a different standard than ours” and Reagan compared the Vietnamese to Native Americans fighting the US cavalry in the Indian Wars.<sup>649</sup> To Reagan, the failure of the press to expose “the savagery and atrocities performed” on both civilians and American military personnel created a false equivalency. This then made Calley’s actions “more understandable,” and Reagan felt that while Calley was not a hero, he should also not be “treated as just a wanton criminal.”<sup>650</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2014), 749.

<sup>647</sup> Ronald Reagan to Mr and Mrs Elwood Wagner, 23 April 1971, in *Ronald Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 771

<sup>648</sup> Ibid

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

The letter revealed several interesting things about Reagan's beliefs about the military. His return to the imagery of the Indian Wars, highlights the prominence of the conflict in his mind, and belief that most in the military, even in the 1970s, met the Kipling and L'Amour ideal of the self-deprivation hero working for the greater good of civilization. Even when Americans committed atrocities, it was not a reflection of their poor character, but rather the fault of the very nature of war. Reagan argued that Calley "probably could have gone through life without committing a single crime until we exposed him to the brutalizing force of war."<sup>651</sup> In this view, one that he sought to bring to the American people writ large, individual service members could only be responsible for success, which would be due to their outstanding character. Any military or moral failure was the fault of the incredibly difficult nature of war, further complicated by feckless politicians and a mendacious press. In short, the military and those serving in it were beyond reproach. While politically advantageous and perhaps a necessary corrective in the short-term, the perpetuation of the narrative proved profoundly damaging to Civil-Military relations and caused Americans to engage with military topics in a superficially supportive manner.

Reagan's efforts to equate the North Vietnamese to Native Americans was telling. He argued "not since the Indian Wars have we fought an enemy who sent women and children onto the battlefield armed with knives to torture the wounded," language that implies both the Vietnamese and Native Americans were violent savages acting in a

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<sup>651</sup> Ibid.

manner contrary to civilization.<sup>652</sup> It unequivocally accepted the worst racial stereotypes of Kipling, Burroughs, and popular westerns. Even as a senior citizen, Reagan still viewed the developing world in a manner like the imperialists he read in his youth. It also demonstrated a misunderstanding of history and a shocking lack of empathy and desire to understand why the North Vietnamese fought. The lack of effort to understand the Vietnam War and the motivations of communists there stands in stark contrast to the nuance and empathy Reagan displayed when discussing the Russian people and those in Europe living under communist rule.

Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October* captured Reagan's romantic view of the American military perfectly. All the military personnel in the book share above-average intelligence, willingness to sacrifice, and unimpeachable moral standards. Jack Ryan, though no longer in the military due to a helicopter crash, leaves his job as a stockbroker to serve with the CIA. He does so because he was "bored with making money" and wanted to help his country again.<sup>653</sup> Ryan is also a family man, whose competent and accomplished wife, adoring daughter, and toddler son speak to his virility and passion for the American Dream.

The naval officers of the book are moral paragons. The commander of the U.S.S. *Los Angeles*, Bart Mancuso, is "one of the youngest submarine commander in the US Navy," and got there through his intelligence and instincts, as well as a willingness to

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> *The Hunt For Red October*, 44

listen to subordinates.<sup>654</sup> The CIA director of the novel is an admiral, James Greer,” who stayed in the Navy long “past retirement age... through brute competence.”<sup>655</sup> Clancy explicitly compares Greer to Admiral Hyman Rickover, but notes that Greer “was a far easier man to work for” than the father of the nuclear Navy.<sup>656</sup> Greer also took some inspiration from Admiral Bobby Inman, who was a former director of the National Security Agency serving as the deputy director of the CIA when Clancy began work on *Hunt*.<sup>657</sup> Clancy’s carrier group commander, Admiral Joshua Painter, is “a gifted tactician and a man of puritanical integrity.”<sup>658</sup> The latter trait adds nothing to the plot, and is there only to bolster the sense of moral righteousness in the Navy. The only negative comment about a naval officer in the book belongs to Admiral Charles Davenport, who is “supposed to be a bastard to work for.”<sup>659</sup> However, this is easily excusable as Davenport shows the same brilliance in performing his duties as the rest of the officers.

Veterans also display superior character in Clancy’s work. Ryan is a former Marine officer forced out of service due to a helicopter crash and resulting back injury. Skip Taylor was on track to command a submarine before a drunk driver cost him his leg. After medically retiring, Taylor continues to serve as an instructor at the Naval Academy and plays a crucial role in developing a computer model to detect the *Red October*. Like

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<sup>654</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> Author interview with Admiral Bobby Inman, Austin, Texas

<sup>658</sup> *The Hunt For Red October*, 102

<sup>659</sup> Ibid, 309

Ryan, he eschews reward. Taylor could come back into service and command after his work finding the *Red October*, but he declines knowing that to do so would “just be taking someone’s slot.”<sup>660</sup> The admiral making the offer expected Taylor to decline for just that reason, and believed Taylor could have been an admiral himself if not for the leg, but “nobody ever said the world was fair.”<sup>661</sup> Taylor’s willingness to forego personal advancement and achievement for the best interest of the nation spoke to the idea of self-sacrifice Reagan admired in the military.

Enlisted sailors display the same characteristics as the officers. Sonarman Second Class Ronald Jones is vastly overqualified for his position, having been close to finishing a degree in electrical engineering at the California Institute of Technology before a prank gone awry cost him his scholarship. Jones joins the Navy to rehabilitate his name and finance a return to school with the G.I. Bill. His understanding of SONAR and refined ear allow him to track the supposedly silent Soviet sub, and his confident demeanor leads to him playing a key role in the success of the mission despite his low rank. Even the Soviets that Jones encounters on the *Red October* are amazed by his skill and the responsibility he is entrusted with. Clancy goes out of his way to establish that Jones is a more qualified and intelligent sailor than Bugayev, a senior officer on the *Red October* who dreams of getting “a proper degree,” rather than the one he has from the Soviet naval academy.<sup>662</sup> Clancy’s message in the passage was clear, that even the most junior

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid 309.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid, 348

American service member was potentially superior to mid-level and senior Soviet officers.

Clancy captured the “new appreciation for men and women in military service” that Reagan sought to instill in Americans.<sup>663</sup> Addressing the graduating class at the Naval Academy in May of 1985, he argued that the country now had faith in Naval officers to “make [their] judgement and move forward” in environments where the “issues [would] not be black and white.”<sup>664</sup> Equally important, the best people in America were choosing to serve. Citizens joined both the regular Navy and the reserves to “share their time, energy and talent to keep America strong, safe and free.”<sup>665</sup> Reagan referenced soaring reenlistment rates on multiple occasions and repeated his 1981 claim that testing showed the overall quality of recruits had never been higher. In his diary, Reagan described the commencement at Annapolis in the same terms he used for West Point four years earlier. Reagan felt “it was a stirring day” and the cadets spirit was “something to behold.”<sup>666</sup>

*The Hunt for Red October* showed Reagan’s efforts to build support for the national security establishment in general. In addition to rehabilitating the image of the military in the public eye, Reagan wanted to bolster the CIA and FBI. As he assumed office, the intelligence community was still reeling from the results of the Church

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<sup>663</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address at the Commencement Exercises of the United States Naval Academy,” Annapolis, Maryland, May 22, 1985.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Entry for May 22, 1985 in *The Reagan Diaries*

Committee's investigation. Beginning in 1975, the committee uncovered significant and wide-reaching abuses of power by the FBI, CIA, and NSA. As a result, the agencies faced significant new oversight, which Charles Hill argues "pretty much devastated the CIA."<sup>667</sup> The illegal actions paired with a lackluster record led to the diminishment of each in the eyes of Americans. Just as with the military, the agencies saw increasingly negative portrayals in popular culture, such as the movie *All the Presidents Men* (1975) portrayal of the FBI and the 1980 Robert Ludlum novel, *The Bourne Identity*'s depiction of the CIA. Kenneth deGraffenreid believed the oversight was a good thing still felt the administration needed to move away from the "hypercritical" view of intelligence that was pervasive after the Church committee.<sup>668</sup>

Reagan sought to move the country beyond this legacy as well, and change the public perception of the FBI, CIA, and other intel agencies towards a positive one. He spoke outside CIA Headquarters in Langley in 1982 and argued that "the days of such abuses" are past and that the agency was now executing its mission in "a way that is lawful, constitutional, and in keeping with the traditions of our way of life."<sup>669</sup> He spoke of the CIA's employees in a manner like that of military service members, noting that it was their "intellect and integrity" along with their "wit and intuition" upon which "the fate of freedom rests for millions."<sup>670</sup> They were "heroes of a grim twilight struggle,"

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<sup>667</sup> Interview with Charles Hill

<sup>668</sup> deGraffenreid interview.

<sup>669</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on the Signing of the Intelligence Identity Protection Act," Langley, VA June 23, 1982.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

remarks which Reagan repeated in a closed-door session with members of the CIA's Directorate of Operations.<sup>671</sup> Reagan strongly condemned that the agency endured “nearly a decade of neglect and sometimes overzealous criticism,” and instead argued that those serving today served as heroically as Nathan Hale in the Revolutionary War, or the members of the OSS in World War II.<sup>672</sup> The strong rhetoric on Reagan's part reflected his belief that intelligence collection was a critical tool of national security policy that was “part and parcel of defending American constitutional values.”<sup>673</sup> His efforts to restore a positive public perception of the intelligence community was a “companion piece” to similar efforts directed at the military.<sup>674</sup> The US needed popular support for both to succeed in the Cold War.

*The Hunt for Red October* built upon Reagan's views. The CIA is the first to recognize that the Red Navy is not moving west to start a war, and Jack Ryan, one of their analysts is the driving force in achieving a major Cold War victory. FBI agents identify that a staffer for the Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, a key part of the oversight of the intelligence community created in the wake of the Church Committee, was passing intelligence to the Soviets. The aide's actions previously resulted in the execution of a CIA source which put the FBI onto the Senator's office. Using false information to identify the leak, they catch the aide in the act and use the

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid.

<sup>673</sup> deGraffenreid interview

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.



information to force the retirement of the Senator, striking a blow against governmental oversight of the CIA.<sup>675</sup> The scene in the book is gratuitous and only serves the purpose of castigating Senate oversight as something that risked lives to no good end.

Clancy's portrayal of the security establishment effectively argued every major Reagan talking point about the military and intelligence community. Reading Clancy's account was undoubtedly reassuring to Reagan, who was highly sensitive to the currents of popular culture. Equally important to this was Clancy's portrayal of the stakes of the Cold War and the morality of each side. The administration believed the "Cold War was profoundly serious" and eagerly embraced an author who shared their view.<sup>676</sup>

### **Confronting the Evil Empire**

Throughout his first term in office, Reagan undertook what Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin termed an "uncompromising new ideological offensive."<sup>677</sup> In March of 1981, a conversation between Dobrynin and Weinberger at a private function left Weinberger convinced Moscow was "really quite concerned at the perceived strength of the anti-Soviet position."<sup>678</sup> The ambassador's concern was understandable even in the early period of the Reagan administration. The president

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<sup>675</sup> *The Hunt for Red October*, 272

<sup>676</sup> Hill interview.

<sup>677</sup> Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 477.

<sup>678</sup> "Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Weinberger to the Counselor to the President (Meese)," 17 March 1981, in *The Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume III*, Document 30, 83.

frequently employed blunt language, depicting the USSR as an evil nation that sought to extinguish freedom.

In his inaugural address, Reagan told the nation that no weapon was more powerful than “the will and courage of free men and women,” something that America’s “adversaries in the world [did] not have.”<sup>679</sup> The clear reference to the Soviet Union was Reagan’s first effort as president to rebuild belief in the US moral high ground in the Cold War. Reagan saw the US as the “white hats” in a western. To expand his belief to the country as a whole he sought to draw attention to Soviet authoritarianism.

Reagan and his advisors planned to use the traditional commencement address at Notre Dame contrast “an imperial Soviet Union” that was “hostile to human rights and economically ruinous” with an America that respected self-determination and rule of law.<sup>680</sup> The public rhetoric would “swing the President’s full weight behind key ideas” that were “struggling to penetrate the bureaucracy” and the American public more broadly.<sup>681</sup> The speech would “satisfy the curiosity of domestic and foreign audiences” about the administrations intentions and “articulate a fresh and coherent national strategy.”<sup>682</sup> It also left observers with little doubt that Reagan intended to pursue a more aggressive Cold War policy.

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<sup>679</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Inaugural Address,” Washington DC, January 20, 1981.

<sup>680</sup> Memorandum, Carnes Lord to Richard Allen, April 27, 1981, Folder: “West Point Speech and Back Up File (1)”, Box 8 Speechwriting, White House Office Of: Research Office, 1981-1989, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

Though Reagan did not directly mention the Soviet Union, the frequent allusions to communism and totalitarianism revealed the target of the speech. Echoing language he would use at Westminster a year later, Reagan promised the “West won’t contain communism, it will transcend communism.”<sup>683</sup> The entire ideology was nothing but a “bizarre chapter in human history” the “last pages” of which were being written.<sup>684</sup> Communist nations used “ideology and war machines” to project a “façade of strength,” that the people of the free world would vanquish.<sup>685</sup>

Speaking at the nation’s most prominent Catholic university, Reagan referenced a recent papal encyclical to take aim at the “use of the rhetoric of class struggle to justify injustice.”<sup>686</sup> Pope John Paul II’s encyclical spoke out against both communism and Liberation Theology, stating they were a “distortion of justice.”<sup>687</sup> Reagan quoted the Pope’s argument that the ideologies left people “stripped of fundamental human rights” in the name of the “alleged justice” of the rhetoric of class struggle.<sup>688</sup> He tied John Paul II’s language into his own feelings about the role of religion in combatting communism and the sanctity of individual liberty. American commitment to “a law higher than [its] own” paired with “belief in a Supreme Being” gave the country the tools it needed to defeat communism and offer real freedom.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>683</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame,” South Bend, Indiana, May 17, 1981.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

<sup>687</sup> John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia* November 30, 1980.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid. “Address at Commencement Exercises of the University of Notre Dame”

<sup>689</sup> “Address at Commencement Exercises of the University of Notre Dame”

The speech at West Point four days later focused more on military aspects of the Soviet Union than ideological ones. Reagan again avoided mentioning the USSR, but intended to highlight its “militaristic imperialism” and identify the Soviets as a threat “so grave as to cause all nations to rethink their fundamental assumptions” about the Cold War.<sup>690</sup> In the speech, he portrayed the Soviets as a “great society” that was “marching to a different drumbeat” that threatened the world with global “retreat into the dark ages.”<sup>691</sup> Reagan contrasted the all-volunteer force of the US with the compulsory service in the USSR. Despite conscription, Soviet citizens had “little more to say about their government than a prison inmate has to say about the prison administration.”<sup>692</sup> The juxtaposition highlighted Reagan’s belief that the moral superiority of the US came from the willingness of its population to sacrifice itself freely. That Americans would fight on the frontier to preserve their freedom stood in stark contrast to the disgruntled, unwilling Soviet conscript.

Reagan expanded these themes of the Notre Dame and West Point commencements most famously in his addresses to the British Parliament in 1982 and his address to the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983. At Westminster, Reagan promised to leave “Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history” and in Orlando, in a speech that drew heavily on Whittaker Chambers and C.S. Lewis, labeled the USSR an

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<sup>690</sup> Carnes Lord to Richard Allen, April 27, 1981

<sup>691</sup> Reagan, Address at West Point Commencement, May 21, 1981.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

“evil empire.”<sup>693</sup> The directness of the language in these speeches, and that they occurred in a period of obviously rising tensions between the superpowers, made them two of Reagan’s most quoted and remembered speeches. However, they did not stand alone and were not the first times he used caustic rhetoric. Rather, they were part of a strategy to reassert America’s position on the moral high ground of the Cold War and to bolster the will of people in the US and the rest of the world to resist and rollback communism. Reagan believed that his administration needed to use America’s military and diplomatic power to wage the Cold War more aggressively, but to do so needed to build both popular support and military capability.<sup>694</sup> His first-term rhetoric enabled this approach and enabled him to adopt greater nuance in descriptions of Russians during his second term.

Clancy captured Reagan’s view of American moral superiority in *The Hunt for Red October*. Religion plays an important role in Ramius’ decision to defect. His grandmother had secretly baptized him as a Catholic and raised him on Bible stories. Ramius then committed the “gravest sin in the Communist pantheon;” becoming “individual in his thinking.”<sup>695</sup> His wife died due to a drunk surgeon botching a procedure. The resulting infection became fatal because factory workers, fearing punishment for missing quota, filled vials with water rather than admit there were not enough antibiotics. However, there is no punishment for the deaths, as the surgeon’s

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<sup>693</sup> Reagan, Address to National Association of Evangelicals, March 8, 1983.

Reagan “Address to British Parliament”, London, England June 8, 1982.

<sup>694</sup> Yoshitani, 11.

<sup>695</sup> *The Hunt for Red October*, 26.

father is a high-ranking official who shields the doctor. The medicine vial is also untraceable because of the byzantine Soviet procurement system.

Already bitter at a system that robbed him of his wife, Ramius stands over her grave and realizes the Soviet Union stole something even more important. It “robbed him a means to assuage his grief with prayer” and deprived him of “the hope—if only an illusion—of ever seeing” his wife again.<sup>696</sup> Communism stole Ramius’ identity by denying him religion, and he returned to his faith to redeem himself. The use of religion as a tool to break free of communism echoed the work of Whittaker Chambers in *Witness* with a key difference, Chambers turned from the ideology “at the level of unconscious life,” while it took death for Ramius to leave.<sup>697</sup> Defecting then became a trip from the land of the dead. Clancy showed that Ramius was embracing Reagan’s promise from the 1950s that “you too can be free men again.”<sup>698</sup> The backstory also demonstrates nuance in its depiction of Russians. Individual Russians come across well in Clancy’s work, but those who dogmatically adhere to ideology often meet grisly ends. The sympathetic portrayal of Ramius embraces the ideas behind Reagan’s Ana and Ivan speech and softer rhetoric about the Russian people. Clancy also captured the way Reagan talked about the Soviet system.

*The Hunt for Red October* frequently depicts the Soviet Union as inhumane, uncaring, and cruel. References to the gulag abound, and the Russians in the novel tend

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<sup>696</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>697</sup> *Witness*

<sup>698</sup> Lee Zhito, “Picture Business” *Billboard* 16 Jun 1951, 2.

to have a vague nihilism concerning their state and their treatment from it. The politburo is ruthlessly self-interested, and coldly willing to engage in state-sanctioned violence with the slightest provocation. The cruelty and inefficiency of the system work against the USSR. Most obvious is the case of Ramius deciding to defect because of a combination of personal oppression, the absence of justice, and economic failure.

However, the system's callousness also hinders its ability to respond to the defection. Ramius penned a letter to announce his intention to defect. A mailroom worker, who is a veteran of World War II, delays delivery because of his personal disdain for the system. He notes that he will be able to meet his quota easily, and that there "was no sense in hurrying."<sup>699</sup> The mail sorter's actions delay the arrival of the letter by over a day, giving Ramius a head start that proves essential to his escape. As he concludes his day, the worker notes, "as long as the bosses pretend to pay us, we pretend to work," a variation on one of Reagan's favorite jokes about the Soviet Union.<sup>700</sup>

Clancy framed the ideological issues of the Cold War in a way that was identical to Reagan's public remarks and personal beliefs. The book rewards individual freedom and initiative and punishes blind adherence to an oppressive regime. Clancy's narrative affirmed for Reagan that popular attitudes about the Cold War were shifting in the direction the administration desired. Historian Andrew Bacevich argues in *The New American Militarism* that Clancy was among a group of "market-savvy writers" who

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<sup>699</sup> *The Hunt for Red October*, 18.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*

“discerned the changing mood that Reagan had promoted.”<sup>701</sup> Their books “powerfully reinforced the mythmaking” that was the key to Reagan’s Cold War strategy. While this accurately captures the result, it is overly cynical. Clancy wrote *The Hunt for Red October* not due to an in-depth understanding of publishing and market currents. The unorthodox path to becoming a best-seller in fact shows how poorly Clancy understood both the market and the industry. He instead wrote out of his own earnest agreement with the Reagan and desire to write a novel. That *Hunt* succeeded to the extent that it did was because it was fit the shifting views of the public.<sup>702</sup> Clancy’s editor, Deborah Grosvenor, believed the book was a “part of the era” and capitalized on the shifting cultural view of the Cold War.<sup>703</sup>

Reagan recognized this dynamic and took heart from the sweeping success of the book. The administration viewed the book as a counter to the “largest block of popular culture,” which viewed the Cold War derisively.<sup>704</sup> It saw *The Hunt for Red October* as an opportunity to advance an alternative narrative and as a sign that larger segments of the population were moving towards Reagan’s view about the moral superiority of the US in the Cold War. The book’s success provided tangible evidence that there was a renewed energy and will among many Americans to wage the Cold War on Reagan’s terms.

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<sup>701</sup> Bacevich, 117.

<sup>702</sup> Grosvenor interview

<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

<sup>704</sup> Charlie Hill interview



Reagan's plan required significant investment in new weapons systems and technology. The administration recognized the importance of advanced technology in mitigating the quantitative advantage of Warsaw Pact forces in Europe. Reagan also appreciated Clancy's depiction of the importance of technology and its decisive role in any engagement between the US and the Soviet Union.

### **Perfect Weapons for Virtuous Men**

Speaking at the commencement of the Air Force Academy in 1984, Reagan reflected on how much the nature of war changed in his lifetime. He argued that despite nearly two millennia of separation, “the armies of Napoleon had not moved across Europe any faster than Caesar’s legions—and neither army worried about air cover.”<sup>705</sup> Yet in the half century between Reagan’s graduation and the cadets in the audience, technology went from “open cockpits to lunar landings” and the rockets of the science fiction from his youth became the space shuttles of the present age.<sup>706</sup> He viewed this as evidence of the capabilities of Americans. Reagan told the cadets that “technology, plus freedom, equals opportunity and progress.”<sup>707</sup> The pairing of American scientific prowess with its ideology was the key to both the country’s future prosperity and victory in the Cold War.

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<sup>705</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address at Commencement Exercises at the United States Air Force Academy,” Colorado Springs, Colorado, 30 May 1984.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

Reagan's address at the Naval Academy the next year covered similar themes. He highlighted the new "advance weaponry and sophisticated equipment" that the Navy received in recent years.<sup>708</sup> Reagan spoke of the Aegis cruiser and advancements in the submarine fleet. He highlighted the Los Angeles and Ohio class submarines, with their ability to track Soviet subs and deliver a second strike respectively, and argued they provided "the ultimate guarantee against nuclear attack."<sup>709</sup> Both classes far outstripped the equivalent Soviet submarines in capability and expanding both programs was one of the earliest initiatives of the Reagan administration.

Modernizing the military was crucial to Reagan's vision of "peace through strength." NSDD-32 posited that there was a large gap "between strategy and capabilities."<sup>710</sup> The strategy called for the US "to deter military attack by the USSR" while also seeking "to contain and reverse" the expansion of their influence.<sup>711</sup> However, as of 1982 US planners felt that "given our current force insufficiencies" there was little chance of the US accomplishing all the goals of the Reagan administration, unless it embarked upon "a sustained and balanced force development program."<sup>712</sup> It called for the immediate enhancement of the capabilities of the conventional forces that were forward-deployed in Europe and elsewhere, which effectively meant developing new, more lethal weapons to counteract the Soviet numerical advantage.

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<sup>708</sup> "Address at the Commencement Exercises at the United States Naval Academy"

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> National Security Decision Directive-32, 20 May 1982.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid.

Other documents from Reagan's first term tell a similar story. A 1981 study prepared by the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department identified the "US conventional and theatre nuclear force posture weaknesses" as a "priority problem" that severely hampered the ability of the US to pursue its European interests.<sup>713</sup> Similarly, a March 1981 memo from Laurence Eagleburger, then the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, to Secretary of State Alexander Haig argued that "Soviet power has grown enormously" over the preceding decade, and the ability of the US to restrain their influence had decline precipitously.<sup>714</sup> The US needed to immediately embark upon the "development of adequate military capabilities" in order to restore the ability of the US to counter Soviet aggression and to offer a serious inducement to seek "serious, equitable arms control."<sup>715</sup> National Security Decision Directive 75 offered a similar appraisal in January of 1983. The US still needed to "modernize its military forces" to ensure that "Soviet calculations of possible war outcomes" were so unfavorable as to prevent them from embarking on war.<sup>716</sup>

However, by the time Reagan read *The Hunt for Red October* in December of 1984, he had reason to be optimistic that these concerns were no longer valid. A study by the National Security Council conducted in advance of Reagan's second term trumpeted that "America's strength has been revitalized" thanks to the aggressive military spending

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<sup>713</sup> "Draft Study Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff," in FRUS Document 13

<sup>714</sup> "Action Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State-Designate for European Affairs (Eagleburger) and the Director of the Bureau of Political and Military Affairs (Burt) to Secretary of State Haig" in FRUS Document 28, 16 March 1981, 96.

<sup>715</sup> Ibid.

<sup>716</sup> National Security Decision Directive 75

by the administration.<sup>717</sup> The investment in personnel and the development and procurement of new weapons significantly “improved US military strength.”<sup>718</sup> His optimism showed in his address at the Air Force Academy a week later, where he optimistically spoke about contemporary and future technological advances as ensuring the security and prosperity of America. His proclamation that the US possessed “the best darn air force in the world,” was typical of his rhetoric but also rooted in the knowledge that new airframes, ordinance, and better training made the Air Force far more capable than it had been when he took office.<sup>719</sup> Clancy’s work reinforced Reagan’s belief that US capabilities were significantly improved by the end of his first term.

The importance of technology is a central theme to Clancy’s work. Reagan was particularly impressed with the author’s ability to accurately describe intricate technical details of weapons systems, something he asked Clancy about during an Oval Office visit.<sup>720</sup> Clancy demurred and told the President that the dialogue was the harder part, though this undersold how seriously he took the research for his books. As part of the publishing process, the Naval Institute Press submitted *The Hunt For Red October* to two active-duty submarine officers. One cleared the book, while the second, Commander John Byron, told the publisher the book was unpublishable as it contained classified

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<sup>717</sup> Memorandum, “U.S. Foreign Policy a Look Ahead” May 18, 1984, Folder: Foreign Policy Background for President’s Trip to Europe-Notebook (1 of 2), RAC Box 8, NSC Executive Secretariat: Trip File, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

<sup>719</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address at Commencement Exercises at the United States Air Force Academy,” Colorado Springs, Colorado, 30 May 1984.

<sup>720</sup> Clancy to Richards, March 1985.

information.<sup>721</sup> Only after Clancy sat with the officer and showed the sources he used for research did the naval commander assent. Reagan's Secretary of the Navy had a similar reaction. He later confided in Clancy that his reaction upon reading the book was to demand to know "who the hell cleared this."<sup>722</sup>

In *The Hunt for Red October*, the strategic importance of technology fuels the entire plot. The titular submarine possesses a "caterpillar drive," which renders it theoretically undetectable by SONAR. As Ramius issues his instructions to the crew, he tells them that their mission is to evade detection and skirt the Atlantic seaboard, bringing Soviet nuclear missiles to America's shores. Though the orders are fake, Ramius still expects to use the technology of the silent drive to defeat the US's "newest and best hunter submarines," the Los Angeles class boats Reagan referenced in his Annapolis address.<sup>723</sup> The drive works flawlessly, as soon as the ship's engineers activate it, a US submarine loses tracking of it, with the sonar man claiming that "the missile sub has gone dead," even as the *Red October* travels west.<sup>724</sup>

The caterpillar drive represents a grave threat to the US Navy's technological superiority. If their attack submarines were unable to track Soviet missile ones, then the ability of the Soviets to launch a first strike would be greatly enhanced. Upon realizing that Ramius intends to defect, the entire national security establishment plays a role in

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<sup>721</sup> Grosvenor interview

<sup>722</sup> Clancy to Richards, March 1985.

<sup>723</sup> *The Hunt for Red October*, 15.

<sup>724</sup> *Ibid.*

learning how to track the submarine, take it, and then keep the knowledge of the *Red October*'s true fate out of Soviet hands. Once captured, the Navy's finest engineers and technicians board the boat to learn not just about the drive, but also every other secret the Soviet's most advanced submarine hid. At the open of Clancy's fourth book, *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, Ryan and Ramius are present at the scuttling of the *Red October*, which resembled "Frankenstein's monster" due to the welding scars covering the boat.<sup>725</sup>

The *Red October* is the lone exception to American technological superiority in Clancy's book. That its advantage comes from a fictional and likely impossible technological advance is important. The book then stands as an ode to the importance of technology in general, and a demonstration of the capabilities of the new and improved US military. In every encounter with Soviet forces, US systems prove superior. Even in the worst case, when a Soviet fighter pilot panics and shoots at an F-14, the American plane can endure a direct hit and return to its carrier even with the co-pilot incapacitated.<sup>726</sup>

Throughout the book, the Soviets are consistently unable to surprise the Americans, as ground, sea, and air-based radar provides US commanders with perfect situational awareness. A Soviet pilot expresses frustration at his "intelligence officer for telling him he could sneak up" on the Americans, who instead intercept and embarrass

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<sup>725</sup> Tom Clancy, *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, (New York: Putnam Books, 1988), 18.

<sup>726</sup> *The Hunt for Red October*, 195.

him.<sup>727</sup> Soviet commanders do not enjoy the same benefits. After the incident with the F-14, the US sought to show its anger and force the Soviets to moderate their behavior. A flight of A-10 warthogs, flying from the continental US, evade detection and jam the radars on the Soviet flagship before surrounding it with magnesium flares. The *Kirov* only has sixty seconds to react to the flight and the entire engagement ends before the Admiral Stralbo, the Soviet commander, can reach the bridge.

The American commander intended to send a message with the mock attack that it the US “were serious [the Soviets] would all be dead now.”<sup>728</sup> Stralbo recognizes the message and orders his fleet to be “meek as mice” from that point forward, as any escalation would likely end in its destruction at a slight cost to the Americans.<sup>729</sup> He also forbids any response to further American provocation, as each action they take would only allow the US to gather valuable intelligence about Soviet systems and procedures. The scene plays out as a tactical-level version of NSDD-75’s goal of changing how the Soviets made their calculations. The fictional action in *The Hunt for Red October* forced a realization on the part of the Soviets that they needed to moderate their behavior or face substantial and unacceptable losses.

Longtime speechwriter Dana Rohrabacher believes that Clancy’s work undeniably influenced Reagan.<sup>730</sup> In the same way the President’s policies inspired the

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<sup>727</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>730</sup> Interview with Rohrabacher

author, the writer's book helped Reagan grasp and visualize intricate military matters by casting them in the form he best understood; narrative. Clancy's book depicted Reagan's first term military policy as a sweeping success. He captured Reagan's drive to bolster the public will, raise military morale, and increase the combat capabilities of the armed forces. Without any high-level access, Clancy wrote a narrative version of what Reagan saw and heard from his advisors. This allowed the President to see the success in a different way and provided a different medium to promote his administration's objectives. *The Hunt for Red October* became a valuable tool for him to both understand the current state of the Cold War and to communicate that vision to the American public. Reagan was not the only person in the administration to view Clancy in this manner, the author's work took on surprising importance as those around Reagan sought to capitalize on his love of the book to advance their own agendas.

### **Clancy and the National Security Establishment**

In the summer of 1985, *The Times Literary Supplement* approached Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger with a request to review a work of fiction that deserved "to be better known."<sup>731</sup> Weinberger, who had reviewed books for *The San Francisco Chronicle* for nearly twenty years, agreed to the project. Kay Liesz, his longtime

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<sup>731</sup> Jeremy Treglown to Caspar Weinberger, August 9, 1985, Box 596, The Papers of Caspar Weinberger, The Library of Congress.



secretary, recommended *The Hunt for Red October* to Weinberger on the basis that she “had it on good authority that our big boss across the river thoroughly enjoyed it” and was “almost singlehandedly responsible for its zoom to the top of the best-sellers list.”<sup>732</sup> The Secretary of Defense took his secretary’s hint and amplified Reagan’s support of the book. He produced a glowing review, which appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* as well as in *The Times Literary Supplement*, lauding the “vast and accurate” portrayal of technical detail and proclaiming that Clancy’s work held “many lessons” for “those who want to keep the peace.”<sup>733</sup> Weinberger also reviewed Clancy’s *Patriot Games* for *The Wall Street Journal* two years later. He again praised the portrayal of US technology, noting that it depicted US abilities “up to the limit of declassified information” and that the resulting “authenticity, and hence believability” made the book particularly valuable.<sup>734</sup>

Like Reagan, Weinberger was deeply sensitive to the power of fiction to influence the way people, including himself, thought about US policy. He savaged Robert Ludlum’s *The Bourne Supremacy* in a review for *The Wall Street Journal* because it depicted a morally ambiguous US government. The book’s protagonist, Jason Bourne, is a retired CIA assassin who opens the book living comfortably with his wife in Maine and working as a college professor. Needing assistance in Hong Kong, the government forces Bourne to return to service by kidnapping his wife and fabricating incriminating

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<sup>732</sup> Kay Liesz to Caspar Weinberger, August 14, 1985, Box 596, The Papers of Caspar Weinberger, The Library of Congress.

<sup>733</sup> Caspar Weinberger, “Caspar Weinberger,” *Times Literary Supplement* October 18, 1985.

<sup>734</sup> Caspar Weinberger, “Patriot Games,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 5, 1987.

information about him. The book depicts the CIA and State Department as willing to engage in extreme, unethical behavior to achieve their aims.<sup>735</sup>

For Weinberger this was proof that Ludlum had ulterior motives. He noted that “the required LeCarre syndrome” had “full reign” in the book as the author took extra effort to demonstrate that “those on our side are also guilty of several violations of good conduct” despite facing murderers and criminal syndicates.<sup>736</sup> Weinberger’s attack on LeCarre echoes that of others in the administration. Charles Hill, a close advisor of George Shultz, believed that LeCarre’s work was “anti-Western” since it depicted Americans “doing things that moral people would not do.”<sup>737</sup> At the end of his review, Weinberger revealed his fear was that the book’s readers would “really think this [was] the way the government’s business [was] done.”<sup>738</sup> The review demonstrates Weinberger’s conviction that the books people read could significantly sway how they viewed the world and influence their opinions on a wide range of issues. Weinberger’s stance ignored that there was a basis to the more ambiguous views of LeCarre and Ludlum. The revelation of the CIA’s “Family Jewels” in the Church Committee offered proof of enough misconduct to fuel the plots of many spy-thrillers. Kenneth deGraffenreid acknowledged this and praised LeCarre’s George Smiley books for reinforcing many things about the nature of the KGB.<sup>739</sup> The opposition of Hill, who

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<sup>735</sup> Robert Ludlum, *The Bourne Supremacy*, (New York: Random House, 1986).

<sup>736</sup> Weinberger, “The Bourne Supremacy” *The Wall Street Journal*, The Caspar Weinberger Papers, The Library of Congress.

<sup>737</sup> Interview with Charles Hill

<sup>738</sup> Weinberger, “The Bourne Supremacy”

<sup>739</sup> deGraffenreid interview.

acknowledged the literary merit of LeCarre, and Weinberger, who was universally derisive of the novelist's work, stemmed from a belief that powerful cultural forces aligned against the Reagan administration, and that they needed to push back on all fronts.

The Navy also quickly realized the value of narratives like *The Hunt for Red October*. In February of 1985, the Navy's senior-most submariner, Vice-Admiral Nils Thurman, invited Clancy to a lunch at the Pentagon. There he presented the author with a large plaque and the intersecting brass dolphins of a member of the Navy's submarine fleet. Clancy counted receiving the badge as one of the three most meaningful events that came from publishing the novel.<sup>740</sup> Five other admirals attended the lunch, including the Vice-Chief of Naval Operations, and over the meal, Clancy answered the admirals' questions about how he wrote the book. He took the opportunity to ask Thurman if the Navy would cooperate with a movie based on the book, a request to which the admiral provided "a qualified yes."<sup>741</sup> The Navy would make good on Thurman's conditional yes and supported the filming of *The Hunt for Red October*, in part, because Clancy insisted as part of his contract that the film could not depict the Navy in negatively in any way.<sup>742</sup>

Clancy was also popular with others in the White House. After his meeting with Reagan, he attended a luncheon hosted by Reagan's assistant Chief of Staff Michael Deaver. At the lunch, he spoke with Secretary of the Navy John Lehman in what *Wall*

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<sup>740</sup> Clancy to Richards, March 1985.

<sup>741</sup> Clancy to Richards, March 1985

<sup>742</sup> Bacevich, 116.

*Street Journal* reporter Robert Merry recalled as a “lively and erudite” discussion about the “arcana of naval warfare and strategy.”<sup>743</sup> Clancy argued with once and future National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft about the prospect of winning a nuclear war. Scowcroft stated it was possible, while Clancy strongly disagreed.<sup>744</sup>

Clancy also learned of his White House fans during a state dinner in March of 1985.

While there, he met Bud McFarlane, then Reagan’s National Security Advisor.

McFarlane commented that he liked the book, but joked that he was nothing like the NSA in the book, a sentiment Clancy agreed with.<sup>745</sup> Clancy then shared an idea on “sea-power and mobility” which he claimed McFarlane liked.<sup>746</sup> Later in the evening, a White House photographer confided in Clancy that “everyone [emphasis Clancy] in the White House” had read and liked *The Hunt for Red October*.<sup>747</sup> Given his experiences of the past several weeks, it would be difficult for Clancy to disagree. At visits to the White House and the Pentagon, high-ranking leaders lined up to tell him how much they appreciated his book. The verdict from ranking members of the Reagan administration was unanimous; *The Hunt for Red October* was not only an entertaining novel, but also a book with the potential to change how people thought about the American military and the role of the US in world.

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<sup>743</sup> Robert Merry, “Tom Clancy and Ronald Reagan,” *The National Interest*, October 3, 2013.

<sup>744</sup> Clancy to Richards, March 1985.

<sup>745</sup> Clancy to Richards March 1985.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid

## Cultural Waves

*The Hunt for Red October* was part of a significant cultural shift in the mid-1980s. Movies, television, and books increasingly adopted the themes the Reagan administration hoped for, with resurgent American nationalism foremost among them. Hollywood depicted this trend most clearly. In 1985, the same year *Hunt* made the best seller's list, two Sylvester Stallone films showed how closely aligned Hollywood was to Reagan's messaging. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Rocky IV* ranked second and third at the box office for the year and each earned over 125 million dollars at the box office.<sup>748</sup> Both movies prominently feature Soviet villains with patriotic American protagonists.

In *Rambo*, the titular character returns to Vietnam to rescue American POWs that the Vietnamese had secretly kept after the end of the war. The focus on POWs left behind evoked a prominent, but unsubstantiated, Republican talking point of the 1970s.<sup>749</sup> After his superior explains the mission, Rambo asks him "do we get to win this time," and receives the answer that this time it was up to him. This reflected the emerging narrative about Vietnam that the unnecessary burdens placed on the military prevented victory in the war. In the film, the CIA sabotages Rambo's mission, resulting in his capture. Held in a prison camp, a Soviet Lieutenant Colonel, Sergei Podovsky, tortures Rambo until he can escape along with the POWs. After angrily confronting the CIA

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<sup>748</sup> "1985 Domestic Grosses," [boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com)

<sup>749</sup> Perlstein, 117.

handler, he storms off but not before he rejects his superior's claim that he hates America. Instead, Rambo says that he would "die for it" and only wants what every Vietnam veteran wants, "for our country to love us as much as we love it!"<sup>750</sup> The plot of the movie embraced the preferred conservative memory of the Vietnam War. It showed it as a noble cause undermined by feckless politicians and the bureaucratic state. The prisoners of war were its true victims, who sacrificed years of their life and endured torture for an ungrateful country. Rambo's closing speech echoes Reagan's 1981 West Point address in its demand for better treatment of America's military service members. That the movie so perfectly captured Reagan's message on this is likely part of why he referenced it casually with reporters soon after watching it.

*Rocky IV* embraced Reagan's Cold War moral framework. In it, the Soviet boxer Ivan Drago is artificially manufactured. His physique is steroid derived, and he trains in a laboratory where doctors and trainers use precise measurements to guide Drago's exercise. The Soviets extol him as the perfect Soviet man, and a model of strength and endurance. However, Drago lacks morality. He kills Apollo Creed in an exhibition match and expresses no remorse for the action, stating "if he dies, he dies."<sup>751</sup> In the film *Rocky*, and by extension, the United States is an underdog, forced to make the most of limited resources to compete on an uneven playing field. Rocky's heart wins over the Soviet crowd in the climactic bout, and even the Soviet premier finds himself applauding

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<sup>750</sup> *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, George Cosmatos, TriStar Pictures, 1985.

<sup>751</sup> *Rocky IV*, Sylvester Stallone, United Artists, 1985. In the movie, Creed embraces Cold War rhetoric before his death, arguing his bout means something because "it's us against them" and promises Rocky will understand its importance when its over.

Rocky's exhortation that "if I can change, and you can change, everybody can change."<sup>752</sup> That change, though, came from recognizing basic human freedom and virtue, something that Rocky stands for in the movie. The Soviet leadership and crowd accept the value of the individual and freedom over rigid adherence to a system by the movie's end. This embodied Reagan's view of the Cold War, in which he was often careful to distinguish admiration and respect for the Russian people while simultaneously castigating the Soviet system.

*Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Rocky IV* finished behind *Back to the Future* at the box office. While *Back to the Future* does not as explicitly embrace Reagan's vision as the Stallone films, some of the worldview does slip into the film. The opening act features the death of Doctor Emmett Brown, creator of the DeLorean Time Machine, at the hands of Libyan terrorists, whose plutonium he had stolen.<sup>753</sup> Following the rise of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya increasingly sponsored terrorist attacks and served as home to training camps. The regime increased its antagonism of the US during the Reagan administration, including an incident where Libyan aircraft attacked American ones, leading to a brief air battle that saw both Libyan planes shot down. The use of Libyan terrorists with fissile material in *Back to the Future* fit with contemporary events and matches the use of Libya as a sponsor of terrorism seen in Clancy's *Patriot Games*.

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<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

<sup>753</sup> *Back to the Future*, Robert Zemeckis, Universal Pictures, 1985.

The good cultural news for the Reagan administration continued in 1986, when *Top Gun* ruled the box office earning over 175 million.<sup>754</sup> The movie, which received significant support from the Navy, was a two-hour long recruitment video for the service. It largely takes place at U.S. Navy Fighter Weapons School in San Diego and follows pilots training to earn the coveted status of Top Gun. An ambiguous communist nation's antagonism create confrontations at the beginning and end of the movie, but the American pilots and fighters so easily outclass their opponents it is difficult to view them as a real threat. Instead, it competition among the American pilots provides the drama in the film, even though all are devoted to serving their.<sup>755</sup> This fit Reagan's emphasis on the universal competence and quality of American service members and the vast superiority of US technology that he emphasized throughout his presidency.

Although *The Hunt for Red October* is often referred to as the first techno-thriller, it was not the first book of its genre. Books utilizing current and near-future military technology in a recognizable international environment were moderately popular in the 1930s.<sup>756</sup> Clancy also was not the first best-seller to use such an approach in the Cold War. General Sir John Hackett published *The Third World War: August 1985* in 1978. He had a similar aim to Clancy, intended to bolster support for more robust defense policy. *The Third World War* is essentially a war game which predicted how a major war between the US and Soviet Union would unfold.

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<sup>754</sup> "1986 Domestic Grosses," boxofficemojo.com

<sup>755</sup> *Top Gun*, Tony Scott, Paramount, 1986.

<sup>756</sup> Interview with Larry Bond



*The Hunt for Red October* presaged these positive depictions of the military. It helped Reagan view his first term as a complete success. The work offered a creative space to see what America's defense capability currently was and the direction it was trending in. That the public then largely embraced Clancy's work only furthered Reagan's sense that his first term restored US will and capability in the Cold War. Clancy's next book, *Red Storm Rising*, helped Reagan conclude the US had the strength to win it.

## **Chapter 5 Techno-Thriller Rising: Conventional Balance and Nuclear Abolitionism**

As the US delegation flew to Reykjavik in October of 1986, Reagan went to one of Air Force One's rear cabins to talk with his staff. However, rather than discuss the preparations for the upcoming summit or the negotiating strategy he wanted to employ, he spoke of things his staff viewed as trivial.<sup>757</sup> This did not surprise those who knew him well, as over the previous five years they had learned that Reagan did not “feel the need to have things fully staffed out before meetings.”<sup>758</sup> His confidence in his negotiating skills and charisma led him to focus on core principles rather than detail. Reagan identified *Red Storm Rising* as his “research” for the summit.<sup>759</sup> The negotiating team believed Reagan was joking and reference the book because part of the plot centered Iceland.<sup>760</sup> However, *Red Storm Rising* did serve as a research tool. Reagan used it to further his understanding of the conventional balance in Europe, the ability of the US to support its allies, and to examine how a theoretical war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact could unfold. It offered a creative space which Reagan used to develop his strategic vision and directly influenced his actions at Reykjavik.

Before departing the summit, Reagan spoke with military personnel and their families at Keflavik Airfield. He told of “hard and tough” negotiations in the previous 48

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<sup>757</sup> Ken Adelman, *Regan at Reykjavik: Forty-Eight Hours that Ended the Cold War* (New York: Broadside Books, 2014), 12.

<sup>758</sup> Poindexter interview

<sup>759</sup> Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 294.

<sup>760</sup> Adelman Interview

hours, lamenting how close they were “the most far-reaching arms control proposal in history” before breaking in frustration.<sup>761</sup> Despite failing to achieve a historic accord, Reagan felt the two nations made “great strides...in resolving most of [their] differences” over nuclear weapons and pledged to “continue the effort.”<sup>762</sup> He closed with a reminder to the service members that they served on “NATO’s frontline” for a purpose. Their mission provided a presence that “strengthened world peace” ensuring “the prevention of war.” As America’s “secret weapon,” they ensured the “flame of freedom” would “spread its light throughout the world.”<sup>763</sup>

Reagan’s closing remarks built upon first-term rhetoric depicting the military as “gallant and brave.”<sup>764</sup> It also evoked his longtime talking point of “peace through strength.” His consistent devotion to the latter principle made Reykjavik shocking to many. The “far-reaching” proposal at the summit came when Reagan told Gorbachev that “it would be fine with him if we eliminated all nuclear weapons,” prompting the Soviet leader to respond, “let’s do it.”<sup>765</sup> The exchange prompted a period of furious negotiations that if consummated would eliminate all nuclear weapons. Talks broke down over Soviet demands to confine Strategic Defense Initiative to the laboratory for a period of ten years, something Reagan was unwilling to do.

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<sup>761</sup> “Remarks to American Military Personnel and Their Families in Keflavik Iceland” Keflavik, Iceland 12 October 1986

<sup>762</sup> Ibid.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.

<sup>764</sup> Interview with Rahrabacher

<sup>765</sup> Memorandum of Conversation Reagan and Gorbachev

Reagan's supporters and many American allies saw the Reykjavik framework as a sudden and dangerous shift. They feared Reagan would throw away one of the most significant accomplishments of his first term. His administration launched a five-point program to modernize the US nuclear triad. It resulted in the design of a new Peacekeeper missile, a relaunch of the B-1 bomber program, improved submarine launched Trident submarines, modernization of the bomber force, and a more robust command and control program.<sup>766</sup> The administration also set a target to grow the US nuclear arsenal by over 17,000 warheads by 1987.<sup>767</sup> Reagan's emphasis on expanding and improving the US nuclear arsenal throughout his first five years in office gave little indication he would favor the sweeping progress on arms control of his last three. Deployment of the Pershing-II intermediate range missiles in Europe also indicated an administration devoted to principles of deterrence and Mutually Assured Destruction. Though the decision for deployment came during the Carter years after the Soviet Union deployed intermediate range SS-20 missiles in 1977, Reagan and his advisors fully supported the NATO response. Jack Matlock, a Reagan advisor and NSC member, argued that the Soviet deployment "changed the nuclear balance in Europe" particularly because rather than replace old missiles on a one for one basis, the Soviets emplaced "a substantially larger number of the more capable weapon."<sup>768</sup> Weinberger similarly

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<sup>766</sup> Briefing Book, "Selected National Security Issues" December 1985, Folder: Selected National Security Issues December 1985 [Copy 1], RAC Box 9, NSC Executive Secretariat: Trip File, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>767</sup> Judith Miller, "Reagan Endorses Rise in Atomic Warheads by 380 Over Carter Goal," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 1982.

<sup>768</sup> Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev* 78

viewed the Soviet actions as a “politically and military threatening change in the nuclear balance in Europe.”<sup>769</sup> Charles Hill felt the US must deploy its own missiles or capitulate to Soviet dominance of Europe.<sup>770</sup> The views of Reagan’s advisors echoed the 1979 NATO Double-Track decision that argued the alliance needed a strong response to prevent “Soviet superiority in theatre nuclear systems.”<sup>771</sup>

Reagan vocally supported the Pershing deployment despite mounting public opposition. At the National Press Club in 1981, he argued that the US had no comparable missile to the SS-20 and had “dismantled the last such missile in Europe over 15 years ago.”<sup>772</sup> In his view, NATO countries therefore had to modernize their forces to meet the Soviet threat. Reagan offered to halt the deployment, but only if the Soviets agreed to dismantle the SS-20s and older SS 4 and 5 missiles.<sup>773</sup> The proposal had little impact, and by 1986 there were 143 of the Pershing missiles in Europe.<sup>774</sup> Reagan’s actions to ensure that NATO maintained equivalent strategic capabilities to the Soviet Union seemed to reflect acceptance of a traditional approach to deterrence.

Similarly, James Mann notes in *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan* that while running for office Reagan offered voters little indication he favored abolition.<sup>775</sup> He consistently railed against the second round of Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT

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<sup>769</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 334.

<sup>770</sup> Charles Hill interview

<sup>771</sup> Special Meeting of Foreign and Defense Ministers, Brussels Belgium, 12 December 1979

<sup>772</sup> “Address to the National Press Club on Arms Reduction and Nuclear Weapons,” 18 November 1981, Washington DC

<sup>773</sup> Ibid

<sup>774</sup> Matlock, 116.

<sup>775</sup> James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 40

II) concluded under the Carter administration. He wrote to Donald Rumsfeld in 1979 that the proposed caps would “be a serious blow to our security.”<sup>776</sup> A 1977 radio commentary argued the framework favored the Soviets enough to cause “purring sounds from the Kremlin.”<sup>777</sup> Utilizing the rhetoric of MAD, Reagan told listeners restrictions on missile range would ensure that the Soviets could range Western Europe, Japan and 69% Americas, while the US would only be able to target 15% of the Soviet population.<sup>778</sup> The absence of the Soviet’s Backfire bomber also demonstrated the imbalanced nature of the agreement. While Reagan was correct that the treaty included the B-1 but not the TU-22, he overstated its importance.<sup>779</sup> His decision to honor the terms of the unratified treaty through 1986 implies that his rhetoric of SALT II stemmed more from political opportunism than serious strategic concern.

In between his 1976 and 1980 campaigns, Reagan advocated for new classes of nuclear weapons and devoted several radio programs to push for creation of a neutron bomb. He believed the proposed weapon was “truly akin to the science fiction deathray.”<sup>780</sup> Through allusion to science fiction Reagan inaccurately implied the weapon would kill only enemy soldiers. The deathray analogy spoke to Reagan’s love of the fictional genre and showed a lack of technical expertise. A neutron bomb still

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<sup>776</sup> Reagan to Rumsfeld, 26 October 1979

<sup>777</sup> “Reprint of a radio program entitled SALT,” Hoover Archives

<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

<sup>779</sup> Article II Fourth Agreed Statement, Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, Together with Agreed Statements and Common Understandings Regarding the Treaty, 18 Jun 1979, Vienna, Austria.

<sup>780</sup> “Reprint of Radio Program Entitled “Neutron Bomb II” Hoover Institution

required a nuclear blast, albeit one with significantly reduced explosive force. While it would result in less collateral and property damage than the Lance missile in use by NATO forces at the time, a neutron bomb would still kill civilians and damage the countryside. It was not the controlled, clean vaporization implied by the term “deathray.” Reagan’s rhetoric and actions convinced many Americans that he made nuclear war more likely.<sup>781</sup> A 1984 gaffe in which an open mic caught him joking about “outlawing Russia forever” and beginning a bombing campaign in five minutes increased the unease.<sup>782</sup> Rising fear of nuclear war became a staple of popular culture during the period. Two critically and commercially adored stories, Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, stridently criticized US foreign policy and argued it risked nuclear war and annihilation.<sup>783</sup>

Miller’s Batman story featured President Reagan unintentionally causing a nuclear war over a small Caribbean island. He depicts a smiling Reagan, clad in a radiation suit, praising American victory on a clear stand in for Grenada, before informing the people that the Soviets are “bad losers” who launched a nuclear missile in response.<sup>784</sup> An iconic and stunning sequence took up the next four pages. In the first panels, Superman places himself in front of a red star tipped missile, strongly evoking early Cold War propaganda. Then the missile explodes. Superman, representative of

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<sup>781</sup> Mary Thornton, “45% in Poll say Chance of Nuclear War on the Rise,” *The Washington Post* March, 24 1982.

<sup>782</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Congressional Inaction on Proposed Legislation,” 11 August 1984.

<sup>783</sup> *Watchmen* was selected as one of the top 100 novels since 1923 by *Time* magazine in 2005.

<sup>784</sup> Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*, (New York: DC Comics, 1986).

truth, justice and the American-way, appears zombie-like and barely survives the strike, a clear allusion to the potential fate of his adopted home.

Reagan is not the president in *Watchmen*; instead Nixon circumvented the 22<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to serve five terms in office while pursuing policies pushing the US and USSR to the brink of war. The comic uses the “Doomsday Clock” of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists to instill a sense of dread and pending disaster. Only the destruction of major international cities in a fake alien attack orchestrated by a former-hero forces the nations to come together.<sup>785</sup> Faced with a perceived existential extraterrestrial threat, the US and USSR set aside the Cold War in the name of mutual survival.

There is some irony that Moore saw an alien invasion as the way to bridge the gap between the two nations. While meant as a commentary on a conflict he saw as foolish and needlessly intractable, Reagan and Gorbachev did actually agree to abandon the Cold War if aliens attacked. In their first face to face meeting, Reagan mused that news of an alien invasion would “unite all the peoples of the world” and asked Gorbachev what the Soviet Union would do in that scenario.<sup>786</sup> The Soviet Premier answered that the USSR would help the US to defend itself, and Reagan promised the US would do the same for the Soviets.

A 1983 made-for-tv movie, *The Day After*, also tapped into American fears of nuclear war. The depressing film depicted life in a small Kansas town immediately after

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<sup>785</sup> Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*

<sup>786</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Reagan-Gorbachev Meetings in Geneva November 1985. National Security Archive



a nuclear war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. John Corry, TV critic for *The New York Times*, argued the film's relatively graphic depiction of the effects were an effective "primer on the horror of thermonuclear war," despite being a "terrible" movie from a critical perspective.<sup>787</sup> Other critics felt it was a "rallying cry" for the nuclear freeze movement.<sup>788</sup> Concerned by the potential reception, the White House requested that ABC air a town-hall with Secretary Shultz immediately after.<sup>789</sup> Their fears intensified after Reagan and several staffers watched the movie before it aired.<sup>790</sup> However, the forced inclusion of commercial breaks and editing that rendered the film difficult to comprehend lessened the feared impact.<sup>791</sup>

*The Day After*'s imagery struck Reagan and left him "greatly depressed."<sup>792</sup> However, it also fueled his desire "do all we can to have a deterrent" sufficient to scare the Soviets from launching a nuclear attack.<sup>793</sup> Reagan also noted in his diary that the film was "anti-nuke propaganda" and the administration had to do everything it could to "take over" the message of the film.<sup>794</sup> He hoped that Shultz's interview would help show the administration's present course was the correct one. While many histories argue *The Day After* inspired later efforts at arms control and abolition, they greatly overstate its

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<sup>787</sup> John Corry, "TV View; The Day After: TV as a Rallying Cry," *The New York Times* 20 November 1983.

<sup>788</sup> David Hoffman and Lou Cannon, "ABC's The Day After," *The Washington Post*, 18 November 1983,

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Matlock, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Austin, Texas, September 23, 2014.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries* edited by Douglass Brinkley, (New York: Harper, 2009), 186.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid, 199.

importance to Reagan. The launch of SDI nearly nine months before the film aired already demonstrated his vision of a nuclear-free world. Reagan became a nuclear abolitionist in the late 1940s, though he failed to effectively message why he believed achieving abolition required strategic modernization.

A science fiction film did help inspire Reagan's anti-nuclear beliefs. Reagan spoke frequently about the 1951 classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.<sup>795</sup> It was a surprisingly subversive film for its period. Margot Henriksen notes in *Dr Strangelove's America* that much of the film challenges Cold War notions of American power. The alien, Klaatu, lands on a baseball field in Washington DC, "the center of all that represents American power and the American way of life."<sup>796</sup> Throughout the film, the US military is unable to penetrate the UFO and Klaatu's guardian robot proves both indestructible and capable of melting weapons instantaneously. Though killed by the military, his ship's advanced technology revives Klaatu long enough to deliver a dire warning, the Earth must abandon its warlike ways or risk being "reduced to a burned out cinder."<sup>797</sup> Klaatu asks Earth's leaders to follow his people's example and allow a police-like force of robots to act with impunity to prevent aggressive behavior, a clear allusion to contemporary efforts to internationalize atomic energy and ban the atomic bomb.

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<sup>795</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History 1974-2008*, (New York: Harper-Collins 2009)

<sup>796</sup> Margot Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 51.

<sup>797</sup> *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 1951

Klaatu's belief that security for all "does not mean giving up any freedom, except the freedom to act irresponsibly" appealed strongly to Reagan.<sup>798</sup> He was fond of stating "with freedom comes responsibility," and even linked the idea to arms control in a 1983 address.<sup>799</sup> *The Day the Earth Stood Still* cast nuclear weapons as an attack on individual freedom and liberty. They made the world "face obliteration" and prevented individuals from "pursuing more profitable enterprises."<sup>800</sup> These ideas mirror Reagan's own about the immorality of atomic weapons and their impact on individual liberty. Colin Powell, one of Reagan's National Security Advisors, believed the film helped inspire both the President's aside about alien invasion to Gorbachev and his frequent attempts to incorporate references to "little green men" in speeches.<sup>801</sup> The film and its internationalist message likely contributed to Reagan's desire to share SDI.<sup>802</sup>

Paul Lettow convincingly argues in *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* that Reagan "held audacious, unorthodox views regarding nuclear weapons" long before he became president.<sup>803</sup> Some of his earliest political activity centered around his opposition to nuclear weapons. Reagan planned to lead a mass antinuclear rally in December of 1945 and to read the poem "Set Your Clock at U-235" by Norman Corwin, which featured apocalyptic descriptions of the bombing of Nagasaki.

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<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on the Tricentennial Anniversary Year of German Settlement in America," 25 June 1983.

<sup>800</sup> *The Day the Earth Stood Still*

<sup>801</sup> Cannon, 42.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid, 251

<sup>803</sup> Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, (New York: Random House, 2005), XI.

Only intervention by Warner Bros, which feared the political repercussions of the performance, prevented Reagan's participation.<sup>804</sup>

Reagan also fundamentally disliked the underlying principles of Mutually Assured Destruction. While campaigning for the 1968 Republican Nomination he equated the concept to a western standoff. For Reagan, MAD was no different than “two westerners standing in a saloon aiming their guns to each other's head – permanently.”<sup>805</sup> Ed Meese noted Reagan saw MAD as “politically and diplomatically, militarily, and morally flawed.”<sup>806</sup> Kenneth Adelman, one of Reagan's lead nuclear negotiators felt the president's “hatred for nuclear weapons” strongly influenced nuclear strategy and negotiations with the Soviets during the administration.<sup>807</sup> Reagan's sense that MAD was “morally flawed” stemmed from his view that it represented the absolute failure of the government to uphold its basic responsibility, protection of individual life and freedom. Americans could not be free if they lived under threat of annihilation.

Reagan's nuclear abolitionism was in apparent conflict with his large investment in the nuclear triad. In *The Triumph of Improvisation*, historian James Graham Wilson argues that Reagan was “torn between a crusade for freedom and peace through strength.”<sup>808</sup> Wilson acknowledges Reagan's nuclear abolitionism, but feels it clashed

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<sup>804</sup> Lettow, 3-5.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid.

<sup>807</sup> Ambassador Kenneth Adelman, interview with author, notes, Austin, Texas, January 19, 2017.

<sup>808</sup> James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

with his desire to eradicate communism and “when it came to foreign policy, Reagan’s thoughts and emotions were conflicted.”<sup>809</sup> Achieving the first would mean forgoing the latter, but Reagan’s “abundant optimism and conservative political philosophy” meant “tradeoffs did not interest him.”<sup>810</sup> Conceding on either would betray individual freedom, which he viewed as both the strength of America and the right of people everywhere.

However, these goals were not as diametrically opposed as the language would indicate because of how Reagan defined “peace through strength.” He adopted the language when campaigning for Barry Goldwater in 1964. In his televised address during the campaign, which effectively launched his political career, he argued that strength meant having the “courage to say to our enemies, there is price we will not pay, there is a point beyond which they must not advance.”<sup>811</sup> The expansion of strength to include more than military means, but also the will of the population was a critical one, and likely came from conversations with one of his political mentors, Dwight Eisenhower. The view reflects Clausewitz’s maxim that the ability to defeat an enemy stems from being able to overcome resistance with strength that is “the product of two factors which cannot be separated, namely the sum of available means and the strength of the will.”<sup>812</sup> Whether Reagan learned this from reading *On War* or from mentorship is largely irrelevant, as his first term sought to buttress both aspects of American strength.

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<sup>809</sup> Ibid.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

<sup>811</sup> “A Time for Choosing.” Televised Speech. October 27, 1964.

<sup>812</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Chapter 1 section 4

Wilson notes that Reagan's notion of "crusade for freedom" sought to "cast the Cold War struggle in terms of moral clarity."<sup>813</sup> The concept focused less on rollback than on eliminating notions of moral equivalency in the Cold War. Reagan's view of "Crusade for Freedom" came from his participation in a Radio Free Europe fundraising drive spearheaded by Eisenhower in 1950. Eisenhower, then a private citizen, called on his fellow citizens to meet the communist "threat with courage and firmness" by aiding those behind the Iron Curtain with "access to truth."<sup>814</sup> America's moral superiority was its "most formidable weapon" and one each citizen could "help forge through the Crusade for Freedom."<sup>815</sup> Reagan echoed these sentiments in television commercials for the program, stating the funds raised helped "pierce the Iron Curtain with truth" identifying the "Crusade for Freedom as your chance and mine to fight communism."<sup>816</sup>

As president, Reagan introduced the "Crusade for Freedom" in his address to the British Parliament at Westminster. He concluded the speech, which famously promised democracy would leave "Marxism-Leninsim on the ash-heap of history," by pledging to "begin a major effort" to support a "crusade for freedom that [would] engage the faith and fortitude of the next generation."<sup>817</sup> The *New York Times* noted the speech was "full

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<sup>813</sup> Wilson

<sup>814</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, "Crusade for Freedom Speech" Denver, CO, 4 September 1950. Accessed on <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2010/09/labor-day-speech-ike-eisenhower-1950.html>

<sup>815</sup> Ibid.

<sup>816</sup> Reagan Ronald. "Crusade for Freedom," Radio Free Europe Advertisement, circa 1950s. Accessible at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVy1K\\_xX5pg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVy1K_xX5pg).

<sup>817</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Address to British Parliament," London, England, June 8, 1982.

of echoes of the cold war of the 1950's" and drew on Eisenhower's own remarks.<sup>818</sup> Though the term "crusade" was part of a "militantly anti-Communist tone," the *Times* recognized Reagan called for "a peaceful struggle for ideological supremacy."<sup>819</sup> The pledge caught many in the administration off-guard. Advisors did not expect the president to announce a major policy initiative in the speech. Over the next eighteen months, the National Security Council worked with a broad array of government agencies to create the National Endowment for Democracy.<sup>820</sup> The Endowment created a fund for non-governmental organizations that promoted democracy abroad. In this context, "Crusade for Freedom" nested under "Peace through Strength" as a non-military way to rebuild and project American will.

Reagan wanted to increase American military strength as well. He felt this would allow him to negotiate from a credible position. A key component of this strength was building enough strength to win a war in Europe. Doing so seemed unlikely as Reagan entered office. In 1976, the US developed a new doctrine of "Active Defense" to provide guidance on how to fight against the Warsaw Pact. Army field manuals painted a daunting picture of the situation in Europe. They warned the army would fight "battles at the end of a long, expensive, vulnerable, line of communications."<sup>821</sup> Worse, commanders "must prepare... units to fight outnumbered, and to win."<sup>822</sup> In order to

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<sup>818</sup> R.W. Apple, "President Urges Global Crusade for Democracy" *The New York Times*, 9 June 1982.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

<sup>820</sup> William Inboden, "Grand Strategy and Petty Squabbles," in *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft* edited by Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri, (Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2016), 168.

<sup>821</sup> FM100-5 Active Defense, 1976, 1-2

<sup>822</sup> Ibid.

win, allied forces would substitute “firepower for manpower.”<sup>823</sup> However, critics believed the new doctrine relied too much on achieving near-perfect intelligence to prepare for Soviet attacks.<sup>824</sup> These doubts led to the development and 1982 adoption of AirLand Battle. NATO’s new strategy would leverage technological advances to provide offensive opportunities not available under the Active Defense model.

The new doctrine viewed an “integrated tactical nuclear-conventional response” to Soviet invasion “as mandatory.”<sup>825</sup> A credible tactical nuclear capability would “discourage the enemy from forming relatively dense formations” that could overwhelm NATO units.<sup>826</sup> Nuclear strikes would create offensive opportunities by halting Soviet advances allowing NATO forces opportunities to exploit breaks in enemy formations. The alliance would employ its nuclear weapons to “focus heavily on targets well beyond the front-line” for both political and operational reasons.<sup>827</sup> It required “extending the battlefield and integrating conventional, nuclear, chemical and electronic means to permit attack of the enemy at the full depth of his formations.”<sup>828</sup>

However, NATO lacked the ability to execute this doctrine during Reagan’s first term. As the Reagan administration entered the White House, Admiral John Poindexter, the military assistant to the National Security Advisor, believed that the “Carter

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<sup>823</sup> Ibid, 3-4

<sup>824</sup> John Romjue, *From Active Defense to AirLand Battle: The Development of Army Doctrine 1973-1982*, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1984), 19.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>828</sup> Ibid, 45.



administration had not done enough to keep the Defense Department funded.”<sup>829</sup> He identified significant problems with the lack of maintenance and spare parts and a reliance on old and outdated weapons systems. The problems ran counter to the emphasis on readiness and technological superiority, leaving the US and NATO in a poor strategic position to hold off a concerted Warsaw Pact offensive.

Carter’s Secretary of Defense Harold Brown expressed similar concern about the about the alliance’s strength relative to the Soviets. He wrote National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski in April 1979 to argue that Brzezinski was “too optimistic” about US conventional forces.<sup>830</sup> Brown felt that despite recent efforts the US still had not “achieved any major changes... in our actual capabilities in Europe.”<sup>831</sup> Without greatly increased spending the US would “slide behind rapidly in military capabilities across the board.”<sup>832</sup> Brown’s concerns were a precursor to the Reagan administration’s. While Carter took steps to address the concerns, Reagan viewed the steps as insufficient and felt he inherited a disadvantageous position in Europe.

Early policy documents reflected this fear. The Policy Planning Staff began efforts just a month into the administration to “identify US conventional and theatre nuclear posture weaknesses” preventing the US from “[competing] effectively with the

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<sup>829</sup> Vice Admiral John Poindexter, interview with the author, skype, West Point, NY, 19 August 2017

<sup>830</sup> Brown to Brzezinski, Memorandum, 30 April 1979, in *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge, Documentary Supplement* edited by Edward Keefer, (Washington DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017), page 802.

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*, 803.

<sup>832</sup> *Ibid.*

Soviet Union in Europe.”<sup>833</sup> Lawrence Eagleburger, writing to Haig, argued the US must “correct the growing imbalance in US-Soviet military power” in the face of “increasingly aggressive Soviet behavior.”<sup>834</sup> National Security Decision Directive-32 utilized similar language in May of 1982, identifying the “loss of U.S. strategic superiority” and the “overwhelming growth of Soviet conventional forces capabilities” as established fact.<sup>835</sup>

That same month, while speaking at the commencement of his alma mater, President Reagan brought the message of NSDD-32 to the American people. He argued that despite the economic and social difficulties faced by the Soviet Union, it had still forged the “largest armed force in the world.”<sup>836</sup> Reagan built upon his rhetoric of peace through strength by asserting that “peace [was] not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with conflict by peaceful means.”<sup>837</sup> He identified “a sound East-West military balance” as “absolutely essential” to peace.<sup>838</sup> A NATO comparison of Alliance and Warsaw Pact forces showed such a balance was non-existent. The document showed over

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<sup>833</sup> “Memorandum From the Counselor-Designate of the Department of State (McFarlane) to the Director-Designate of Policy Planning (Wolfowitz)” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988: Volume III Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, edited by James Graham Wilson, (Washington DC: US Government Publishing Office, 2016), Document 13.

<sup>834</sup> “Action Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State-Designate for European Affairs (Eagleburger) and the Director of the Bureau of Political and Military Affairs (Burt) to Secretary of State Haig” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988: Volume III Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, edited by James Graham Wilson, (Washington DC: US Government Publishing Office, 2016), Document 28.

<sup>835</sup> National Security Decision Directive Number 32, 20 May 1982.

<sup>836</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address at Commencement Exercises at Eureka College,” Eureka, Illinois, May 9, 1982.

<sup>837</sup> Ibid.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid.

the previous ten years the Soviets “built up their forces across the board” while US and NATO defense spending “declined in real terms.”<sup>839</sup>

The study Reagan referenced was the first comparison NATO publicly released.<sup>840</sup> In the foreword, NATO Secretary General Joseph Luns pointed out that over the last twenty years “the numerical balance of forces... moved slowly but steadily in favor of the Warsaw Pact.”<sup>841</sup> NATO’s technological advantage also decayed, endangering the ability of the alliance to overcome quantity with quality.<sup>842</sup> The study highlighted the challenging nature of NATO supply lines and the gap in intermediate nuclear forces as the two greatest challenges.<sup>843</sup> Logistical challenges limited the likelihood the US and NATO could prevail conventionally and strategic imbalance meant their efforts at deterrence were less effective.

Based on these weaknesses, Reagan felt the US could not afford to accept a new arms control deal. During a 1981 National Security Council meeting Reagan insisted that the US needed “positive movement on modernization before we go into negotiations.”<sup>844</sup> He stated this publicly as well. During an address at Eureka College he identified the

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<sup>839</sup> Ibid.

<sup>840</sup> David Fouquet. “NATO’s own comparison with Warsaw Pact strength puts East ahead,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 May 1982.

<sup>841</sup> Joseph Luns, *NATO and Warsaw Pact Force Comparison 1982*, (Brussels: NATO Information Service, 1982), Foreword. A start date of 1962 for the period of neglect likely was meant to identify many reasons for the decline. The Vietnam War, US disengagement with Europe, Domestic European discontent with the Cold War, and Soviet build up and aggression all played a role.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid.

<sup>843</sup> Ibid, 45

<sup>844</sup> “National Security Council Meeting on Theater Nuclear Forces Negotiation Timing,” 30 April 1981, Washington DC.

“growing instability of the nuclear balance” as the “main threat to peace posed by nuclear weapons.”<sup>845</sup> Acknowledging those calling for a nuclear freeze, Reagan argued that would only be possible after the gap between the US and Soviet Union closed.<sup>846</sup> Reagan expanded on his support for a future arms control deal in a press conference after the speech, stating his “goal [was] to reduce nuclear weapons dramatically.”<sup>847</sup> Rejecting the views of his advisors, he reiterated his belief that “everybody would be a loser if there is a nuclear war.”<sup>848</sup> However, reducing strategic weapons depended on NATO’s ability to defeat the Warsaw Pact conventionally.

At the Reykjavik Conference in 1986, Reagan felt NATO had that ability. His optimistic read on the relative strength of the alliance put him at odds with his advisors, allies, and much of the defense establishment, a difference of opinion that he used to his advantage during the talks. As negotiations broke down Reagan pleaded with Gorbachev to relent on SDI because the “most out-spoken critics of the Soviet Union over the years, the so-called right-wing” would react negatively to the ten-year framework.<sup>849</sup> Reagan’s critics were already “kicking his brains out” for discussing limitation, to say nothing of abolition.<sup>850</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> Eureka College

<sup>846</sup> Jack Nelson, “Reagan Urges Nuclear Freeze: But Only After U.S. Catches up with Russia,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1982.

<sup>847</sup> Ronald Reagan, “The President’s News Conference,” (Press Conference, Washington D.C., March 31, 1982).

<sup>848</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>849</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation,” October 12 1986, FO006-11, WHORM : Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>850</sup> *Ibid*

Reagan's prediction of vocal opposition proved true. Poindexter, now National Security Advisor, wrote immediately after the summit expressing his opposition. He argued the elimination of nuclear weapons would return the US to a state like "that which [it] faced in the 1950s" when it only had a "chance" of stopping a conventional assault.<sup>851</sup> Poindexter supported abolition as a long-term goal but did not think it was the appropriate time to pursue it. Instead, he felt the two powers should eliminate land-based missiles, believing ones from submarines were a sufficient deterrent.<sup>852</sup> However, his proposal blatantly favored the US and had no realistic chance of Soviet acceptance.

The Joint Chiefs also expressed immediate opposition to the Reykjavik framework. In a December meeting with the president, they unanimously argued that the elimination of nuclear weapons within ten years would gravely impact the strategic balance in Europe. In their view, the contemporary conventional deterrent was inadequate and would require an investment of tens of billions of dollars over a period of at least a decade.<sup>853</sup> While the timelines for the buildup and nuclear abolition matched, the Pentagon felt political and social factors would prevent the necessary spending.

Weinberger strongly dissented. Shortly after the summit, NSDD-250 reiterated Reagan's desire to eliminate ballistic missiles. It also directed the Pentagon to provide recommendations to support an IBM-less strategy.<sup>854</sup> Weinberger ignored this guidance

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<sup>851</sup> Memorandum, John Poindexter to Ronald Reagan, "Why We Can't Commit to Eliminating All Nuclear Weapons within 10 Years," October 16, 1986, RAC Box 3, Alton Keel Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>852</sup> Poindexter interview with Author

<sup>853</sup> Transcript, "JCS Meeting with the President," December 19, 1986, folder JCS Response-NSDD 250, 12/19/1986 (1 of 4), RAC Box 12, Robert Linhard Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>854</sup> NSDD-250, 03 NOV 86

and instead argued “at the least it [was] unclear whether the Soviet Union [intended] to accept the US proposals” and as a result “our national security planning and military programming remain unaltered.”<sup>855</sup> An attached study reiterated his standard line that the US would “have to address more realistically the Warsaw pact’s distinct advantage in nuclear, biological, chemical, and conventional warfare capabilities.”<sup>856</sup> Poindexter broadly agreed with Weinberger and the Joint Chiefs. His own memo to Reagan stressed that “the differences in size of conventional forces” and other “military requirements” meant it was “very unlikely we could take the actions to improve our conventional forces” to a point that enabled the Reykjavik framework to succeed.<sup>857</sup>

Opposition to Reykjavik extended well beyond the White House. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger coauthored a *National Review* op-ed arguing the proposed deal threatened to reopen the “gap in deterrence.”<sup>858</sup> Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor to President Ford, felt the proposed deal would lead to “absolute disaster.”<sup>859</sup> Even decades later when Kissinger advocated for nuclear abolition, Scowcroft continued to insist the weapons were necessary.<sup>860</sup> Opposition also came from the Democratic

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<sup>855</sup> Caspar Weinberger to Ronald Reagan. Memorandum. “Post-Reykjavik Activities – NSDD 250” 5 DEC 1986, folder JCS Response-NSDD 250, 12/19/1986 (1 of 4), RAC Box 12, Robert Linhard Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>856</sup> Ibid.

<sup>857</sup> Poindexter to Reagan, 16 October 1986

<sup>858</sup> Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, “A Real Peace” *The National Review*, May 22, 1987, 34

<sup>859</sup> Mann, 47

<sup>860</sup> Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 550.

Party. Chair of the House Armed Services Committee Les Aspin believed it would take ten more divisions in Europe to establish an all-conventional deterrent.<sup>861</sup>

European leaders dreaded the possibility of nuclear abolition. After the summit, the USIA reported the proposals “amazed” continental news services.<sup>862</sup> A memo from USIA Director Charles Wick to Poindexter argued Western Europe fears of “an America strategically decoupled from Europe have suddenly revived.”<sup>863</sup> Even before the summit, the French expressed concern about the possibility of US concessions on INF. They believed any agreement would further push the US from Europe, placing greater strain on France to make up the gap in deterrence.<sup>864</sup> The summit concerned the West German government and complicated efforts to placate a population supportive of the Nuclear Freeze movement. Kohl called Reykjavik “breathtaking” but feared its “far-reaching consequences,” most notably that it would leave a “conventional imbalance in Europe” still not “properly addressed” by NATO.<sup>865</sup>

Reagan’s willingness to abolish nuclear weapons caught the British completely off-guard. Writing to Reagan before the summit, Thatcher gave no indication that she expected a sweeping offer. Instead, she felt that Reagan should “be sticking to the

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<sup>861</sup> George Will, “...Another Ten Divisions...” *The National Review*, May 22, 1987.

<sup>862</sup> Memorandum, Charles Wick to John Poindexter, “SDI and INF Dominate Revitalized Strategic Debate in post-Reykjavik Europe,” October 17, 1986, folder Post-Iceland (3 of 4), RAC Box 2, Alton Keel Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid.

<sup>864</sup> “Reykjavik Summit, French Reaction,” 03 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>865</sup> “Reykjavik: Initial German Reactions,” October 14, 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

essential elements of the negotiating position worked out with your Allies.”<sup>866</sup> Thatcher would naturally “welcome an agreement based on an equal ceiling in Europe” for ballistic missiles, but did not envision a ceiling of zero.<sup>867</sup> Shortly after the summit, Sir Anthony Acland, the British Ambassador to the US, sought to clarify the US position on nuclear weapons. He met with Shultz on October 16 to discuss UK concerns. Shultz held firm, indicating he believed “longer term” fears of Warsaw Pact superiority were not “wholly justified.”<sup>868</sup> NATO would take advantage of the combined population and economic advantages of all its member states. Acland remained unconvinced and retorted it was easier for a “totalitarian state to keep a huge force under arms than for western democracies.”<sup>869</sup> In a later meeting, Poindexter assured the ambassador that Reagan did not seek to eliminate all nuclear weapons and remained committed to maintaining deterrence through bombers and cruise missiles. He also emphasized that these areas were ones of strength for the alliance and referenced the development of stealth technology which “undoubtedly” put the US far ahead of the Soviets.<sup>870</sup> Despite Poindexter’s efforts, Acland found it to be “an unsatisfactory discussion” that only offered “confused” and “contradictory” counterarguments to British concerns.<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> Thatcher to Reagan, 03OCT1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>867</sup> Ibid.

<sup>868</sup> Sir Anthony Acland, Cable to Foreign Ministry, 18 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>869</sup> Ibid.

<sup>870</sup> Diplomatic Cable, Washington to London, 30 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>871</sup> Ibid.



Thatcher took her concerns directly to Reagan. She cabled congratulating Reagan on coming close to an agreement and blamed Gorbachev for preventing a “historic achievement.”<sup>872</sup> However, the initial reports about a “prospective agreement to eliminate all long-range nuclear missiles... caused [her] considerable concern.”<sup>873</sup> She worried it reflected reluctance by the US to commit to NATO and could “cause even more difficulties for Western unity.”<sup>874</sup> The cable encouraged Reagan to negotiate “along the lines we have discussed in the past,” a sign of the Thatcher’s displeasure.<sup>875</sup> She also called Reagan the day after the summit. The phone call echoed the language of the cable, beginning by praising Reagan’s for having “preformed marvelously” and then segueing into the “considerable concern” caused by the proposal.<sup>876</sup> Thatcher “repeatedly stressed the importance of nuclear deterrence in the face of the imbalance of conventional forces in Europe,” to no effect.<sup>877</sup> Reagan felt the US “could have a strategy” to address the issue.<sup>878</sup> After the call, the British felt Reagan would not abandon the abolition and instead “showed considerable pride in it.”<sup>879</sup>

Reagan clearly viewed the conventional environment in Europe differently from his advisors, supporters, and allies. Even in the face of concerted, organized efforts to

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<sup>872</sup> Thatcher to Reagan, 13 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>873</sup> Ibid.

<sup>874</sup> Ibid.

<sup>875</sup> Ibid.

<sup>876</sup> “Prime Minister’s Talk with President Reagan,” 13 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>877</sup> Charles Powell to Colin Budd, 14 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid.

<sup>879</sup> Ibid.

sway him, he remained committed to his belief in the ability to deter the USSR conventionally. While many advisors agreed with Reagan about the increased capability of US forces they still felt the US needed strategic weapons. Reagan drew his distinct conclusion from an unconventional source that he revealed to Thatcher during their conversation. In response, the British classified the transcript as “particularly sensitive” and limited its distribution.<sup>880</sup> Thatcher and her advisors feared that others who viewed the transcript would feel it demonstrated Reagan’s “grasp of strategy must be pretty limited,” a view they rejected.<sup>881</sup>

During the phone conversation, Reagan “strongly commended” Tom Clancy’s *Red Storm Rising* to Thatcher.<sup>882</sup> He felt it “gave an excellent picture of the Soviet Union’s intentions and strategy” and “had clearly been much impressed by the book.”<sup>883</sup> Thatcher did not know what to make of the recommendation, and an advisor had to explain the reference.<sup>884</sup> However, for Reagan with his penchant for using fiction as a creative space in developing policy, Clancy’s work provided an environment which allowed him to realize his dream of a nuclear free world.

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<sup>880</sup> Ibid.

<sup>881</sup> Lord Charles Powell of Bayswater to Author, email, 19 August 2016.

<sup>882</sup> Powell to Budd

<sup>883</sup> Ibid.

<sup>884</sup> Powell to Author.

## Red Storm Rising and the President

Thatcher was not the only one with whom Reagan discussed Clancy's book. When the author visited the White House in March of 1985, the president demonstrated a strong interest in forthcoming novel after hearing it was about World War III.<sup>885</sup> He queried Clancy about who win and enjoyed the response of "the good guys."<sup>886</sup> He read the book immediately after its August 1986 release, and claimed it prepared him for the summit.

*Red Storm Rising* is, as Clancy indicated in the Oval Office, about World War III. The author also kept his promise about "the good guys" winning the war. It begins with a successful terrorist attack on a Soviet oil refinery, leading to an energy crisis for Moscow. Soviet leaders determine they must take Iranian oil fields and refinery facilities to prevent economic collapse. They recognize aggressive military action could lead to a broader war and conclude they must "eliminate NATO as a political and military force."<sup>887</sup> They view NATO as "divided and soft" and express certainty it will crumble quickly.<sup>888</sup> The USSR then stages a terrorist attack against a group of children visiting the Kremlin and use it as *casus belli* to invade West Germany.

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<sup>885</sup> Tom Clancy to Susan Richards March 8, 1985. Accessed online at <http://piedtype.com/2013/10/06/tom-clancy-boy-writer-part-4/>

<sup>886</sup> Ibid.

<sup>887</sup> Tom Clancy, *Red Storm Rising*, (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1986), 32.

<sup>888</sup> Ibid, 34.

The Soviets immediately push deep into Germany and seize Iceland in a surprise amphibious invasion. Losing the island threatens NATO's supply lines and begins a period of fierce naval combat in the Atlantic. NATO eventually establishes a stalemate on the continent and the recapture of Iceland returns control of air and sea lanes to the alliance. The arrival of fresh troops and supplies in Europe places conventional victory out of reach for the USSR, leading to a coup in Moscow, the end of the war, and Clancy ends the book hinting about a non-communist Soviet Union.

The favorable outcome alone was not enough to endear the work to Reagan. *Red Storm Rising* was neither the first "techno-thriller" about a NATO-Warsaw Pact world war published, nor the first work of fiction that Reagan read on the subject. The 1978 book *The Third World War: August 1985* by General Sir John Hackett provided a basic template for Clancy to work with. Recently retired, the general worked with other retired flag officers seeking to raise alarm about the weakness of NATO. His first draft of the book had the Soviets win the fictional war due to the "damage of the locust years" of the 1970s.<sup>889</sup> However, consultation with colleagues led Hackett to believe that the ending would "cause more harm than good," and he changed the ending to a NATO victory.<sup>890</sup> The book became a bestseller as a paperback, debuting on *The New York Times* list in ninth place on June 1, 1980.<sup>891</sup> Berkley Books published it, and the success of this first techno-thriller likely influenced their decision to purchase the paperback rights to *The*

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<sup>889</sup> John Hackett, *The Third World War: August 1985*, (New York: MacMillan, 1978), 138

<sup>890</sup> Stephen Webbe, "World War III: A Novel Warning," *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 7, 1980.

<sup>891</sup> "Paperback Best Sellers: Trade," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1980.

*Hunt for Red October*.<sup>892</sup> Hackett's and Clancy's books have much in common. Both portray reestablishment of supply lines from North America as critical to the eventual NATO victory, show the importance of technology, and end in a Soviet coup. On the surface, Hackett's concluding argument that "if the crisis of 1985 had occurred in 1977" it would be "scarcely conceivable the Soviet plan...could have failed" and clear call for increased military spending would appeal to Reagan in a similar way to Clancy's books.<sup>893</sup> However, after including the work on a June 1984 list of books he was reading, Reagan never publicly referenced it again.<sup>894</sup>

Partly, this was due to Clancy's superior storytelling. *The Third World War* lacks a central narrative and protagonist. Hackett uses military jargon excessively and does not have Clancy's ability to provide supporting context effectively. Hackett's depiction of a limited nuclear exchange negated its potential impact on Reagan as it embraced the logic of mutually assured destruction. Hackett depicted the type of amoral decision-making Reagan found abhorrent. In contrast, *Red Storm Rising* depicts the commander of the Red Army supporting a coup rather than employ tactical nuclear. Clancy's ending saw NATO prevail conventionally and ideologically, a perfect narrative for Reagan.

*Red Storm Rising* channeled Reagan's roadmap for "peace through strength." In his 1982 address during the commencement exercises at Eureka College, Reagan described five points he believed a just peace would rest on. Foremost among these was "a sound East-

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<sup>892</sup> Webbe, "World War III: A Novel Warning"

<sup>893</sup> Hackett

<sup>894</sup> Ronald Reagan to *The Baltimore Sun*, June 26, 1984, in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 285.

West military balance” that was “absolutely essential.”<sup>895</sup> He also identified “economic security, regional stability, arms reductions, and dialogue” as the additional “means by which we can seek peace with the Soviet Union.”<sup>896</sup> All five of these were central to the plot of *Red Storm Rising*. The presence of these themes led Reagan to view the book as realistic, relevant, and a worthy reference.

### **A Sound East-West Military Balance**

Reagan emphasized conventional parity to support nuclear abolition. A December 1985 National Security Council review highlighted this view and noted the movement towards “lower levels of nuclear forces” meant the need to plan on an “increasing contribution” from “primarily non-nuclear systems” to deter Soviet aggression.<sup>897</sup> The US and NATO could not simply match the numbers of the Warsaw Pact. While Reagan was fond of noting NATO enjoyed a greater combined GDP and population than the Warsaw Pact, that advantage was politically impossible to use in peacetime.<sup>898</sup> US allies rightly feared large-scale, permanent mobilization. They recognized garrison-states were unsustainable in a free society. While discussing NATO spending with the British, Ken Adelman noted Bulgaria spent four times more than the

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<sup>895</sup> “Address at the Commencement of Eureka College”

<sup>896</sup> Ibid.

<sup>897</sup> “Selected National Security Issues,” December 1985.

<sup>898</sup> Poindexter interview

British on defense. His counterpart quickly agreed this was true, but it was also true his country had no desire to live like the Bulgarians did.<sup>899</sup> Instead, NATO would develop and rely on superior technological means to achieve parity.

Historian Odd Arne Westad argues “technology was a main reason for the durability of the Cold War as an international system.”<sup>900</sup> Rapid advancements in military and other technologies following World War II allowed both the US and USSR to build and maintain influence globally. The advancements enabled the use of that power on a speed and scale impossible in previous eras. However, by the Reagan presidency, the Soviets had fallen behind technologically in significant ways. Westad points out that the consumerism of the capitalist world spurred better “ideas, designs and technologies.”<sup>901</sup> The powerful demand for products like personal computers buttressed individual freedom through building support for open markets and increasing access to information. Integration of many public and private sectors created technology with both military and civilian applications. NATO weaponry quickly became more adaptable and advanced than Soviet equivalents. It was also expensive, often prohibitively so for the USSR. In the early 1980s, the US military alone had over twenty thousand computers and processors, more than the entire Soviet Union. While the US entered the digital age, Soviet planners still relied on computing instruments from the 1950s to track

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<sup>899</sup> Adelman interview

<sup>900</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, (New York: Hachette Books, 2017), 6.

<sup>901</sup> *Ibid*, 525.

production.<sup>902</sup> At Reykjavik Soviet leaders were well aware they “could not afford massive new investments in science and technology in order to catch up.”<sup>903</sup>

Contemporary US government assessments identified the divide. A 1987 CIA report highlighted that over the previous decade, the Warsaw Pact maintained its quantitative advantage but had broadly failed in “pushing the state of the art in designing its weapons.”<sup>904</sup> They instead relied on an “evolutionary design process” of incremental improvements to older systems.<sup>905</sup> The report concluded that by 1986 “only a small share of Soviet inventories” contained technologically advanced systems.<sup>906</sup> In contrast, the US made “better use of emerging technologies” believing increased lethality and survivability mitigated the numeric disadvantage.<sup>907</sup> NATO leveraged its economic strength to achieve this, spending forty percent more during the 1980 on defense than Warsaw Pact countries.<sup>908</sup> The spending spree was a sharp reversal from the late 1970s, when Warsaw Pact expenditures outstripped NATO’s.<sup>909</sup>

Much of this increased funding went into developing and fielding new systems. During its first term, the Reagan administration expanded on Carter-era programs to begin construction of thirty-four new combat ships, field over four-thousand Abrams

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<sup>902</sup> Jeffrey Engel, *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 53.

<sup>903</sup> Westad, 523.

<sup>904</sup> “A Comparison of Warsaw Pact and NATO Defense Activities, 1976-86,” Central Intelligence Agency Electronic FOIA Reading Room, 1987, 4.

<sup>905</sup> *Ibid*, 4

<sup>906</sup> *Ibid*, v.

<sup>907</sup> “Selected National Security Issues,” December 1985.

<sup>908</sup> CIA 1987 Assessment, vi

<sup>909</sup> *Ibid*.



tanks, and develop the Bradley Fighting Vehicle and Light Amphibious Vehicle.<sup>910</sup> In addition, the administration increased support for the Apache attack helicopter, Blackhawk support helicopter, and F-117 stealth fighter.<sup>911</sup> These new systems, paired with investments in advanced munitions led the Joint Chiefs of Staff to unanimously conclude that by 1985, the US military was more ready for combat “by every measure of common sense” than it had been in 1980.<sup>912</sup> General Vessey also highlighted the US “lead in high technology” during a 1984 NSC meeting, noting it could mitigate the Soviet’s “greater military and industrial base.”<sup>913</sup>

*Red Storm Rising* let Reagan see these improvements in action. A *New York Times* review of the book entitled “Virtuous Men and Perfect Weapons” found *Red Storm Rising* was “particularly good news... for Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger.”<sup>914</sup> The reviewer highlighted how “American technology works- spy satellites, stealth aircraft, advanced tanks and sonar, the lot.”<sup>915</sup> It was “an oddly comforting version of World War III,” free of nuclear or chemical weapons. Though written on a “Victorian boys’ book level” with “undistinguished prose” it filled the same niche as Horatio Hornblower novels. *Red Storm Rising* offered “good men in tight spots” with “lots of action” to provide what was a “rattling good yarn.”<sup>916</sup>

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<sup>910</sup> “Selected National Security Issues,” December 1985.

<sup>911</sup> Ibid.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid.

<sup>913</sup> “National Security Council Meeting: Soviet Defense and Arms Control Objectives,” 30 November 1984, Washington DC.

<sup>914</sup> Robert Lekachman, “Virtuous Men and Perfect Weapons,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 1986.

<sup>915</sup> Ibid.

<sup>916</sup> Ibid.

All of these aspects of *Red Storm Rising* made it the perfect book for Reagan. The “comforting certainty that our side will win” was a throwback to the adventure novels of Reagan’s youth.<sup>917</sup> The novel offered a narrative version of the information Reagan received from the NSC and DoD about the successful turnaround of America’s military. The close parallels between Clancy’s fiction and the NSC’s policy documents made the two nearly interchangeable to Reagan. However, fiction was more immersive and entertaining and spoke to Reagan directly.

Clancy placed the technological superiority of NATO on display in *Red Storm Rising*. The advanced technology of the alliance wins the war. In the direst moments of the novel, a new system provides NATO the exact edge it needs to win. Though the program was still classified, the F-117 stealth fighter appears in the novel. US pilots use the stealth technology to strike Soviet supply lines and radar sites causing chaos and confusion in Soviet ranks. In contrast, NATO enjoys near perfect tactical intelligence in the book thanks to its use of the airborne EWCS platform. The advanced sensors quickly relayed information such that throughout the novel, NATO forces know exactly when and where Soviet forces intend to strike.

The intelligence sharing increased the effectiveness of Clancy’s ground forces. It allows Abrams tanks to provide NATO with a decisive edge in ground battle. An early engagement between ten Abrams with dismounted infantry in support and two full strength Soviet tank regiments with over one hundred T-72s ended in a decisive victory

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<sup>917</sup> Ibid.

for the US. In the fight, the better technology of the Abrams combined with the ability to call in air support from A-10 Warthogs destroyed one-third of the Soviet force, with minimal damage to US formations.<sup>918</sup> Soviets refer to the aircraft as the “devil’s cross” since “from an angle, the American fighter did look like a stylized Russian Orthodox crucifix.”<sup>919</sup> Throughout the book, Soviet commanders assume they face much larger formations and lament “murderous” cost NATO imposed on their forces.<sup>920</sup>

*Red Storm Rising* effectively portrayed the new NATO doctrine of AirLand Battle which sought to make use of NATO’s technological edge.<sup>921</sup> The doctrine relied on the ability to use technology to identify command and control units, key supply locations, and disrupt logistics routes. The intent was for EWACs to provide intelligence on targets that air assets could strike, which would in turn create opportunities for ground forces to take advantage of chaos in enemy formations to conduct effective counter-attacks. This complicated integration works perfectly in Clancy’s novel. Throughout the book, Soviet military leadership express frustration as superior western radar technology effectively tracks individual vehicles on the ground, despite their efforts at concealment.<sup>922</sup> Worse still for the Warsaw Pact, stealth technology allows NATO to destroy bridges, decimate critical supply lines, and kill senior commanders at will.<sup>923</sup>

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<sup>918</sup> *Red Storm Rising*, 324.

<sup>919</sup> *Ibid*, 329.

<sup>920</sup> *Ibid*, 332.

<sup>921</sup> *AirLand Battle* 45

<sup>922</sup> *Red Storm Rising*, 320.

<sup>923</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

Enemy leadership were often torn between awe and frustration at the vastly superior capabilities of NATO, and in the final negotiations they noted that if not for “those damned invisible bombers” the war would end differently.<sup>924</sup> *Red Storm Rising* argued that not only was AirLand Battle a feasible doctrine but also NATO could already execute it. Clancy and his co-author, Larry Bond, consciously included the doctrine, increasing the appeal of the book to military professionals.<sup>925</sup> However, they chose not to include the doctrine’s use of nuclear and chemical weapons. They shared Reagan’s abhorrence of such weapons and believed they were no longer necessary.<sup>926</sup> The overarching message of the book for Reagan was the US could execute AirLand Battle without doctrinal use of weapons of mass destruction.

While at the Air Force Academy, Reagan spoke to the importance of technology. He noted that over the previous century “the pace of change, once orderly and evolutionary, became frantic and revolutionary.”<sup>927</sup> Technology like personal computers, transistors, and fiber optics were part of a “cataclysmic rush” that helped to advance civilization in innumerable ways.<sup>928</sup> He drew upon the mythos of the American frontier and his own love of the 1870s west by equating it to the modern space age. Encouraging the graduating class to “accept the challenge of space,” Reagan argued that just as “the

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<sup>924</sup> Ibid, 649.

<sup>925</sup> Larry Bond and Chris Carlson, interview with author, tape recording, Springfield, Virginia, 20 October, 2014.

<sup>926</sup> Bond Interview

<sup>927</sup> “Address at Commencement Exercises at the United States Air Force Academy.” Colorado Springs, Colorado, 30 May 1984.

<sup>928</sup> Ibid.

brave men and women of the West” did not “let the unknowns and dangers overwhelm them,” only the “own courage and imagination” limited modern Americans.<sup>929</sup> Reagan’s tendency to link American technological prowess with the ideology of American exceptionalism is critical to understanding his strategic approach. He believed the boundless creativity of a free people would overcome any obstacle. Shultz believed this was due to Reagan’s “instinctive vision of the future.”<sup>930</sup> Technology and freedom formed a mutually beneficial relationship, where advances in one spurred the other forward. Reagan told the Air Force cadets “technology plus freedom, [equaled] opportunity and progress.”<sup>931</sup>

*Red Storm Rising*’s mix of high technology and virtuous leaders captured Reagan’s dynamic perfectly. Clancy’s narrative, though more optimistic than official assessments, provided a plausible version of World War III. Reagan believed it compellingly argued that the US and NATO could equal the Warsaw Pact without use of weapons of mass destruction. Official briefings reinforced this. After a 1987 meeting with the Joint Chiefs, Reagan gushed in his diary. He described a fascinating day, with “the real kicker a report on new weaponry.”<sup>932</sup> The report excited Reagan by showing how even though “we can’t match the Soviets tank for tank,” the US could use its “technology and come up with a weapon that nullifies their superior numbers.”<sup>933</sup>

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<sup>929</sup> Ibid.

<sup>930</sup> Anthony Acland, Diplomatic Cable, 18 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, 20.

<sup>931</sup> Ibid.

<sup>932</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Wednesday, April 8 1987,” *The Reagan Diaries*.

<sup>933</sup> Ibid.

Reagan also learned of new aircraft and other classified programs that would allow outnumbered US forces to prevail. The report built upon Reagan's belief that the US had overcome the numerical and logistical challenges to conventional containment. Even if the view was overly optimistic in 1986 and 87, Reagan felt developments over the next decade would make it reality. This period matched the proposed implementation of the Reykjavik framework, and gave the US time to ensure the way Reagan viewed the conventional balance became reality. Though the plan assumed peace in Europe over the next decade, neither Reagan or his advisors expected a war.<sup>934</sup> They felt "Soviet leadership was smart, intelligent, and not crazy," and therefore, despite its ideological failings, was not seeking to destroy the world.<sup>935</sup>

Reagan's belief in the stability of Europe and more optimistic view of American power created a unique window in the negotiations at Reykjavik. Secretary of State Shultz argued that Reagan went as far as he did in the summit in part because of the need "to reel the Soviets in" due to the concessions they were making.<sup>936</sup> Gorbachev himself would later express frustration at Reagan's tendency to simply "pocket concessions" and move on to the next issue without moving on.<sup>937</sup> This dynamic occurred because each side felt they held the stronger position. It would be unlikely that the Soviets would offer as much if they saw themselves behind conventionally. *Red Storm Rising* helped

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<sup>934</sup> Poindexter interview

<sup>935</sup> Ibid.

<sup>936</sup> Anthony Acland, Diplomatic Cable, 18 October 1986, PREM-19-1759, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, 20.

<sup>937</sup> George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, (New York: Scribner's, 1995).

Reagan identify what he believed was a narrow window of time between his belief in NATO's conventional advantage and Soviet recognition of it. He wanted to exploit a strategic advantage his opponent was unaware of. As a negotiator, he sought to use this to maximum advantage and pursue a lifelong vision.

### **Know Your Enemy: The People vs the System**

In January of 1984, Reagan sought to calm the citizens of the US and the rest of the world after a year of tension between the US and USSR. The previous year saw numerous events that made US-Soviet relations more acrimonious. In March, Reagan referred to the USSR as an "evil empire" in his speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida. Soviet leadership viewed this as part of an "uncompromising ideological offensive."<sup>938</sup> It lent credence to Andropov's view that Reagan was "unpredictable" and the Soviets should "expect anything from him."<sup>939</sup> In a June meeting with Averell Harriman, Andropov told the envoy he "had no confidence in the present administration" and since "mistrust and enmity have heated up" the prospect of war was increasingly likely.<sup>940</sup> Shortly after the "Evil Empire" speech, Reagan

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<sup>938</sup> Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Time Books, 2005), 477.

<sup>939</sup> *Ibid*, 523

<sup>940</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between General Secretary Yuri Andropov and Averell Harriman," 2 June 1983, Moscow, USSR, National Security Archive

announced the Strategic Defense Initiative. The proposed defensive system played to Soviet fears that Reagan sought an arms race in space.<sup>941</sup>

Over the summer, Soviets increasingly worried over the prospect of an American first strike. They sent “urgent and detailed instructions” to KGB residents to collect evidence of US preparations for war.<sup>942</sup> The alert coincided with the deployment of Pershing II missiles to Europe, and despite the deployment’s announcement in 1979 their presence added to tensions in Europe. During this period, NATO also prepared for its annual exercises, Autumn Forge and Reforger, as well as a command post exercise, Able Archer. In preparation the US deployed 16,000 additional troops to Europe.<sup>943</sup> The extra deployments increased the US footprint on the continent and showed “US resolve and ability to defend Europe.”<sup>944</sup> Soviet officers viewed this as a “most dangerous” provocation as they realistically simulated mobilization for war.<sup>945</sup>

The Soviets shared responsibility for the escalating tensions. In September, their forces shot down a civilian airliner. The crash of Korean Airlines Flight 007 killed 269 people, including an American congressman. Soviet efforts to cover up involvement failed after US Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick presented audio recordings of the incident. The tapes revealed Soviet pilots had visual contact with the

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<sup>941</sup> Dobrynin, 527.

<sup>942</sup> Ibid, 523.

<sup>943</sup> Nate Jones, Able Archer Electronic Briefing Book, National Security Archive [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB427/#\\_ftn1](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB427/#_ftn1)

<sup>944</sup> US Military Airlift Command ““Reforger 83\Crested Cap 83\Display Determination 83\Autumn Forge 83 After Act Report,” 8 December 1983, National Security Archive

<sup>945</sup> “Unpublished Interview with former Soviet Head of General Staff Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev,” 10 January 1990, National Security Archive.



aircraft for over twenty minutes, did not fire any warning shots, and made no effort to communicate with the plane before shooting it down.<sup>946</sup> The actions displayed “shocking disregard for human life and international norms” and demonstrated “violence and lies [were] regular instruments of Soviet policy.”<sup>947</sup>

Reagan employed similarly harsh language. He argued there was no way to mistake the profile of KAL 007 and it was the second time the Soviets had shot down an airliner. According to Reagan, Americans should not “be surprised by the inhuman brutality” displayed by the Soviets. He reminded listeners of the Prague Spring, Hungarian Uprising, and recent Soviet actions in Poland and Afghanistan. The speech implied that the Soviets intentionally used massacres as a tool of national policy.<sup>948</sup> By November 1983, both the Soviets and Americans felt the other’s recent behavior demonstrated increased aggression and willingness to use violence to achieve their goals. NATO’s command post exercise ABLE ARCHER occurred during this period of heightened tension. During the exercise, the KGB reported the US had gone on nuclear alert and Soviet early warning satellites erroneously detected a launch of five nuclear missiles.<sup>949</sup> Stanislav Petrov, a Soviet officer, recognized a first-strike would likely encompass a greater number of missiles and waited for confirmation from other systems

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<sup>946</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, Comments to the UN General Assembly, New York City, 05 September 1983.

<sup>947</sup> Ibid.

<sup>948</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation on the Soviet Attack on a Korean Civilian Airliner,” 5 SEP 1983.

<sup>949</sup> Wilson, 78.

before alerting Moscow.<sup>950</sup> While the incident ended peacefully, an accidental nuclear exchange was possible. The rhetoric and actions of both the US and USSR created an environment where such an event was feasible.

Following Able Archer, US intelligence agencies were unsure about the seriousness of Soviet war fears. However, in 1990 the US government concluded that the USSR had “a genuine belief” the US was preparing to attack them in the fall of 1983.<sup>951</sup> Reagan became convinced much sooner. In 1984, he wrote in his diary that “maybe they are scared of us and think we are a threat.”<sup>952</sup> He went further in his 1990 memoir, noting that after three years on the job he had learned that “many people at the top of the Soviet hierarchy were genuinely afraid of America and Americans.”<sup>953</sup> This was an important realization, and he increasingly empathized with the challenges faced by individual Russians while maintaining his enmity of the Soviet system.

Reagan’s 1984 speech reaffirmed US commitment to peace in the wake of the past year’s tension.<sup>954</sup> He acknowledged recent harsh rhetoric “led some to speak of heightened uncertainty and an increased danger of conflict.”<sup>955</sup> Reagan admitted this view was “understandable,” but argued it was “profoundly mistaken.”<sup>956</sup> He rejected the

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<sup>950</sup> Greg Myre, “Stanislav Petrov, ‘The Man Who Saved the World,’ Dies at 77,” *National Public Radio*, 18 Sep 2017

<sup>951</sup> The President’s Foreign Advisory Board, “The Soviet War Scare,” 15 February 1990, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book.

<sup>952</sup> Ronald Reagan Diary entry 14 June, National Security Archive

<sup>953</sup> Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1990), 588-589.

<sup>954</sup> Matlock interview

<sup>955</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations” 16 January 1984

<sup>956</sup> *Ibid.*

assertion that his administration made the world more dangerous, a common claim of critics. Instead, improvements to US defense led to “less danger” because the USSR would not “underestimate [US] strength or question [US] resolve.”<sup>957</sup> The argument ignored that the Soviets might view US strength as a threat to their own security. Reagan noted both nations shared the goal and responsibility “to avoid war and reduce the level of arms.”<sup>958</sup> Given the large American investment in defense over the past three years, those watching could be forgiven for doubting his sincerity. The opening rhetoric fit Reagan’s past comments on the Cold War and did not suggest a change in viewpoint. However, the middle sections of the speech strike a more conciliatory tone.

Reagan acknowledged a “gap in American and Soviet perceptions and policy” that prevented each side from understanding the other.<sup>959</sup> He called for both governments to jointly examine steps to display good intentions and find ways to achieve cooperation and understanding. “Strength and dialogue” must go hand in hand, and Reagan felt the obvious mutual distaste for the other’s ideology should not prevent negotiations.<sup>960</sup> Reagan’s closing particularly stood out. He imagined married couples from the US and USSR taking shelter from a storm with the language barrier magically removed. Reagan felt the two couples would not pass the time discussing “differences in governmental structure and philosophy.”<sup>961</sup> Instead, they would talk of “common interests” that “have

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<sup>957</sup> Ibid.

<sup>958</sup> Ibid.

<sup>959</sup> Ibid.

<sup>960</sup> Ibid.

<sup>961</sup> Ibid.

to do with the things of everyday life.”<sup>962</sup> The conversation would “probably have touched on ambitions and hobbies, and what they wanted for their children,” and all would depart as friends.<sup>963</sup> Reagan concluded “people don’t make wars,” instead they just want the freedom “to raise their children in a world without fear and without war,” to work in a field of their choice and engage in something that “gives them satisfaction and a sense of worth.”<sup>964</sup> He believed these interests transcended borders and both the US and USSR could do more to guarantee their citizens the chance to live freely. Reagan added the story to the speech personally.<sup>965</sup> He intended the passage to show commonality between American and Soviet people and that the differences between the two governments were surmountable.<sup>966</sup> The anecdote demonstrated Reagan’s proclivity for parable. The story was short, memorable, and gave listeners a clear understanding of how Reagan viewed common people.

However, it was less conciliatory to the Soviet government than it seemed at first blush. Reagan often noted that the USSR denied its citizens the “common interests” that he mentioned in the Anya and Ivan parable. One of Reagan’s favorite jokes highlighted this. He liked to tell of a businessman traveling from New York to Moscow. In each city, he takes a cab driven by a young college student. The businessman asks each driver their plans upon graduation and neither knows. The American has not decided, but the

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<sup>962</sup> Ibid.

<sup>963</sup> Ibid.

<sup>964</sup> Ibid.

<sup>965</sup> Matlock Interview

<sup>966</sup> Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev* 85

Soviet is unsure because his government has not told him yet. The joke captured what Reagan viewed as a key difference between the two nations, the ability for an individual to “work at some trade, craft, or profession that gives them satisfaction and a sense of worth.”<sup>967</sup> Even when Reagan spoke of average Soviets it still attacked the ideology and government of the USSR.

The speech closed with another attack on the Soviet Union. Reagan argued that “if the Soviet government wants peace, then there will be peace.”<sup>968</sup> The line, though somewhat conciliatory, also marked a clear accusation that the USSR was solely responsible for the fraught world environment, and Moscow would need to be the first to move towards a healthier relationship. The speech did not break with Reagan’s pattern of attacking the Soviet Union on issues of militarism, human rights and ideology, it did demonstrate nuance in Reagan’s Cold War vision. He portrayed the Soviet couple sympathetically, demonstrating a regard for the Russian people at odds with his anti-Soviet rhetoric. He demonstrated that he saw the Soviet government and Russian people as distinct entities.<sup>969</sup> The Russian people were victims. Reagan sought to save them and people everywhere from the freedom-denying ideology of communism.

Jack Matlock, a long-time foreign service officer and the NSC Senior Director for East European and Soviet Affairs shared Reagan’s view.<sup>970</sup> He felt the need to use his

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<sup>967</sup> “Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations” 16 January 1984

<sup>968</sup> Ibid.

<sup>969</sup> Matlock interview, Matlock was preceded in this position by Richard Pipes an academic who took a much more hardline view with regard to the Soviet Union

<sup>970</sup> Matlock Interview

role on the NSC to build upon the President's positive inclination toward Russians and to humanize them. One way he did this was to provide Reagan with a fictional memorandum between Gorbachev and Anatoly Chernyaev, one the Soviet leader's key foreign policy advisors. The memo highlighted the need for Gorbachev to achieve something tangible in the realm of arms control so that he could maintain domestic support for reform.<sup>971</sup> Knowing his audience, Matlock filled the missive with "jokes and anecdotes," framing the issue in a way Reagan found familiar and memorable.<sup>972</sup>

Additionally, Matlock brought in academics and writers from outside the administration to offer new voices. Suzanne Massie had a particularly large impact on Reagan. She met the President for the first time the day after the Ivan and Anya speech, and he sought to further his understanding of Russians. Reagan asked how deeply Soviet leaders believed in communism, before shifting to the topic of religion. He expressed interest when Massie spoke of the continued importance of the Orthodox Church to Russian identity.<sup>973</sup> In a later meeting, she continued to emphasize religion and presented Reagan with a painted Russian Easter Egg. The egg showed Mary with an infant Jesus and a written message that "we will not permit the world to be blown up."<sup>974</sup> Massie gave it as a "talisman" for Reagan's upcoming summit with Gorbachev and to remind him of the spirituality of the Russian people.<sup>975</sup> The religious message appealed to

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<sup>971</sup> Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 195.

<sup>972</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>973</sup> Suzanne Massie, *Trust but Verify: Reagan, Russia, and Me*, (Rockland: Maine Authors Publishing, 2013) 99

<sup>974</sup> Massie, 166.

<sup>975</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

Reagan, who believed that faith could provide a common ground and offer evidence of the dissatisfaction of the Soviet people with their government.

Massie's book *Land of the Firebird: The Beauty of Old Russia* also assisted in the preparation for the summit. Reagan read it in September of 1985 and thought it a compelling history of Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution. It included details on common Russians that appealed to the President.<sup>976</sup> During one pre-summit session, Reagan interrupted Shultz to ask what happened to 19<sup>th</sup> century St Petersburg merchants of the book.<sup>977</sup> Reagan's clear interest, and sympathy, for the religious views of Russians and desire to know more about the people's history displayed an empathy that contributed to his willingness to negotiate peace. Reagan's willingness to separate the people from ideology provided opportunity to compromise and connect on a personal level.

Although Massie deepened Reagan's understanding of the Russian people and their history he did not draw the attention of the public to her work. He rarely spoke publicly about the histories that he read, even though he often read biographies and other historical works. There are likely political reasons for Reagan's decision not to reference scholarly works as he did with movies and other popular culture. Doing so might undermine the carefully cultivated "everyman" image of Reagan. Despite his reluctance

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<sup>976</sup> Mann, 64

<sup>977</sup> Ibid.

to publicly discuss how reading increased his empathy, books strongly influenced how he approached the Soviet Union during his second term.

*Red Storm Rising* portrayed a vast difference between the Soviet people and their government. As they were writing the book, Clancy and co-author Larry Bond intentionally sought to portray the average Russian in a positive light.<sup>978</sup> They largely agreed with Reagan's sense of Soviet citizens as victims of their government, who if given the opportunity would favor Western ideals. The two main Soviet characters frequently express revulsion for the callousness and immortality of their government. They prevent the politburo from using nuclear weapons and lead a coup in Moscow. When faced with an ultimatum, Clancy's ideal Russian chose humanity over ideology. The book offers a starkly negative portrayal of Soviet society. References to death sentences, gulags, and human rights abuses abound. However, these are shown as occurring at the impetus of the state rather than individuals. The main exception is the brutal gang rape of a pregnant Icelandic women by Soviet paratroopers. An American Air Force officer rescues the women and extra-judiciously executes the rapists. However, the scene was intended to draw attention to the systematic abuse of populations subjugated by the Soviet system, rather than indict individual Russians.<sup>979</sup>

The clear distinction between Russian and Soviet identities is most evident in the use of Russian culture. Early in the book, American intelligence analysts examine the

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<sup>978</sup> Bond interview

<sup>979</sup> Clancy and Bond were likely drawing upon the conduct of the Red Army in WWII which raped tens of thousands of women, with the tacit approval of Soviet leadership.



showing of the film *Battleship Potemkin* on Soviet state broadcasting. Analysts note how frequently the film used the word Russia or Russian, which they had thought the Soviets were “trying to get away from.”<sup>980</sup> The discussion highlighted the difference between Soviet and Russian identity and that the Soviet government often tried to suppress the latter. Supreme Allied Commander of European Forces (SACEUR), General Robinson, to further illustrates the difference. While discussing a cease-fire with his Soviet counterpart, Robinson reveals he is fluent in Russian. The American explains he learned the language to better understand Anton Chekov, a Russian writer and playwright.<sup>981</sup> Chekov’s works engaged with questions of Russian identity and his final play “The Cherry Orchard” explored the conflict between Russian values and Marxism.<sup>982</sup> While the Soviet leader believed the American general read the literature to “better know your enemy,” Robinson seemed legitimately interested in the art. Rather than using Soviet literature such as Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, Clancy and Bond chose to use a quintessentially Russian voice to further the sense that Americans should look deeper into Russia’s past to empathize with the modern people.

*Red Storm Rising* provided Reagan with an account that portrayed Russians in the same way he thought about them. While both Reagan’s and Clancy’s view failed to recognize that Russians were not the only people in the USSR with a distinct history and

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<sup>980</sup> *Red Storm Rising*, 88.

<sup>981</sup> *Ibid*, 647.

<sup>982</sup> Anton Chekov, “The Cherry Orchard” in *Plays* translated by Elisaveta Fen (London: Penguin, 1954). American strategist George Kennan was a reader of Chekov and often identified a “Chekovian self” that was more genuine than his American one. See *The Keenan Diaries* edited by Frank Costigliola, page 374.

culture, the nuance in distinguishing the population and governmental system of the Soviet Union was important. Such portrayals were uncommon in popular culture, and largely unreflective of the way Americans thought about the Soviet Union. The distrust dated back to the earliest days of the Cold War, and the government-sanctioned belief that all Russians were communists and all communists were dangerous ideologues bent on destroying everything that made America free. Even as popular culture shifted narratives in the 1960s, the prevailing themes were not of peace-loving Soviets. Instead, works by Graham Greene, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Le Carre argued that the US was not a moral paragon. For these authors, America often eagerly employed the immoral, coercive, and violent actions of its rival. They saw the two superpowers as morally equivalent and equally deserving of scorn.

Reagan's Ivan and Anya speech sought to change the way Americans talked about the Russian people. *Red Storm Rising* was only one work that helped with this as Hollywood also adopted the theme. The brutal Russian soldiers of *Red Dawn* gave way to Rocky winning over a hostile crowd in Moscow. Reagan's obvious rapport with Gorbachev aided the shift. If someone with Reagan's history of staunch anticommunism could establish a relationship with a Soviet leader then it would be hard for an average American to truly view the Russian people as the enemy of the US. The Reagan-Gorbachev resembled Nixon's trip to China. Reagan's biography, like Nixon's, made a drastic shift in relations broadly palatable. While defense hawks strongly objected in both cases, most Americans embraced the moves and promise of peace.

Gorbachev's celebrity in the US shows how drastically American views changed. He received a rapturous reception in 1987 waded into a delirious Washington crowd. His popularity stood in stark contrast to the muted reception of Khrushchev in 1959 and Brezhnev in 1973. It compares favorably to the popularity of China's Deng Xiaoping, whose willingness to show a human side on his 1979 visit to the US greatly improved his country's standing in the eyes of many Americans.<sup>983</sup> This effect was not entirely the result of Reagan's speech and popular culture, but both contributed significantly. Importantly, the appearance of a more nuanced view of Russians in a book that Reagan viewed as realistic in many other areas helped reinforce the President's confidence in his own view of the Soviet Union and his belief that they did not want war. He identified with Russian characters in the work who shared his own convictions. The empathetic portrayal of the characters faced between loyalty to the system and their people reinforced Reagan's sense that the Soviet system was at fault, and that Soviets as individuals shared a great deal in common with Americans.

Reagan displayed this empathy during his address to students at Moscow State University in 1988. Throughout his remarks, Reagan highlighted "the growth of democracy" and freedom across the world.<sup>984</sup> He painted freedom as something that takes place at the community level, noting how it impacts local media, schools, courts, and small businesses. Reagan referenced a Soviet song, "Do the Russians want war?" as

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<sup>983</sup> Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013)

<sup>984</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Address at Moscow State University," Moscow, USSR, 31 May 1988.

evidence of his audience's peaceful intentions. The song spoke of the silence hanging over the trees planted on soldier's graves as proof that none want war. Reagan emphasized that Americans shared this sense, and that he wanted nothing more than the two country's diplomats "grappling with the problem of trade disputes between America and a growing, exuberant, exporting Soviet Union."<sup>985</sup> He closed by referencing a different burial site. Reagan hoped that individual freedom would blossom in the USSR like the "fresh green sapling planted over Tolstoy's grave."<sup>986</sup> The reference to a Russian whose work received global acclaim and celebration, showed Reagan's recognition of the nation's past contribution to the arts and the hope that individual freedom would enable the Russian people to do so again.<sup>987</sup>

### **Friends in Need**

Reagan's plan for peace required the close cooperation of allies in Western Europe. He believed in conventional deterrence because the combined population and GDP of NATO nations exceeded that of the Warsaw Pact. The administration also doubted the devotion of Soviet Bloc nations to the alliance and engaged in open

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<sup>985</sup> Ibid.

<sup>986</sup> Ibid.

<sup>987</sup> Reagan did read Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* and *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* but would likely argue that this, and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* were exceptions that proved the rule given the treatment of the authors after they published their works.

speculation about whether members would fight alongside Soviet formations.<sup>988</sup> Jack Matlock felt the Red Army would be careful about the placement of their allies, as they would effectively be choosing whether they would face betrayal on the flank or from the rear.<sup>989</sup> The absence of reliable allies complicated Soviet formations already unlikely to coordinate effectively due to conscription and lack of a common language in units. However, the ability to capitalize on the perceived advantage required steadfastness among American allies. The Reagan administration initially feared there was little support for NATO or the US among member states. Even as late as 1984, the National Security Council worried about the risk of “political and economic retrenchment” in Western Europe.<sup>990</sup> Mass demonstrations against the deployment of the Pershing II missiles and the general popularity of the Nuclear Freeze Movement underpinned these concerns. The NSC urged Reagan to combat “Europessimism” through policies that would restore the will of Europeans to fight the Cold War.<sup>991</sup>

Thatcher’s ascension to Prime Minister in the United Kingdom in 1979, the year before Reagan’s election, and Kohl’s assumption of the Chancellorship of West Germany in 1982 helped bring the alliance closer together. In each, Reagan found a strong partner that largely supported his hardline stance. Reagan clearly valued his relationship with

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<sup>988</sup> Jack Matlock, *Superpower Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray and How to Return to Reality*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010)

<sup>989</sup> Ibid.

<sup>990</sup> Memorandum, “U.S. Foreign Policy a Look Ahead” May 18, 1984, Folder: Foreign Policy Background for President’s Trip to Europe-Notebook (1 of 2), RAC Box 8, NSC Executive Secretariat: Trip File, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>991</sup> Ibid.

both and believed personal rapport between leaders could bring nations together. It was Thatcher who first gave Reagan a sense that Gorbachev was a different sort of Soviet leader. She met with Gorbachev in 1984, before he came to power and came away convinced they could “do business together.”<sup>992</sup> Reagan valued her opinion and it shaped his view of Gorbachev. While Thatcher and Reagan did not always see eye to eye, particularly on the issues of Star Wars and Grenada, these disagreements never undermined their relationship.<sup>993</sup>

Reagan took political risks to support his allies. The most prominent example occurred when Reagan visited Germany in 1985. In the planning for the trip, Kohl requested that Reagan visit a cemetery in Bitburg to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. The President readily accepted the request, hoping to celebrate “40 years of peace between erstwhile enemies.”<sup>994</sup> However, the proposed site contained several graves honoring members of the Waffen-SS, notorious for their enthusiastic participation in the Holocaust. The revelation of the graves prompted a domestic political crisis for Reagan. While receiving the Congressional Gold Medal, Noble Prize winner and Holocaust Survivor Elie Wiesel chastised Reagan for planning to attend the ceremony. Wiesel told him that Bitburg “is not your place,” instead he should stand with “with the victims of the SS.”<sup>995</sup> For Wiesel,

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<sup>992</sup> John Cole, Interview with Margaret Thatcher, BBC, 17 DEC 1984.

<sup>993</sup> Poindexter interview

<sup>994</sup> Reagan to Zeeman in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 538.

<sup>995</sup> Weinraub, Bernard, “Wiesel Confronts Reagan on Trip; President To Visit Bergen-Belsen; Survivor of Holocaust Urges Him Not to Stop At German Cemetary,” *The New York Times*, 20 April 1985.

the issue was clear, and he put it in terms Reagan often used by arguing the issue was “not politics, but good and evil.”<sup>996</sup> Despite the emotional plea, Reagan noted that continuing with the ceremony was the “morally right thing” before leaving.<sup>997</sup>

Afterwards, he felt “even more sure.”<sup>998</sup> The visit did celebrate forty years of peace, and between the stops in Bitburg and Bergen-Belsen, Reagan reflected on the legacy of evil left by the Nazis. More importantly, his steadfastness strengthened his relationship with Kohl. Reagan felt the visit returned a favor to Kohl, who endured domestic backlash for supporting the deployment of Pershing II missiles. Reagan viewed Kohl as “a good friend and solid ally,” and wanted to support the German when he could.<sup>999</sup>

The decision to accept political fallout to support an ally underlined the importance Reagan and his administration placed on NATO. They believed that the Alliance would play a critical role in returning the Cold War to an environment favorable to the US. If Reagan was to make good on his desire to contain and defeat communism, Western Europe would need to play an active and potentially decisive role. The administration needed support not only in military matters, but also economic ones. NATO allies would need to avoid helping to “subsidize the Soviet economy” by

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<sup>996</sup> Ibid.

<sup>997</sup> Reagan to Colonel Barney Oldfield, in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*

<sup>998</sup> Ibid.

<sup>999</sup> Ronald Reagan, Friday, November 30, 1984,” in *The Reagan Diaries*.

transferring technology cheaply or making relying on the USSR for energy.<sup>1000</sup> They would also have to present a unified front in diplomatic efforts throughout the world. *Red Storm Rising* clearly depicted the importance of allies. Throughout the book the US coordinates with NATO to blunt Soviet advances. At a critical point in the main land battle, German fighter aircraft force Soviet attack helicopters to break off their attack. The allied air support allows the Americans to leverage their superior tanks and defeat a larger enemy formation.<sup>1001</sup> German infantry also coordinate closely with their US counterparts to prevent the Soviets from flanking the Americans.<sup>1002</sup>

In the battle for the Atlantic, the combined British and American fleets reopen shipping lanes and prove crucial in retaking Iceland. The US uses cruise missiles to destroy the Soviet bombers which had conducted devastating attacks against an American carrier group, however, they are only able to do so because British and Norwegian radar sites track Soviet aircraft.<sup>1003</sup> The first NATO elements to return to Iceland are British SAS.<sup>1004</sup> They link up with remaining American forces and coordinate the landings that lead to the island's recapture. In contrast, the Soviet's allies are either unhelpful or actively hurt the war effort. Even before the war begins, Clancy shows tension between the Soviets and their client states. Members of the Military Liaison Mission, a group of NATO officers stationed in Potsdam watch Red Army forces conducting a training

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<sup>1000</sup> "Commencement Address at Eureka College"

<sup>1001</sup> *Red Storm Rising* 330.

<sup>1002</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1003</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>1004</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.



exercise. The Soviet formation takes a wrong turn, and an attached East German does not redirect the convoy.<sup>1005</sup> NATO observers note it was common for Soviet units to get lost in East Germany given the language barrier, but the refusal of their allies to assist stands out, showing tension between the DDR and USSR.

During the first stages of the war, a DDR senior general reviews the scenarios of what would happen if the Soviets employed chemical weapons. The report places a floor of ten million deaths among German civilians. During an ensuing conversation with the DDR's leader, he bitterly notes that the Russians would view "even a united, *socialist* Germany" as a strategic threat.<sup>1006</sup> The scale of potential casualties from employing chemical weapons leads the DDR to term their potential use a "matter of gravest national concern" and an act of war against the DDR by the Soviets.<sup>1007</sup> A debate in the Soviet politburo follows the missive and concludes the "slaughter of civilians with gas" would incur a political cost that was "simply too high."<sup>1008</sup> Clancy and Bond used the debate to underline their belief that the Soviet system saw its client states as resources rather than socialist brothers. Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces are absent from *Red Storm Rising's* descriptions of combat. Even in the final days of war, the Soviets draw on new formations from the USSR rather than call upon the DDR or other allies. The need to draw soldiers from Kazan and the far eastern reaches of the Soviet Union creates a supply

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<sup>1005</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>1006</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1007</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>1008</sup> Ibid, 133.

line problem that is equally, if not more, challenging than the one that NATO faced and eliminates one of the key advantages of the Warsaw Pact highlighted in the CIA and NATO assessments of their forces.

Clancy and Bond consciously included the detrimental relationship between the Soviet Union and its allies in *Red Storm Rising*.<sup>1009</sup> They depicted the alliance as unproductive and unstable. Somewhat ironically, the authors viewed the Warsaw Pact in the same way their Soviet characters viewed NATO. The version of the relationship between the Soviets and their clients portrayed in the book matched the more optimistic views of Reagan administration officials.<sup>1010</sup> *Red Storm Rising* consistently gave the benefit of the doubt to the US. Throughout, their technology works perfectly, its people are exactly where they need to be, and their opponents make just enough mistakes for the US to win. Reagan viewed these narrative choices as a feature that made the book memorable and useful. Though a war in Europe would not unfold nearly as favorably for NATO as it did in the book, it was not sheer fantasy. Clancy and Bond devoted significant attention to ensuring the book's battles were plausible, if unlikely.

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<sup>1009</sup> Interview with Bond

<sup>1010</sup> Interview with Matlock

## Warfare in Miniature

When Clancy met Secretary of the Navy John Lehman in 1985, Lehman confided in the author that his reaction to *The Hunt for Red October* was to ask, “who the hell cleared this?”<sup>1011</sup> Technical detail was a hallmark of Clancy’s writing. His books often featured paragraphs long summaries on how military hardware worked. Clancy wrote this way because of the importance of technology in his narratives. He sought to prevent experts from questioning the backbone of his plot.<sup>1012</sup> The detail contributed to the sense of realism in the books and made them more useful for government officials.

The specific technical details led many to accuse Clancy of drawing from classified sources for his novels. Clancy admitted he inferred “secrets about operational capabilities of certain weapon systems such as the stealth bomber,” which appeared in *Red Storm Rising* two years before it was officially declassified.<sup>1013</sup> He argued revealing capabilities in this manner actually helped deterrence, as “if everything we do is secret they [the Soviets] won’t know enough to be afraid” of the US.<sup>1014</sup> The Pentagon did not disagree, and Secretary Lehman even argued Clancy’s work helped show the damage that spies had done and the danger of selling technology to the Soviets.<sup>1015</sup>

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<sup>1011</sup> Clancy to Richards

<sup>1012</sup> Interview with Larry Bond

<sup>1013</sup> Robert Pear, “For the Patient Reader, Military Secrets are Self-Revealing,” *The New York Times*, 30 August 1987.

<sup>1014</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1015</sup> Ibid.

The success of *Hunt for Red October* opened doors for Clancy. In February of 1985 he attended a luncheon in the Pentagon and the opportunity to speak with several admirals, including the vice-CNO for undersea operations, the Navy's chief submariner.<sup>1016</sup> Clancy visited the CIA's headquarters in Langley to discuss writing and conveying "complex technical matters to the lay reader."<sup>1017</sup> The deputy director of the agency attended the talk, as did future Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.<sup>1018</sup>

Clancy and Bond received access to military installations and equipment as they wrote *Red Storm Rising*. They travelled to Norfolk, Virginia, and discussed joint operations with NATO personnel stationed at Supreme Allied Command Atlantic (SACLANT). Clancy recalled his interactions with the director of public affairs there fondly, and particularly enjoyed speaking with British officers, who talked about tactics "a little more freely" than their American counterparts.<sup>1019</sup> The writers also spoke with Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko about the USSR. Shevchenko defected to the US while serving as the UN undersecretary general, and Clancy found his book *Breaking with Moscow* to be "pure dynamite" for the starkly negative way it portrayed Soviet leadership.<sup>1020</sup> Shevchenko's experience and views strongly informed the Politburo of

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<sup>1016</sup> Clancy to Richards.

<sup>1017</sup> "Employee Bulletin, No. 1341," 12 February 1986. Central Intelligence Agency Electronic FOIA Reading Room.

<sup>1018</sup> "Memorandum for Mr Casey" 24 February 1986. Central Intelligence Agency Electronic FOIA Reading Room.

<sup>1019</sup> Clancy to Richards

<sup>1020</sup> Clancy to Richards

*Red Storm Rising*.<sup>1021</sup> Clancy also spent a week on a Navy frigate, rode on a submarine, drove an M1 tank, and worked with a variety of other military systems.<sup>1022</sup>

Senior Pentagon leadership recognized the value that Clancy's wildly popular narrative could have in building public opinion and became invested in his success. Flag officers sought to uphold and enhance his credibility even when Clancy did not toe the official line. During the 1990 National Defense Authorization Act, Representative Norman Sisisky questioned Vice Admiral Daniel Cooper, the assistant-CNO for Undersea Warfare, about recent statements made by Clancy. In an article, the author argued the US was training submarine officers who were too risk-averse and that the British training model produced superior officers. Sisisky noted that Clancy had "a big following as a big naval expert" and wanted the Admiral to respond to the allegations.<sup>1023</sup>

Cooper disagreed with Clancy's view and reaffirmed his support of the way the US Navy trained its submarine captains. However, even as he disagreed with the author, Cooper praised him as a "fine individual" and a "real patriot."<sup>1024</sup> It was because he "love[d] Tom Clancy" and that the author "did a lot for the submarine force" that made the criticism hurt.<sup>1025</sup> During Cooper's response, Representative Duncan Hunter interjected that Clancy helped "the Navy immensely," drawing rapid agreement from the

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<sup>1021</sup> Bond interview

<sup>1022</sup> Clancy to Richards

<sup>1023</sup> "Hearings on National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1990—H.R. 2461 and Oversight of Previously Authorized Programs," (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 333.

<sup>1024</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1025</sup> Ibid, 335.

admiral.<sup>1026</sup> Cooper critiqued Clancy obliquely. He did not attack the author in his comments, or directly refute the allegation of conservatism. Instead, he highlighted how the Navy's "strict process" led to selection of the "smartest people" they could "possibly find."<sup>1027</sup> The Navy was careful to not undermine the perception of Clancy as an expert. However, the appeal of Clancy's work to Reagan and other stemmed from more than the author's ability to discuss arcane technical matters in an approachable way. The books demonstrated the systems in action, providing context beyond simple description of capabilities.

Even when writing implausible events, Clancy made sure that they were technically possible. While working on *The Hunt for Red October*, Clancy wrote himself into a corner and was unsure how to end the book.<sup>1028</sup> The titular submarine had less than a skeleton crew but needed to defeat a Soviet *Alfa* class attack sub, the *Konovalov*. The *Red October* could not engage the *Konovalov* with its weapons or seek aid from other ships. The solution came as Clancy looked at scale models of the two submarines. He recognized as a *Typhoon* class, the *Red October* was significantly larger than the *Alfa* it faced. This would allow it to ram the opposing submarine and survive the impact, while consigning the *Konovalov* to a watery grave.<sup>1029</sup> Such a maneuver would certainly be unorthodox, but technically feasible. The invasion of Iceland in *Red Storm Rising*

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<sup>1026</sup> Ibid, 333.

<sup>1027</sup> Ibid, 334.

<sup>1028</sup> Interview with Larry Bond.

<sup>1029</sup> *ibid*

presented a similar situation. Clancy and Bond needed a way to get a Soviet regiment to the island without drawing NATO suspicion. A fully loaded troop transport, or convoy of Soviet ships, would be unlikely to escape notice. Instead, the authors used a civilian container ship, the *MV Julius Fucik*, to transport the unit and serve as base of operations for an amphibious assault. Clancy and Bond used its real-world measurements to determine the ship could serve as a launch pad for an airborne regiment.<sup>1030</sup> While few plans call for the clandestine use of a civilian container ship, the effort to ensure workable plans aided in the overall realistic feel of the novel.

War gaming played a major role in developing the combat of *Red Storm Rising*. While serving in the Navy, Bond grew dissatisfied with the way the service conducted war games on its ships. The game used classified mechanics, which meant officers could only play it under limited circumstances. The difficulty in utilizing the official version led him to develop his own. He released the game, *Harpoon*, through *Dungeon and Dragons* co-founder Dave Arneson's Adventure Games and Clancy purchased a copy while working on *The Hunt for Red October*.<sup>1031</sup> After Clancy sent Bond a letter praising the game, the two met, played a few times, and agreed to collaborate on Clancy's second novel.<sup>1032</sup> The two used *Harpoon* to fact check the naval combat sequences in *Red Storm Rising*. They used it most prominently to verify the structure of the air and sea battle in the chapter "The Dance of the Vampires" could happen. The wargame did not dictate the

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<sup>1030</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1031</sup> Bond interview.

<sup>1032</sup> Ibid.

plot, as the book needed the US fleet to face a significant setback but did ensure that defeat of the Americans was not a *deus-ex-machina*.

*Red Storm Rising* also drew on official war games. After leaving the Navy, Bond worked for the Center for Naval Analyses, a federally funded research and development center. While at CNA, he assisted in the development and execution of war games, many of which focused on how to maintain open shipping lanes in the event of war.<sup>1033</sup> These war games addressed the most significant challenge to NATO's ability to fight conventionally in Europe, access to American troops and material. Bond developed this into an expansion for *Harpoon* called *Convoy*. When he told Clancy of the project, the author told him "that would make a good book," providing the impetus for *Red Storm Rising*.<sup>1034</sup> Peter Perla, a long time wargamer at CNA, argues that part of the appeal of the book was that it took the core findings of wargames the think tank and others conducted, and packaged it as a narrative digestible by all.<sup>1035</sup> The scope of *Red Storm Rising* far exceeded anything done by either the CNA or *Harpoon*, but the realistic examination of a critical strategic issue enhanced the credibility of the book.

Wargaming does not identify what will happen in a conflict; rather, its primary benefit is to provide a range of possibilities to analyze. From these possibilities, military planners can adjust plans, add resources, and look for ways to exploit success and react to failure. They reduce the chance of surprise, something that is invaluable in developing a

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<sup>1033</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1034</sup> Bond, email exchange with author 9 Jun 15.

<sup>1035</sup> Peter Perla, interview by author, notes, October 23, 2014, Arlington, Virginia. Perla still works with the CNA and is referred to there as the "Peyton Manning of war gaming."



strategy. Additionally, Perla argues war games can exercise outsized influence on planning because they carry a “greater emotional impact” than simply discussing a plan.<sup>1036</sup> Those involved become more personally invested as their decisions directly impact the scenario. They are more likely to remember their choices and the results because of this personal involvement and investment.

Novels and other narratives have similar potential. A well-written story forces the reader to become emotionally involved and identify with the protagonist. The resulting emotional connection is more memorable. Reagan capitalized on the power of narrative in his political rise, and used stories in the same way he wanted his audience to. In the case of *Red Storm Rising*, Reagan found a realistic portrayal of World War III that served the same purpose as a wargame. He used it to think about the strategic position of the US and USSR and draw a radically different conclusion than many of his closest advisors. Reagan was not the only one in government to use *Red Storm Rising* to inform ideas about the ability of NATO to defeat the Warsaw Pact.

### **Proof of Concept**

*Red Storm Rising* became a part of the national security conversation in Congress immediately upon release and remained part of it until the end of the Cold War. Congressmen touted Clancy’s portrayal of their pet systems as proof of their importance.

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<sup>1036</sup> Perla interview

*Red Storm Rising*'s portrayal of anti-satellite technology drew significant interest. In the book, Major Nakamura, the only female combatant in the novel, shoots down two reconnaissance satellites from her F-15.<sup>1037</sup> She does this despite shoddy construction and poor maintenance. Before her first mission, a technician notes that the missiles were stored improperly and implies no one cared about the program.<sup>1038</sup> Since the program lacked support the US only has three missiles to use in the war. Fortunately, this does not haunt the Americans, as MAJ Nakamura's successful attacks cause the Soviets to forego satellite tracking rather than lose a third expensive platform.<sup>1039</sup> ASAT provides NATO with a critical strategic advantage at small cost, and Clancy's clear implication was the US needed to make the program a higher priority.

Republicans in Congress seized on this message. Just one week after the release of *Red Storm Rising*, future-Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich referenced the book in a floor debate on the 1987 National Defense Authorization Act. He argued the book provided "the best single illustration of how a major conflict would work in the real world."<sup>1040</sup> Gingrich used it "to make the point that [he thought] opposition to anti-satellite technology may well be the most irrational position on the left this week."<sup>1041</sup> He quoted Clancy's description of Soviet satellite technology and stated Democrat opposition to funding ASAT showed the "peculiarly twisted logic on the left" that

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<sup>1037</sup> *Red Storm Rising*, 484

<sup>1038</sup> *Ibid*, 418.

<sup>1039</sup> *Ibid*, 484.

<sup>1040</sup> Newt Gingrich, "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1987," *Congressional Record* August 13, 1986, 21173.

<sup>1041</sup> *Ibid*.

“killing 800 pounds of electronics is terrible but shooting down an airplane to save 20,000 lives is acceptable.”<sup>1042</sup> He continued the partisan attack, implying those opposed to ASAT were in league with the Soviets and willing to “put at risk 20,000 or 30,000 lives.”<sup>1043</sup>

Thomas Downey, a Democrat from New York, objected to Gingrich’s remarks, calling them a “remarkable argument, based on fiction.”<sup>1044</sup> He was not sure if it was “life imitating art or fiction imitating reality,” but he was certain that there was no “clearer example” of how arms control had helped the US than with ASAT.<sup>1045</sup> Downey believed the limited capability of the US ASAT program provided incentive for the Soviets to forego efforts to militarize space. Since the US relied more on its satellites, this development favored US interests in the event of war. He and his caucus believed funding the technology in the manner suggested by Gingrich would touch off an arms race in space and put a strategic advantage of the US at risk.<sup>1046</sup> Both Congressmen accepted Clancy’s portrayal of ASAT. For Gingrich this was tantamount to treason, while Downey believed it showed how the US could leverage its technological advantage to gain concessions. The use of *Red Storm Rising* underlined its importance as a serious and realistic contribution to the broader discourse on US strategy.

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<sup>1042</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1043</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1044</sup> Thomas Downey, “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1987,” *Congressional Record* August 13, 1986, 21174.

<sup>1045</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1046</sup> Ibid.

Senators also made use of the book. During a 1987 debate on funding of ASAT, Senator Dan Quayle held a copy of the book and asked his colleagues if they had read it. He argued that if they had, they would realize “ASAT technology is what wins the war.”<sup>1047</sup> After his addition to the 1988 Republican ticket as vice-president, Democratic staffers leaked the exchange to discredit the candidate. An unnamed aide noted Quayle using the book meant “at least... we know he can read.”<sup>1048</sup> However, Quayle continued to use the book as a resource. During a September 1988 campaign stop, he deviated from prepared remarks and referenced the novel to support ASAT.<sup>1049</sup> His advisors expressed concern as they had not expected him to stray from his prepared remarks. However, Quayle stood by his interpretation and felt that his version was more exciting.<sup>1050</sup> The use of *Red Storm Rising* by Quayle both in the Senate and on the campaign trail demonstrated how he used the book as shorthand for strategic issues.

*Red Storm Rising* was more than a vehicle for partisan attacks for Gingrich as well. Following its publication, he invited Clancy and Bond to lunch at the Capitol. Throughout the lunch, the co-authors engaged in discussions of defense policy with Congressmen. Larry Bond was surprised Representative Dick Cheney studiously took notes as he responded to a question about the capabilities of the Soviet Navy.<sup>1051</sup> The

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<sup>1047</sup> Walter Hixson, “Red Storm Rising: Tom Clancy Novels and the Cult of National Security,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 17, Issue 4, October 1993.

<sup>1048</sup> Peter Osterlund and Donald Rheem, “Quayle: wide appeal but untried on national stage” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 18 August 88.

<sup>1049</sup> Lisa Belkin, “Quayle Discards His Script on Military Issues and Raises Eyebrows,” *The New York Times*, 9 September 1988.

<sup>1050</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1051</sup> Bond interview

event convinced Bond that many on Capitol Hill took his work seriously. It also demonstrated how wide-spread the use of narrative in policy discussion was. While interactions like Bond's were common, as discussion of books, movies, and other media occurred daily, they are also largely forgotten. However, this does not make them unimportant. Rather it underlines how commonplace exchanges and light entertainment can play a large, often unacknowledged, role in shaping strategic perception. They create what political scientists Paul Musgrave and J Furman Daniel term "synthetic experiences."<sup>1052</sup> Popular culture can "encode information in ways that affect judgement" because they "prompt the inward experience of a fictional reality."<sup>1053</sup>

The military treated *Red Storm Rising* as a serious contribution. In addition to publicly lavishing praise upon Clancy during Congressional testimony, the Navy used the author's work in its professional military education. Officers attending the Prospective Command Course, which identified and trained future submarine commanders, received a copy of *The Hunt for Red October* upon beginning the course.<sup>1054</sup> The Naval War College immediately added *Red Storm Rising* to its curriculum in a course that consisted primarily of senior officers in both American and allied navies. The syllabus identified *Red Storm Rising* as a war game and asserted it was a "very true to life story."<sup>1055</sup> The book's value to the course was in its depiction of the coordination between different

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<sup>1052</sup> Paul Musgrave and J Furman Daniel, "Synthetic Experiences: How Popular Culture Matters for Images of International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 61, Issue 3, September 2017.

<sup>1053</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1054</sup> Clancy to Richards, 5 FEB 85

<sup>1055</sup> "OPS Session 2—Red Storm Rising: A Case Study," U.S. Naval War College, Personal Papers of Larry Bond.

military branches, close relationships between NATO allies, the essential role of technology, and the employment of politics and diplomacy in ending the war.<sup>1056</sup> These reasons closely mirror Reagan's own for valuing the book.

The purpose of the course was to introduce "officers to various maritime, national, and alliance strategies," showcase the importance of "joint and combined operations," and finally to "evaluate military decisions."<sup>1057</sup> Using Clancy's work to support these objectives demonstrated that the course planners at the Naval War College viewed it as both realistic and relevant. It also likely helped skirt issues of foreign disclosure. *Red Storm Rising* was unclassified and American officers could gloss over any of the classified material as fictional speculation by the author. It is possible Clancy's book could offer a more realistic depiction of American capabilities than a government produced scenario which would be subject to security review. The accessibility of the novel made it an ideal tool for use in a joint schoolhouse.

*Red Storm Rising* was a commercial success as well. After release, it debuted in the second place on *The New York Times* best seller's list, behind Danielle Steele's *Wanderlust*.<sup>1058</sup> Clancy shortly overtook Steele, and *Red Storm Rising* sold over a half million copies in its first month of release.<sup>1059</sup> By the end of the year, only Stephen

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<sup>1056</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1057</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1058</sup> "Best Sellers," *New York Times*, August 3, 1986.

<sup>1059</sup> "Best Sellers" *New York Times*, August 24, 1986.

Edwin McDowell, "Author of 'Hunt for Red October' stirs up a 'Red Storm'" *The New York Times* August 12, 1986

King's *It* sold more copies.<sup>1060</sup> For the remainder of the decade, a new Clancy thriller would finish in the one of the top two positions in sales for the year.<sup>1061</sup> The success of the novel lead HBO, a satellite and cable television channel, to seek to adapt it into a mini-series. However, the projected cost proved too high, and they abandoned the project.<sup>1062</sup> Other media projects were more successful. Micropose adapted *Red Storm Rising* into a commercially-successful computer game. Sid Meier, better known for creating the *Civilization* series of games, led the effort.<sup>1063</sup> The success of the venture later led to the birth of Red Storm Entertainment, a company Clancy to produce video games based on his written work and other original ideas.<sup>1064</sup> The expansion to digital media and later success of films based on *The Hunt for Red October*, *Patriot Games*, and *Clear and Present Danger* expanded Clancy's reach well beyond the reading public. Vice-Admiral Cooper's testimony on the NDAA demonstrated that the military was aware of it and encouraged the public to use Clancy in the same way Reagan did.

## Creative Spaces

*Red Storm Rising* was not the reason why Reagan and Gorbachev almost abolished nuclear weapons at Reykjavik in 1986. Many factors contributed to the near-

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<sup>1060</sup> "The Books of the Century" <http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~immer/books1980s>

<sup>1061</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1062</sup> Bond Interview

<sup>1063</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1064</sup> Ibid.

agreement. Gorbachev wanted to reach an agreement due to the significant drain on the economy caused by the escalating arms race. Just before the summit, he told Chernyaev, the economic drain meant the US had an interest in “keeping the negotiations machine running idle,” it was therefore essential to offer concessions in order to get the process moving again.<sup>1065</sup> Soviet leadership feared the potential economic cost of researching and developing a program similar to Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative and distrusted Reagan’s promise to share the technology.<sup>1066</sup> Soviet fears and Gorbachev’s desire to pursue sweeping economic reform meant that the USSR came to Reykjavik prepared to offer more than at previous summits.

Advisors close to Reagan felt that the time was right for a monumental agreement. Shultz believed that given the pace of concessions both before and during the summit, Reagan should move quickly to “reel the Soviets in.”<sup>1067</sup> Reagan’s first term strategy of “Peace Through Strength” created an environment allowing for serious and sweeping arms control agreements without jeopardizing US interests.<sup>1068</sup> NSC member Jack Matlock felt that the Soviets were serious about their proposals, and “felt optimistic that US-Soviet relations might be on the verge of a sudden turn for the better.”<sup>1069</sup> The popularity of the Nuclear Freeze Movement provided strong evidence that global populations were tired of Mutually Assured Destruction. Diplomatic efforts by the

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<sup>1065</sup> Wilson, 111.

<sup>1066</sup> Poindexter interview

<sup>1067</sup> Acland diplomatic cable

<sup>1068</sup> Wilson, 111.

<sup>1069</sup> Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev* 209



Vatican and other groups furthered this narrative. Popular culture also added to the growing anti-nuclear narrative. Hollywood movies like *WarGames* showed the danger of a misunderstanding or accident leading to war and *The Day After* revealed the aftermath of such a conflict. Eliminating nuclear weapons provided the basis for the plot of the much-maligned *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*. The consistent, starkly anti-nuclear view of Hollywood productions, even as other films embraced the nationalistic tone of the Reagan administration, showed the commercial appeal of arms control.

The developments in Soviet attitudes, US conventional strength, and popular attitudes, would have meant little if Reagan believed in nuclear weapons. However, his long-standing abhorrence of the weapons created a desire to seek out sweeping reductions, a shift from past talks which focused on limiting their expansion. The primary reason that Reagan did not pursue this actively in his first term was the belief that the US remained dangerously behind the USSR militarily. *Red Storm Rising's* key contribution to Reykjavik was in helping Reagan draw the conclusion that the US had reversed this imbalance, particularly with regards to conventional units. Reagan used the book as a personal war-game, and it led him to believe the US and its NATO allies could defeat the Warsaw Pact dangerous and apocalyptic weapons.

Only Reagan's refusal to confine research on the Strategic Defense Initiative to the laboratory prevented the initial agreement. The program was far more than a bargaining chip to him. It represented a guarantee that whatever the state of relations was between major powers, their populations would not have to live under the threat of near-

instantaneous annihilation. SDI was not tradeable for Reagan, because he thought it would guarantee individual freedom in an uncertain world. His attachment to the program generated controversy among his allies, advisors, and in popular culture.

## Chapter 6 Pebbles from Space: SDI, Cultural Division, and Strategic Success

In March of 1983, Reagan spoke to the nation about the topic of defense and national security. Most of the speech was boilerplate Reagan. The President lamented that the US and its allies allowed the Soviets to build up military strength uncontested over the previous decade and argued that continuing to fix the decay would take significant funding over a period of years. Even though calls to cut the defense budget “came in nice simple arithmetic,” doing so would be a dereliction of duty and one that echoed the decision of France and Britain to “neglect their defenses in the 1930s.”<sup>1070</sup> Reagan attacked the aggressive actions of the Soviets and the Cubans, who were supporting communist forces in Grenada, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Ethiopia and Angola. The President also highlighted the ongoing war in Afghanistan and Soviet complicity in the establishment of martial law in Poland.<sup>1071</sup> He argued that while the US had made great strides in the first two years of his administration, it still needed to do more to ensure that it had the will and the means to both resist and deter such aggressive behavior. None of these points were new to the American people, and those watching the speech could be forgiven if they expressed confusion as to why it was broadcast nationally during prime time.

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<sup>1070</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security,” Washington DC, 23 March 1983.

<sup>1071</sup> Ibid.

Reagan saved the important part for the end. He sought to share “a vision of the future” with his fellow citizens.<sup>1072</sup> In it, “free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant US retaliation to deter a Soviet attack.”<sup>1073</sup> Instead, the US could respond defensively and destroy incoming missiles. Reagan wanted Americans to put faith in technology, which combined with the individual ingenuity of a free people, could render “nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.”<sup>1074</sup> This belief in the combined power of technology and the American people was one Reagan spoke to often. It reflected his faith that individual liberty would foster innovation, which would in turn protect and spread that same liberty. With the address, Reagan sought to eliminate the idea of Mutually Assured Destruction, the principle that the strategic defense of the US had rested on for decades. He had long disdained the concept, believing it immoral.<sup>1075</sup> Reagan now sought public support to repudiate MAD and permanently change the global strategic environment. He hoped that the Strategic Defense Initiative would fulfill his dream of a world where every day Americans no longer need fear nuclear war.

The concept drew immediate criticism. Even before publicly proposing the idea, Reagan faced concerted opposition in his own administration. The day before the speech McFarlane sent National Security Advisor Bill Clark a draft memo highlighting that

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<sup>1072</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1073</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1074</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1075</sup> Vice Admiral John Poindexter, interview with the author, telephone, West Point, NY, 19 August 2017

many on the NSC “expressed their most extreme concern” about the likely reception of the initiative by American allies and the public at large.<sup>1076</sup> McFarlane further suggested that Reagan speak with Weinberger and Vessey “to solicit their views” on the program.<sup>1077</sup> Clark rejected the memo and did not forward it to Reagan. Many of his closest advisors sought to kill the concept. Secretary Shultz only learned of the proposal two days before, when Undersecretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger informed him that the President was planning to announce the high-tech initiative on the basis of advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>1078</sup> Eagleburger had misread the interest of the Pentagon, which feared the technology was not advanced enough and that more research would take away from offensive capabilities.<sup>1079</sup> Despite the military’s reluctance, Reagan sought to make the program a centerpiece of his goal of “Peace Through Strength.” Shultz and Eagleburger feared that this “revolution in our strategic doctrine” would undermine relationships with key allies by signaling strategic disconnect.<sup>1080</sup> The State Department also expressed concern that SDI risked increasing tensions with the Soviets over technologically infeasible idea.<sup>1081</sup>

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<sup>1076</sup> Robert McFarlane to Bud Clark, draft memorandum, 22 March 1983 older 15, Box 73, William P. Clark Papers, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>1077</sup> *ibid*

<sup>1078</sup> George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, (New York: Scribner’s, 1995).

<sup>1079</sup> Steven Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), 293, Kenneth deGraffenreid, interview with the author, telephone, West Point, NY, 05 September 2017.

<sup>1080</sup> Shultz.

<sup>1081</sup> *Ibid*.

The lack of coordination about SDI's inclusion into the address hurt its reception internal to the administration. Reagan decided to add the language less than a week before delivering the speech originally intended to defend continued high levels of defense spending.<sup>1082</sup> Officials in the Pentagon and at Foggy Bottom both felt they were not properly consulted on an issue that would fundamentally change core strategic principles. As a result, they responded in a fashion that future National Security Advisor John Poindexter characterized as "very negative."<sup>1083</sup> The opposition left Reagan undeterred. He chose to trust his own instincts and National Security Advisor Bill Clark on the issue. Reagan's willingness to buck his closest advisors demonstrated how important SDI was to his strategic vision. Over the remainder of his presidency, he would unflinchingly support it and refused to consider any restrictions or limitations to SDI.

Reagan's speech received a starkly negative reaction. *Time* suggested that "in the nuclear age it may be safer when each side has only spears."<sup>1084</sup> The magazine felt that Reagan's "faith in technology as the solution to the country's military problems" was "both forgetful about the past and shortsighted toward the future."<sup>1085</sup> After all, the Soviets had demonstrated an ability to overcome technological gaps before. An effective missile defense could provoke a Soviet first strike. The USSR would have an incentive

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<sup>1082</sup> Poindexter interview

<sup>1083</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1084</sup> Strobe Talbott, "The Risks of Taking of Shields," *Time* 4 April 1983, Vol 121 Issue 14.

<sup>1085</sup> Ibid.

to attack before the shield came online or risk leaving “itself permanently at the America’s mercy.”<sup>1086</sup>

*Newsweek* termed SDI “nuclear heresy,” and argued that Reagan should instead accept the recent recommendations of a commission chaired by President Ford’s National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft.<sup>1087</sup> The Commission on Strategic Forces recommended continuing the deployment of MX missiles in the short-term but gradually replacing them with Midgetman missiles, each of which contained a single warhead rather than the ten on the MIRV-enabled MX.<sup>1088</sup> Scowcroft believed these moves would enhance the ability of the US to deter the Soviets in the short term, while creating a more survivable second-strike capability. *Newsweek* argued this would mean that “Americans may feel somewhat more secure without making Moscow feel less so.”<sup>1089</sup> In contrast, Reagan’s proposal would “require enormous diplomatic skill” to prevent a new arms race, a skill the publication found lacking in Reagan.<sup>1090</sup>

Concerns about SDI’s feasibility dominated the discussion. An editorial in the *New York Times* accused Reagan of acting without firm “scientific basis and political examination,” and expressed doubt that physics of the project were theoretically sound.<sup>1091</sup> The Office of Technology Assessment concluded that the prospects of

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<sup>1086</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1087</sup> David Alpern, David Martin, Mary Lord and William Cook, “A New Nuclear Heresy,” *Newsweek* 4 April 1983

<sup>1088</sup> Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 228.

<sup>1089</sup> Alpern.

<sup>1090</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1091</sup> “Nuclear Facts, Science Fictions,” *The New York Times*, 27 March 1983.

successfully employing advanced missile defense technology were remote.<sup>1092</sup> Many accused Reagan of drawing on science fiction rather than science fact. *Newsweek* equated the proposed technology with the shields of the starship *Enterprise* from *Star Trek*.<sup>1093</sup> The *New York Times* editorial carried the headline “Nuclear Facts, Science Fictions,” and referred to SDI as a “pipe dream,” that was little more than “a projection of fantasy into policy.”<sup>1094</sup> Most famously, Senator Edward Kennedy referred to the speech as “misleading Red-scare tactics and reckless Star Wars schemes.”<sup>1095</sup> The reference to the popular films stuck, and Star Wars quickly became a shorthand for discussing the program.

While Reagan intensely disliked the name, noting in a letter that he would “bristle every time our media friends (?) call it “Star Wars,” his fondness for science fiction did contribute to his embrace of SDI.<sup>1096</sup> Edmund Moore, Reagan’s official biographer, argued that the President’s childhood reading of John Carter’s adventures helped Reagan accept the core concept of SDI.<sup>1097</sup> This overstates the importance of Burroughs directly on SDI, but Reagan’s reading did affect the way he looked at the future. He frequently marveled at the pace of technological developments in his lifetime and recognized that many ideas he first encountered in science fiction were now normal. In his 1984 address

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<sup>1092</sup> Hayward, 297.

<sup>1093</sup> Alpern

<sup>1094</sup> “Nuclear Facts, Science Fictions”

<sup>1095</sup> Lou Cannon, “President Seeks Futuristic Defense Against Missiles,” *The Washington Post*, 24 March 1983.

<sup>1096</sup> Reagan to Lt. Gen (Ret) V.H. Krulak, 4 February 1985, in *in Reagan: A Life in Letters edited by Kiron Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson*. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 122.

<sup>1097</sup> Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1991), XII



to the graduating class at the Air Force Academy, Reagan reflected while only 52 years separated his days at Eureka College from the cadets, it seemed more like 520.<sup>1098</sup> He noted that the US had gone from “space fiction to space shuttles” and over that half century, “a new future was discovered and quickly rediscovered” thanks to the “cataclysmic rush” of technological prowess.<sup>1099</sup>

The rush made it seem only natural to Reagan to take inspiration from imagined futures and reject naysayers of the present. His faith in technology and the capabilities of Americans reverberated well beyond Washington DC. It lent legitimacy in previously closed debates to a wide variety of actors and began to shape the genre that he took inspiration from. During the SDI debate, science fiction did more than create a provide a general spark for the idea, it became a cultural battleground. Legends of the genre engaged in fierce advocacy on the issue and publicly inserted themselves into the debate. Policymakers both welcomed and actively encouraged this, accepting the authors as experts in large part because of their ability to translate arcane detail into powerful visions of the future.

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<sup>1098</sup> “Address at Commencement Exercises at the United States Air Force Academy.” Colorado Springs, Colorado, 30 May 1984.

<sup>1099</sup> Ibid.

## Citizen Action

Shortly after Reagan's election in 1980, a group of scientists, writers, military personnel, and others interested in space began meeting at the California home of Larry Niven, a science-fiction writer. They called themselves the Citizens Advisory Council on National Space Policy, and were the brainchild of another sci-fi author, Jerry Pournelle. Convinced that Reagan would win the election, Pournelle organized the group with the hope using his connections to the future president's close advisors.<sup>1100</sup> During the 1970s, Pournelle had collaborated on a non-fiction book entitled *Strategy of Technology* with Stefan Possony, a fellow at the Hoover Institution. Possony was a mentor to Richard Allen, Reagan's first National Security Advisor, during Allen's own time at Hoover in the late 1960s, and eventually introduced Allen to Pournelle. The two men then worked together on some foreign policy issues.<sup>1101</sup>

Pournelle began his career working in the aerospace industry for Boeing in the 1950s, working on the development of Project Thor. The program proposed using tungsten rods launched from satellites to destroy targets on the ground. Kinetic energy released from the impact would have power equivalent to a small-yield nuclear device.<sup>1102</sup> However, since it was a conventional weapon it could be deployed without violating the strictures of the ABM or Outer Space Treaties. Pournelle's work on this

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<sup>1100</sup> Larry Niven, email with Author, 15 August 2017

<sup>1101</sup> Jerry Pournelle, interview with author, skype, West Point, New York, 19 August 2017.

<sup>1102</sup> Ibid.

project led him work with Edward Teller and Possony on space defense. At the same time, he became active in the Republican Party, and served as the San Bernardino county chairman for Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign. In this capacity, he invited Reagan to give a speech at a rally and dined with the future president.<sup>1103</sup> Beginning in the late 1960s, he began writing science fiction, publishing his first book in 1969 and served as president of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, the guild for genre writers.

The political, academic, and writing connections of Pournelle, allowed him to assemble an eclectic group to the first meeting of the Citizen's Advisory Council. Niven acted as host due to the size of his house, and wife's cooking talents.<sup>1104</sup> Other attendees included Lowell Wood, who attended on behalf of Nobel-laureate Edward Teller, Buzz Aldrin, noted science fiction authors Robert Heinlein and Poul Anderson, and a number of senior military officers.<sup>1105</sup> The group sought to outline a new direction for US space policy, and over the course of three meetings before Reagan's inauguration produced a two hundred page document covering a wide array of space issues.

Strategic Defense was the centerpiece of the project. Finding consensus was challenging, as over several decades a wide variety of concepts for missile defense emerged. It became commonplace for supporters of one concept to the technological underpinnings of another. The net effect was to diminish the perceived possibility of the

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<sup>1103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1104</sup> Interview with Larry Niven

<sup>1105</sup> Pournelle interview

entire concept. An early compromise between the proponents, termed the “Treaty of Tarzana” allowed the group to advocate for SDI in a general sense without delving too deeply into technical issues.<sup>1106</sup> The name stemmed from the location of the meetings in the LA suburb of Tarzana, named for the Edgar Rice Burroughs character.

Heinlein, Pournelle, Niven, and Anderson largely abstained from the in-depth discussions as they lacked expertise. However, they played an essential role in the production of final document. Their work as science-fiction authors allowed them to translate the heavy jargon of the scientists and present the material in a way that “made it more interesting.”<sup>1107</sup> Their efforts paid off, as Reagan reportedly read the entire document rather than just the executive summary. The positive reception from the President led Allen to ask the Council to provide periodic recommendations on a variety of space issues.<sup>1108</sup>

The group also influenced the announcement of SDI to the public. Reagan speechwriter, Dana Rohrabacher, noted that as he worked on the speech he was in contact with the science fiction community, and a “lot of creativity” was available to the administration on space issues.<sup>1109</sup> Some of the language from the group’s original report also made it into the speech. Reagan’s question asking Americans “wouldn’t it be better to save lives than to avenge them” came directly from the report’s text.<sup>1110</sup> After the

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<sup>1106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1107</sup> Ibid, Niven email

<sup>1108</sup> Pournelle interview

<sup>1109</sup> Representative Dana Rohrabacher, interview with author, telephone, West Point, NY, 18 July 2017.

<sup>1110</sup> Pournelle interview, Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security

announcement, the Citizen's Council also sought to demonstrate broad public support for SDI. They turned to Bjo Trimble, who had organized the letter-writing campaign which led NBC to renew *Star Trek* for a third season, to similarly flood the White House with letters supporting SDI.<sup>1111</sup> The letters offered a counter to the largely negative reception the idea received outside of the Oval Office.

Reagan's speech sparked a crisis within the science fiction community. Pournelle recalled that it "damn near split Science Fiction in America in half."<sup>1112</sup> Debate over whether SDI would lead to the militarization of space, was technologically post, cost-effective, or could provoke the Soviets into attacking raged in genre magazines, op-eds, and novels. Authors actively responded to Reagan's idea and incorporated it into their new stories. Pournelle was the most prominent voice in favor, authoring a book *Mutual Assured Survival* that was essentially a fictionalized version of the Advisory Council's initial report.<sup>1113</sup> The cover featured the tag line "ICBMs Will Soon Be Obsolete" and a blurb from Reagan praising the work of the Citizen's Advisory Council.<sup>1114</sup> Reagan's letter praised the group for "addressing with verve and vision the challenges to peace and to our national security," highlighting the positive effect the prose of the sci-fi writers had on the overall report.<sup>1115</sup>

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<sup>1111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1113</sup> Thomas Disch, *On SF*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 211.

<sup>1114</sup> Jerry Pournelle and Dean Ing, *Mutual Assured Survival*, (New York: Baen Books, 1985).

<sup>1115</sup> Disch, 211.

Pournelle and Niven also collaborated on *Footfall* in 1985, which reached the top spot on *The New York Times* best-sellers list.<sup>1116</sup> The book features a plotline in which science fiction writers advise the president on how to respond to an alien invasion. The writers are thinly disguised stand-ins for actual authors and included characters for Pournelle, Niven, and Heinlein.<sup>1117</sup> Pournelle admitted that his work on the council influenced the novel.<sup>1118</sup> *Footfall* embraced the militarization of space and relied on the extraterrestrial deployment of nuclear weapons to defend the planet. *The New York Times* positively reviewed the work, though did decry that the inclusion of the writers only served to allow “the authors to score some points against fuzzy-minded liberals.”<sup>1119</sup> This was by design, as Pournelle and Niven explicitly intended to build support for a more robust military role in space. For the authors it was impossible to separate personal beliefs from his writing, Niven noted that part of being a sci-fi writer was that “we teach, we can’t help it.”<sup>1120</sup>

The debate also ensnared the authors commonly regarded as the “Big Three” of science fiction publishing: Robert Heinlein, Arthur Clarke, and Isaac Asimov. Clarke, author of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, wrote a short story that appeared in the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board Newsletter, entitled “On Golden Seas.”<sup>1121</sup> The story features a

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<sup>1116</sup> “Paperback Best Sellers: May 18, 1986,” *The New York Times*, 18 May 1986.

<sup>1117</sup> Pournelle interview

<sup>1118</sup> Ibid, Larry Niven disagrees and stated that the council work had no influence at all on the novel in an email exchange with the author.

<sup>1119</sup> Gerald Jones, “Science Fiction,” *The New York Times*, 8 September 1985.

<sup>1120</sup> Niven interview

<sup>1121</sup> Arthur C Clarke, “On Golden Seas,” in *The Collected Stories of Arthur C Clarke*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 2002), 935.

female President Kennedy facing a substantial national debt crisis. She then surprises her own staff with a “Budget Defense Initiative” unveiled during an address to the nation. Clarke’s fictional president is a “great reader of historical fiction” and came across a book which discusses the ability to remove gold from seawater. The proposal infuriates the Soviet Union, who Kennedy seeks to calm by offering to share the technology, though “nobody believed her.”<sup>1122</sup> The story also identified a host of international relations questions about ownership of the sea and concludes with the implication of a pending arms race between the US and USSR to drain the world’s oceans as quickly as possible.<sup>1123</sup>

It is unlikely that Reagan read “On Golden Seas,” and Clarke’s decision to name the stand in for the president Kennedy would likely not have sat well, but the newsletter and story did circulate through the Pentagon and White House. It contained an explicit acknowledgement of the ability of fiction to influence policy makers, which likely also indicated why Clarke chose to write a short story with little prospect of commercial success. The short length, just three pages, and clear allusions to SDI, Reagan, and administration officials show Clarke’s intent to use the story in a manner like Reagan’s own use of stories in speeches and public comments. It was a short, memorable parable intended to influence popular opinion on policy.

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<sup>1122</sup> Ibid, 937

<sup>1123</sup> *ibid*

Clarke also testified against SDI before Congress. In his testimony, he referred to the program as a “technological obscenity” and called for more cooperation with the Soviet Union. These themes largely matched Clarke’s novels, which often centered on utopian societies and the optimistic side of exploration. Technology was of central importance in much of Clarke’s work, and he most commonly used it to elevate a society and its citizens. Clarke’s testimony drew the ire of Heinlein, who confronted the British author at a 1985 meeting of the Citizen’s Advisory Council at Niven’s house. Heinlein questioned why Clarke felt that he had a right to discuss US policy as a foreigner. He also viewed the moral doubts Clarke had about weaponizing space as “outrageously misplaced” since the technology would make nuclear war impossible.<sup>1124</sup> The outburst “really was vicious” in Clarke’s eyes, and left the author deeply hurt.<sup>1125</sup> Clarke did reassess his views on SDI and while he did not fully support it, later acknowledged that there were “certain aspects of SDI that made sense.”<sup>1126</sup> However, the argument lingered and the two never completely reconciled before Heinlein’s death in 1988.

Heinlein also found himself on the opposite side of the issue from Asimov. As with Clarke, the debate over SDI would effectively end their long-time, though already strained friendship. The two men worked together at the Naval Air Experimental Station in Philadelphia during the Second World War, after Heinlein secured Asimov a position

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<sup>1124</sup> William Patterson, *Robert Heinlein, Vol 2: In Dialogue with His Century Volume 2: The Man Who Learned Better*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 2014), 446.

<sup>1125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1126</sup> Neil McAleer, *Arthur C Clarke: The Authorized Biography*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1992), 325.



there.<sup>1127</sup> Asimov recalled that Heinlein had a difficult manner and would seek to badger him about viewpoints. Their differences of opinion were exacerbated by what Asimov saw as Heinlein's shift from "flaming liberal" during the war to a "far-right conservative immediately afterward."<sup>1128</sup> In his 1995 memoir, Asimov tied the shift to Heinlein's marriage to his second wife, Virginia, and compares it to Reagan's own shift which Asimov inaccurately blamed on Nancy Reagan. Asimov goes on to refer to Reagan as "brainless" before somewhat disingenuously claiming that he could not "explain Heinlein in that way at all."<sup>1129</sup> The juxtaposition of the two so closely in the memoir implied strongly that Asimov viewed both men as intellectually feeble and disingenuous. Asimov concluded his reminiscence of Heinlein by noting that the posthumously published *Grumbles from the Grave* revealed a "meanness of spirit" in Heinlein.

Asimov opposed SDI on the basis that he felt it was both not technically feasible and too expensive. In a letter for the advocacy group Americans for Democratic Action, he argued that the program was "only Hollywood science fiction, and like almost all Hollywood science fiction, it is bad science fiction."<sup>1130</sup> Asimov also employed the rhetoric of the westerns, equating SDI to "a John Wayne standoff," as he believed that the program would bankrupt both the USSR and the US.<sup>1131</sup> This somewhat ironically

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<sup>1127</sup> Isaac Asimov, *I, Asimov: A Memoir*, (New York: Random House, 1995)

<sup>1128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1130</sup> Majorie Hunter and Warren Weaver Jr, "Briefing: Science Fiction," *The New York Times*, 2 August 1985.

<sup>1131</sup> William Broad, "Sci-Fi Writers Speak Up Over Real-life 'Star Wars'," *The Chicago Tribune*, 21 March 1985.

echoed Reagan's own language about the concept SDI was supposed to render obsolete, Mutually Assured Destruction. He also wrote against the program in the genre magazine, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, taking his case for the program's futility directly to his fans.<sup>1132</sup> Asimov opened an essay entitled "Out of the Everywhere," which was ostensibly about cosmic rays, with an attack against Reagan and supporters of SDI. The author lambasted the program as "the wish fulfillment dream of a shallow-mind" that was both technologically and politically impossible.<sup>1133</sup> He then told the story of encountering another author who was of "far-right persuasion" and a "well-known apostle of the righteousness of violence."<sup>1134</sup> Asimov described fearing for his physical safety and offered it as proof that supporters of the program had lost their sanity.

There were efforts to use Sci-Fi magazines to support the administration's initiative as well. Pournelle and publisher Jim Baen established a new science fiction magazine, in part to combat what they saw as a left-ward shift in the genre and a movement away from what they viewed as traditional military science fiction.<sup>1135</sup> The new journal, entitled *Far Frontiers*, only lasted seven volumes, but frequently featured op-eds in favor of SDI. Michael Ashley notes in *Science Fiction Rebels: The Story of the*

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<sup>1132</sup> "Out of Everywhere," *Kirkus Reviews*, 1 June 1990

<sup>1133</sup> Isaac Asimov, "Out of the Everywhere" in *Out of the Everywhere: Thoughts on Science From the Master*, (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 29.

<sup>1134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1135</sup> Michael Ashley, *Science Fiction Rebels: The Story of the Science-fiction Magazine from 1981-1990*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 213.

*Science-Fiction Magazine from 1981-1990* that the journal's fiction also showed clear signs of the influence of SDI.<sup>1136</sup>

Heinlein was outspoken in his support of SDI. His advocacy worked its way into his fiction books. Heinlein's penultimate novel, *The Cat Who Walked Through Walls*, was dedicated to his fellow members of the Citizen's Advisory Council. The dedication listed Pournelle, Niven, and seven other authors involved in the group, and called them "men to have at your back."<sup>1137</sup> Beyond his active participation in the Citizen's Advisory Council, he collaborated with LTG Daniel Graham.

Graham was one of the leading advocates for missile defense, through a program dubbed High Frontier. Heinlein donated over forty thousand dollars to High Frontier-centric advocacy groups.<sup>1138</sup> He also wrote the introduction for Graham's 1983 book *High Frontier*, the subtitle of which promised Americans that "there is a defense against nuclear war."<sup>1139</sup> In the introduction, Heinlein stated that *High Frontier* offered him the "best news I have heard since V-J Day."<sup>1140</sup> He went on to argue that the program's reliance on non-nuclear systems made it something that everyone who opposed nuclear weapons should get behind, and that as it could not kill anyone it was "as non-aggressive as a bulletproof vest."<sup>1141</sup> Heinlein responded to claims about the high costs of SDI by

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<sup>1136</sup> Ibid, 214

<sup>1137</sup> Robert Heinlein, *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls*, (New York: Putnam Press, 1985)

<sup>1138</sup> Martin Morse Wooster, "Questioning Authority," *National Review*, 8 September 2014.

<sup>1139</sup> Daniel Graham, *High Frontier: There is a Defense Against Nuclear War*, (New York: TOR Books, 1984).

<sup>1140</sup> Robert Heinlein, in *High Frontier: There is a Defense Against Nuclear War* by Daniel Graham, (New York: TOR Books, 1984), 7.

<sup>1141</sup> Ibid, 8.

noting High Frontier advocates expected it to reduce net defense expenditures. However, Heinlein felt he “was not in a position to judge this,” but did not “give a damn” since “[a] man with a burst appendix can’t afford to dicker over the cost of surgery.”<sup>1142</sup> Heinlein concluded his introduction by referencing his time as a research and development engineer to assert that any technical issues would prove surmountable. Pournelle’s preface to the *High Frontier* similarly referenced his past as a scientist to lend credibility to arguments about the feasibility of the program.<sup>1143</sup>

Though both authors cast their support for High Frontier in scientific terms, it is unlikely that Graham sought their input because of their technical expertise. Both men were decades removed from conducting formal research, and best known as science fiction authors. Heinlein’s introduction and Pournelle’s preface were intended to lend Graham their celebrity and help influence genre-fans to support the program. The choice of publisher further indicated this desire. TOR books published the mass market version of *High Frontier*. The publishing house, both historically and in the present, focused heavily on science-fiction and fantasy, rarely venturing beyond those genres. The decision to publish Graham’s work indicates that both the general and the publisher felt that the science-fiction community would readily receive and embrace the ideas of High Frontier, offering a potentially valuable way to build support for SDI.

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<sup>1142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1143</sup> Jerry Pournelle in *High Frontier* by Daniel Graham, 13.

The science-fiction community was omni-present in the debate over SDI. Journalists sought out prominent authors and quoted them as authoritatively as Nobel Prize winning physicists, military leadership, and policy makers. A profile of Graham, who advised Reagan during his 1976 campaign and afterwards, listed former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Thomas Moore, Edward Teller, Buzz Aldrin, and Heinlein as supporters of High Frontier.<sup>1144</sup> The article implied that the support of each was equally valuable and all four men position as “nationally prominent figures in the military and scientific community” made them suitable advocates.<sup>1145</sup>

Politicians also sought out the authors. Newt Gingrich developed a long-lasting friendship with Pournelle, which led Pournelle to write the introduction for Gingrich’s first book *Window of Opportunity*. Gingrich co-wrote the book with Marianne Gingrich, his second wife, and noted science-fiction author David Drake. The book offered policy prescriptions for the US and argued that further space exploration was essential to creating an “opportunity society.”<sup>1146</sup> Its cover art was more reflective of a science fiction novel than political tract, featuring an Earth dwarfed by a bald eagle in space and a shuttle flying towards the reader. Gingrich met the authors and sci-fi publisher Jim Baen at the 1983 World Science Fiction Convention in Atlanta.<sup>1147</sup> He maintained a close relationship with both Baen and Pournelle and embarked on a science fiction

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<sup>1144</sup> Tom Nugent, “Daniel Graham: Sheriff of the ‘High Frontier’,” *The Washington Times*, 1 November 1983.

<sup>1145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1146</sup> Newt Gingrich, *Window of Opportunity: A Blueprint for the Future*, (New York: Tor Books, 1984)

<sup>1147</sup> David Streitfield, “The Speaker Also Writes,” *The Washington Post*, 12 June 1995.

project with the two, though Pournelle would later drop out. The result was the 1995 book, *1945*, an alternate history of World War II featuring a timeline in which the US and Germany never went to war. A planned sequel never materialized, but Gingrich did continue to write alternate histories and pursue other fictional projects.

The inclusion of figures like Heinlein, Asimov, and Clarke into a debate on national policy reflects the significant strides science fiction made from its origins in pulp magazines like John Campbell's *Astounding Science Fiction* and the novels of Burroughs. Part of this acceptance stemmed from their audience growing up and seeing technology from childhood imaginations become reality. Reagan's remarks at the Air Force Academy reflected the amazement of many over the movement from "space fiction to the space shuttle."<sup>1148</sup> The increased prominence of authors in policy also stemmed from their value as translators. Pournelle, Niven, Heinlein and other's role on the Citizen Advisory Council showed the value of storytellers in selling a vision.

Controversy over SDI in the science fiction community also demonstrated the way policy makers could influence culture. Reagan's enthusiastic embrace of the concept made it one that many authors felt they had to reckon with, and "damn near split science fiction in America in half."<sup>1149</sup> The issue exposed deep divisions in the community, many of which persist into the present day.<sup>1150</sup> While these controversies

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<sup>1148</sup> Air Force Academy Commencement

<sup>1149</sup> Pournelle interview

<sup>1150</sup> There remains considerable controversy in the Sci-Fi community about what constitutes "real" science fiction and the role of military science fiction. A vocal minority known alternatively as the Sad or Rabid Puppies sought to repeatedly hijack the Hugo Awards in the mid-2010s to protest themes of inclusion and perceived political correctness. Many authors associated with Baen Books and Pournelle were involved.

may have come to light without SDI, the policy choice of Reagan set the community on a collision course for a literary civil war.

### **Conclave of the Kremlin**

Reagan appreciated the public support of authors like Heinlein and Pournelle. The President responded to Graham's dedication of *High Frontier* with a letter praising "the important work that [Graham] and [his] colleagues have done to prepare the way for a more secure America."<sup>1151</sup> Reagan particularly appreciated the "efforts to help us build a national consensus" on the issue of SDI.<sup>1152</sup> He also wrote to the Citizen's Advisory Council and praised the "verve and vision" of the writers.<sup>1153</sup> Reagan's explicit praise for the consensus building of Graham and the language of the writers showed the tremendous value he placed on the inclusion of SDI into narratives, both fictional and otherwise. That the authors presented his policy in an approachable manner made them significant assets for the administration.

Science fiction writers were not the only ones who took inspiration from Reagan and included SDI into their work. Clancy also embraced the theme of missile defense for his fourth novel, *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*. Published in 1988, *Cardinal* was the last

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After Pournelle's death in September of 2017, the reaction of the community was mixed due in large part to his outspoken political views.

<sup>1151</sup> Reagan to Graham, June 3, 1983 from *High Frontier*

<sup>1152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1153</sup> Disch, 211.

of the Jack Ryan books published during the Reagan administration and Clancy opted to make missile defense the primary technology featured in the work. A 1988 *New York Times Magazine* profile portrayed Clancy as a “champion... of Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative program,” and quoted the author as believing that if the US did not “go forward with it, we’re stupid.”<sup>1154</sup> Clancy felt that “it can work” and that clearly the Russian “think it can work,” provided the strongest evidence that program had value.<sup>1155</sup>

*The Cardinal of the Kremlin* focuses on a competition between the US and USSR to develop effective missile defense. It begins with the scuttling of the *Red October*, allowing Jack Ryan, now working on arms control, to reflect on nuclear weapons. The analyst recalls his reaction to seeing the submarine’s missiles and recoils at the recollection of the “ghastly things.”<sup>1156</sup> He later rejects the utility of arms reductions, noting that even a reduction of fifty percent still leaves the basic framework of Mutually Assured Destruction intact. Ryan concludes that the US needs to “eliminate that damned things or figure out something to keep them from working” and argues that the US “had to do the latter before [it] can attempt the former.”<sup>1157</sup> Within the first forty pages of the novel, Clancy endorsed Reagan’s Reykjavik stance and argued that SDI not a roadblock to a deal, but rather the guarantor of abolition. In the final chapter, Ryan delivers the

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<sup>1154</sup> Patrick Anderson, “King of the Techno-Thriller,” *New York Times Magazine*, 1 May 1988.

<sup>1155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1156</sup> Tom Clancy, *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, (New York: Putnam, 1988), 21.

<sup>1157</sup> Ibid, 37.



message directly to the Soviet General Secretary, a clear Gorbachev stand in. The Soviet leader wryly notes that Ryan sounds like the president, which Ryan quickly agrees with, adding “he’s right.”<sup>1158</sup> This was Clancy’s central premise for the novel, that Reagan was completely right on SDI.

Clancy’s narrative is structurally like his previous novels. The American characters are unambiguously virtuous and capable. The lead US researcher for SDI, MAJ Alan Gregory, is an army officer who was top of his class at West Point, then earned several PhDs, and “was already being talked about in the same breath as Cambridge’s Stephen Hawking or Princeton’s Freeman Dyson.”<sup>1159</sup> Soviet characters are used as foils to expose the flaws in the Soviet system. The titular character, the Cardinal, is a long-time US mole at the highest level of the Soviet military establishment. Despite having three decorations as a Hero of the Soviet Union, Colonel Filitov spies for the US. He does so because the system betrayed the sacrifices made in the Great Patriotic War and, like Ramius from *Hunt for Red October*, the regime was responsible for the death of Filitov’s wife. The colonel’s sons both died in military service, one in a tank during the 1956 Hungarian Revolt.<sup>1160</sup> Clancy’s characterizations continued the efforts of *Hunt for Red October* and *Red Storm Rising* to advance the Reagan themes of gallant US service members and the distinction between the Russian people and the Soviet system.

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<sup>1158</sup> Ibid, 536

<sup>1159</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>1160</sup> Ibid, 211.

Both nations achieve significant progress in developing missile defense in the book, but Clancy shows the Soviets as more advanced. After a US reconnaissance plane accidentally observes a test at a Soviet facility, the American general in charge of the program comments that the Russians were “at least three years ahead of us.”<sup>1161</sup> However, the sins of the USSR eventually undermine their progress. A former math teacher, driven to join the Mujahedeen after the Soviets kill his wife and daughter in a jet attack and kidnap his son, destroys much of the Bright Star research facility in a raid supported by the CIA.<sup>1162</sup> A Soviet officer on the scene assesses that it would take over eighteen months to repair, which will allow the US to regain the lead in SDI tech thanks to intelligence given to them by Filitov.<sup>1163</sup> Clancy’s use of fear of Soviet technological prowess as a driving force in the plot matched the template established in *The Hunt for Red October*. *Cardinal’s* depiction of the inhuman nature of the Soviet system leading to disgruntlement and American opportunity also matches his first novel and lends to a reading of the work as a call to action for Americans concerned about falling behind in the Cold War.

There were concerns about Soviet missile defense efforts within the Reagan administration. Kenneth deGraffenreid, the National Security Council Director for Intelligence Programs from 1981 to 1987, thought during the transition that previous administrations “had not given enough attention to what the Soviets were doing in

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<sup>1161</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>1162</sup> Ibid, 14,

<sup>1163</sup> Ibid, 538.

Strategic Defense.”<sup>1164</sup> This included missile defense and efforts to disrupt US command and control. Studies conducted in the wake of the 1983 Able Archer exercise revealed a number of vulnerabilities with the system, and the NSC expressed concern that the Soviets had gained access to networks intended to control the targeting and launch of nuclear weapons.<sup>1165</sup> Reagan had expressed similar concerns after watching the 1983 film *WarGames*, which features a young hacker gaining access to US strategic systems and nearly launching nuclear weapons.<sup>1166</sup> Shortly after viewing the movie, Reagan asked the Joint Chiefs if what the movie showed was possible, they were unable to give a response and promised to look into. After investigating, they told the President that the problem was “worse than you could possibly imagine,” and began to work on a solution.<sup>1167</sup>

Reagan believed the Soviets were actively seeking missile defense technology similar to the one he proposed in his 1983 speech. This also led him to believe that the USSR did not actually practice MAD. Instead, they sought to upend the very strategic balance they claimed the ABM Treaty upheld.<sup>1168</sup> Intelligence reports did provide evidence of Soviet research into missile defense. In October of 1985, Secretaries Shultz and Weinberger jointly released a report entitled “Soviet Strategic Defense Programs”

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<sup>1164</sup> deGraffenreid interview

<sup>1165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1166</sup> Nate Jones, *Able Archer 83: The Secret History of the NATO Exercise that Almost Triggered Nuclear War*, (New York: The New Press, 2016), 308n58.

<sup>1167</sup> Christopher Fuller, “The Reagan Administration and the Roots of US Cyber (In)Security” at *Ronald Reagan and the Transformation of International Politics in the 1980s Conference*, The Clements Center for National Security, Austin, Texas, 19 January 2017.

<sup>1168</sup> deGraffenreid interview

which provided a declassified look at USSR programs. It listed a four part “Soviet Approach” to strategic defense. First, the document alleged that the USSR sought the “destruction and disruption of the West’s nuclear associated command, control and communications.”<sup>1169</sup> The Soviets would then seek to destroy weapons before launch and attempt the “interception and destruction of surviving weapons” while in flight.<sup>1170</sup> Finally, they sought the protection of key personnel and infrastructure.

The bulk of the report focused on the third objective, the interception and destruction of in-flight missiles. It identified research sites in Pechora, located in northern Russia, Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, and in Sary Shagan, located in present-day Kazakhstan. Research centers in these cities focused on radar to track missiles and directed energy weapons for the interdiction and destruction of satellites and eventually missiles.<sup>1171</sup> By 1989, the Soviets laser research at Sary Shagan was still only viable for tracking satellites and American physicists doubted the ability to convert them into effective ABM weapons.<sup>1172</sup> Another location in Tyuratam, (also located in Kazakhstan) tested interceptor missiles which already had the capacity to interdict satellites. The report alleged they could interdict ballistic missiles in the future.<sup>1173</sup>

Shultz and Weinberger cast US efforts in SDI as a way to balance Soviet capabilities with those of the US and accused the USSR of blatant hypocrisy in their reaction to the US

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<sup>1169</sup> Caspar Weinberger and George Shultz, “Soviet Strategic Programs,” October 1985, 7, CIA Electronic FOIA Library.

<sup>1170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1171</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>1172</sup> Bill Keller, “American Team Gets Close Look At Soviet Laser,” *The New York Times*, 9 July 1989.

<sup>1173</sup> “Soviet Strategic Programs,” 14.

program.<sup>1174</sup> Reagan echoed these conclusions a week later in a radio address. He highlighted that the Soviets employed over ten thousand scientists and engineers in support of their strategic defense research. Based on this and the intelligence presented in the report, Reagan believed that Americans should “realize that our SDI research program is crucial to maintain the military balance and protect the liberty and freedom of the West.”<sup>1175</sup> Reagan also took pains to argue that the US would “welcome the day when the Soviet Union can shoot down any incoming missile.”<sup>1176</sup> However, he predicated this welcome on the ability of the US to do the same. In his vision, SDI would replace MAD with a “balance of safety” that was “not only morally preferable [but] may result in getting rid of nuclear weapons altogether.”<sup>1177</sup>

That the administration released the report and Reagan gave the address a month before the President’s first meeting with Gorbachev indicated a clear expectation that the issue would be a significant one at Geneva. The two reflected an effort to shape the conversation prior to the summit. The topic did come up frequently and was one of the main points of conversation in plenary sessions and private meetings between the two leaders. Gorbachev flatly denied that the USSR was involved in SDI research, though hedged by noting that “both of us do research in space of course.”<sup>1178</sup> However, he

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<sup>1174</sup> Ibid, 21

<sup>1175</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Soviet Strategic Defense Programs,” Camp David, MD, 12 October 1985.

<sup>1176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1178</sup> “Geneva Summit Memorandum of Conversation Second Plenary Meeting,” 19 November 1985. Reagan Library.

argued that Soviet research was for peaceful purposes, ironically echoing the claims of Reagan about US SDI research. In both official settings and private meetings, Gorbachev admitted that he understood Reagan's desire for SDI "on a human level," but "could not possibly agree" as the leader of a major power.<sup>1179</sup> The Soviet leader's officially stated concern was that the program would start an arms race for space.

During the Reykjavik Summit in 1986, Marshal of the Soviet Union Sergei Akhromeyev framed the issue differently. When confronted by National Security Advisor John Poindexter about Soviet research centers in Kazakhstan, he did not deny the research efforts. Instead, Akhromeyev noted that he and Soviet leadership "had such high regard for US technology and research and development" that they believed if the US put resources behind the project they would have far more success with the development than the Soviets did.<sup>1180</sup> The exchange convinced Poindexter that Soviet objections were not based on the ABM treaty, but rather that American money and ingenuity would yield a breakthrough unmatched by the Soviet Union.<sup>1181</sup>

Soviet opposition held firm even with American pledges to share the technology with them. During discussions at Reykjavik, Reagan offered "to share the benefits of SDI" with the Soviets, hoping it would "ensure that the Soviets understood [the US was] not interested in a 1<sup>st</sup> strike capability."<sup>1182</sup> He told Gorbachev that the US "would share

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<sup>1179</sup> "Geneva Summit Memorandum of Conversation Second Private Meeting," 19 November 1985, Reagan Library.

<sup>1180</sup> Poindexter interview

<sup>1181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1182</sup> "Arms Control and SDI," National Security Planning Group Meeting, 10 February 1987, accessed on thereaganfiles.com

the fruits of our research” and sought to demonstrate it would be in the self-interest of the US to do so.<sup>1183</sup> Reagan believed if “everyone had access to the relevant technology it would be a threat to no one” and there would be no incentive to launch a first strike destined to fail.<sup>1184</sup>

Poindexter later reflected that it was likely “the Soviets didn’t believe us” and felt it was too risky to concede on the point when they “couldn’t really be assured that [the US] would share the technology with them.”<sup>1185</sup> Reagan was genuine in his desire to share and wanted to include language in arms control treaties which would “simply make all the information available about each other’s systems.”<sup>1186</sup> He viewed SDI as essential to making arms control work as it would render nuclear weapons ineffective. During a National Security Planning Group meeting in 1987, he expressed frustration at the slow pace of abolition. Reagan believed that “some day people are going to ask why we didn’t do something now about getting rid of nuclear weapons” and noted he had “been reading my Bible and the description of Armageddon talks about destruction... of many cities.”<sup>1187</sup> Reagan viewed nuclear weapons as the weapon that would destroy the world and felt SDI had the potential to literally avert Armageddon.

This belief is partly why Reagan did not call on the Soviets to end their own space defense program. During the final session at Reykjavik, he noted to Gorbachev that

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<sup>1183</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation,” 11 October 1986.

<sup>1184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1185</sup> Poindexter interview

<sup>1186</sup> “Review of United States Arms Control Positions,” National Security Planning Group Meeting, 8 September 1987, accessed on thereaganfiles.com

<sup>1187</sup> Ibid.

while he believed the Soviets routinely violated the ABM treaty, “he did not talk about it much.”<sup>1188</sup> Even though the Soviet program disregarded the agreement, Reagan did not expect them to “tear it down” and instead wanted the Soviets to acknowledge the US had the same rights to research and test defenses.<sup>1189</sup> However, for Gorbachev “it was not an acceptable request” arguing that allowing the development and deployment of a new system would run counter to the narrative that the two sides were about to “start reductions.”<sup>1190</sup>

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger remained concerned about the prospect of a Russian SDI long after the Cold War ended. Frustrated by what he viewed as the decay of US military capability under the Clinton administration, Reagan’s Secretary of Defense turned to fiction. Writing to Margaret Thatcher asking her to write the forward to his forthcoming book, he noted the project came about because the U.S. let its “defense stagnate.”<sup>1191</sup> Working with Hoover Institution scholar Peter Schweizer, Weinberger wrote *The Next War*, a series of fictional vignettes designed to illustrate the threat to US national security with a weakened military. He believed that the use of fiction would allow the reader to understand the “tough strategic decisions” faced by the US and understand the sweeping impact that technology could have on the battlefield.<sup>1192</sup>

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<sup>1188</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation,” 11 October 1986.

<sup>1189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1191</sup> Caspar Weinberger to Margaret Thatcher, June 25, 1996, Part III: Box 41, The Caspar Weinberger Papers, The Library of Congress.

<sup>1192</sup> Caspar Weinberger and Peter Schweizer, *The Next War* (New York: Regnery Publishing, 1996). XXIV.



Weinberger equated his fiction to the computerized wargames run in the Pentagon. He hoped the stories “could lay bare some possible (and some unlikely) threats” to the US.<sup>1193</sup> The wargames would expose the threats, American limitations, and show potential ways to avoid the dire scenarios portrayed by the authors. Using fictional stories in this capacity, mirrored the way Reagan used works like *Red Storm Rising* as a narrative wargame. Weinberger hoped the scenarios would be more memorable than a standard policy book and believed that fiction would allow him to better capture both the difficulty of the environment and “demonstrate the human and psychological dimensions of combat.”<sup>1194</sup> However, Weinberger’s decision to forgo character development minimized the impact on the reader.<sup>1195</sup>

*The Next War* shows that Reagan was not the only member of his administration who viewed fictional narratives as valuable tools for policy development. Weinberger reviewed books for *The San Francisco Chronicle* for several decades. He did so not in search of a paycheck, but rather because of the value he placed on books. Reading Winston Churchill’s *The World Crisis* led Weinberger to attempt to join the Royal Air Force in 1940. Though rejected due to poor depth perception, he would carry a copy of the book with him throughout his service in the US Army as a member of Douglas MacArthur’s staff.<sup>1196</sup> While serving as Secretary of Defense, Weinberger continued to

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<sup>1193</sup> Ibid, xxv

<sup>1194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1196</sup> *Fighting for Peace*, 18.

take time to review books. He glowingly reviewed Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October* and *Patriot Games* for *The Wall Street Journal*, praising both books for their realism and treating them as important contributions to the national security debate.<sup>1197</sup> Robert Ludlum's *The Bourne Supremacy* received a savage review, largely due to its negative portrayal of the US government.<sup>1198</sup> Weinberger aggressively sought to shape the cultural narrative of the Reagan administration's policy. Aware of Ludlum's negative depiction of the intelligence community in *The Bourne Identity*, he reached out to *The Wall Street Journal* asking them to publish his review.<sup>1199</sup>

Weinberger sought to amplify the works and authors he thought friendly to his politics. He reviewed William Buckley's *Mongoose R.I.P.* for *The Wall Street Journal*. Buckley, a conservative icon and the founder of *The National Review*, largely embraced the views of the Reagan White House on defense issues. His book was an alternative history that imagined a world where the Soviet Union left its missiles in Cuba. Weinberger noted in his review that although Buckley did not depict the CIA of the 1960s "in the best light" Weinberger justified this by noting that Buckley was dealing with history.<sup>1200</sup> More importantly to Weinberger, Buckley treated the "critically important and frequently highly dangerous" work of the intelligence community "with

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<sup>1197</sup> Caspar Weinberger, "Caspar Weinberger," *Times Literary Supplement* October 18, 1985. Caspar Weinberger, "Patriot Games," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 5, 1987.

<sup>1198</sup> Caspar Weinberger, "The Bourne Supremacy," *The Wall Street Journal*, The Caspar Weinberger Papers, The Library of Congress.

<sup>1199</sup> Claudia Rosett to Caspar Weinberger, February 18, 1986, Part III: Box 43, The Papers of Caspar Weinberger, The Library of Congress.

<sup>1200</sup> Caspar Weinberger, "Mongoose R.I.P." *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 January 1988.

respect, quiet admiration, and with a full appreciation of its importance to our security.”<sup>1201</sup> Weinberger expressed gratitude that Buckley “[was] no John Le Carre,” as the famed spy-novelist “always [seemed] to delight in the blunders and weaknesses” of the US and its allies.<sup>1202</sup> The review delighted Buckley, who sent flowers to Weinberger to express his gratitude.<sup>1203</sup> The review demonstrates how even after leaving the Reagan administration, Weinberger sought to shape the cultural narrative around defense issues.

*The Next War* was an attempt to go from drawing attention to favorable voice to directly contributing to the discussion. SDI played an important part of the novel and one of Weinberger’s scenarios drew heavily on the themes of both the *Cardinal of the Kremlin* and Weinberger’s concern that the Soviets were developing their own missile shield. Set in 2006, Weinberger’s Russians expanded their ballistic missile defense launchers into a system called “Magic Chain.” Blending fiction and reality, the book accurately notes that the ABM treaty had allowed for both the US and USSR to develop a system to protect a single target, which the Soviets employed in Moscow. *The Next War* then imagines that Soviet leaders in the 1980s expended significant resources to grow their defenses. The Russian leaders of *The Next War* use the reductions of nuclear weapons due to the START and INF treaties to their advantage, scaling the Magic Chain to interdict the maximum possible US force.<sup>1204</sup>

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<sup>1201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1203</sup> Caspar Weinberger to William Buckley, 21 January 1988, Part III: Box 43, The Caspar Weinberger Papers, The Library of Congress.

<sup>1204</sup> *The Next War*, 226.

The Russians launch a surprise invasion of Poland, and the US president then realizes that the successful, unilateral development of a Russian missile shield left the US “naked, unable to retaliate.”<sup>1205</sup> The imbalance allows the Russians to invade the rest of Eastern Europe and reestablish the Iron Curtain. They enjoy the ability to employ nuclear strikes at will when their forces face significant opposition.<sup>1206</sup> As a result, the Russian conquer all of Europe and are able to extort annual payments from the US, UK, and Japan of one hundred billion dollars.<sup>1207</sup> A crash US SDI program leads to the deployment of brilliant pebbles two years later, and Weinberger ends the chapter ominously as Russian leadership prepares a massive nuclear launch to SDI.

The vignette was a naked attempt to scare the American public into supporting greater defense spending amid the cuts of the Clinton administration. The Russian economy in the mid-90s could not support anywhere near the expenditures necessary to develop the technology, and, while the Soviet Union was developing ABM technology in the 1980s, they had even less success than the US. Weinberger and Schweizer peppered the chapter with allusions to Reagan and Star Wars, frequently having characters lament that the US abandoned research in the area. The result was an in-artful effort to emulate the success of Clancy in building support for an aggressive defense policy.

Clancy provided the authors a model as they embarked on the project. They also provided Clancy with an advanced reader’s copy, asking for an endorsement they could

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<sup>1205</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>1206</sup> Ibid, 255.

<sup>1207</sup> Ibid, 303.

use for the book. Schweizer informed the novelist that they decided to save “the entire back of the dust jacket” for Clancy’s comments.<sup>1208</sup> The two clearly hoped that Clancy would provide effusive praise. The author did provide a brief blurb, stating it was “a well presented and thought-provoking look into an undetermined future.”<sup>1209</sup> Weinberger also received blurbs from Henry Kissinger, who thought that “*The Next War*, through fiction, lays out some chilling but plausible scenarios,” and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Jack Vessey, who called it “an exciting and eminently readable tale to give readers an important civics lesson.”<sup>1210</sup> However, despite receiving favorable commentary from prominent and experienced national security voices, only Clancy’s praise appeared on the dust jacket.<sup>1211</sup> This was because for many Americans, particularly ones likely to purchase a book by Weinberger, Clancy was now the leading writer on war.

*The Cardinal of the Kremlin* was another massive success for Clancy. The book sold over 1.2 million copies in 1988 and was the best-selling hard cover work of the year.<sup>1212</sup> Critics also embraced the novel in a way they had not with Clancy’s previous works. Robert Lekachman, *The New York Times* reviewer of thriller novels, had criticized Clancy’s writing in his 1986 review of *Red Storm Rising*. The reviewer argued

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<sup>1208</sup> Peter Schweizer to Tom Clancy, August 20, 1996, Part III: Box 41, The Caspar Weinberger Papers, The Library of Congress.

<sup>1209</sup> Tom Clancy to Caspar Weinberger, 26 August 1996 Part III: Box 42, The Caspar Weinberger Papers, The Library of Congress.

<sup>1210</sup> Suzanne McFarlane to Ileana Gonzalez, 18 October 1996, Part III: Box 41, The Caspar Weinberger Papers, The Library of Congress.

Jack Vessey to Ileana Gonzalez, 14 October 1996, Part III: Box 41, The Caspar Weinberger Papers, The Library of Congress.

<sup>1211</sup> Weinberger, *The Next War*.

<sup>1212</sup> Edwin McDowell, “Top-Selling Books of 1988: Spy Novel and Physics,” *The New York Times*, 2 February 1989.

that it demonstrated “undistinguished prose” and characters on a “Victorian boys’ book level.”<sup>1213</sup> Lekachman upgrades his description of Clancy’s writing to “workman-like” in the review of *Cardinal of the Kremlin*, but also confesses that he found the “unmasking of the title’s secret agent” to be “as sophisticated an exercise in the craft of espionage” as he had encountered.<sup>1214</sup> The review also praised how Clancy kept “readers well abreast of current politics,” but criticized the uncritical and unflinching embrace of Star Wars.<sup>1215</sup>

In response, Daniel Graham wrote a letter to the editors complaining about Lekachman’s “deplorable bit of snide ax-grinding.”<sup>1216</sup> Graham argued that Clancy made a “very clear and very persuasive case for SDI,” and that for the review to insinuate that Clancy believed “a leaky defense [was] worse than no defense” was tantamount to “censorship of the literati against all books that offend their politics.”<sup>1217</sup> The central message of *The Cardinal of the Kremlin* was that “defense, not vengeance, [was] the proper function of the military.”<sup>1218</sup> This statement consciously echoed Reagan’s language that it would be “better to save lives than to avenge them” from the 1983 address introducing SDI.<sup>1219</sup> In his response to Graham’s letter, Lekachman noted that he was “in excellent company of many eminent scientists who oppose the enterprise as a

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<sup>1213</sup> Robert Lekachman, “Virtuous Men and Perfect Weapons,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 1986.

<sup>1214</sup> Robert Lekachman, “Making the World Safe for Conventional War,” *The New York Times*, 31 July 1988

<sup>1215</sup> Ibid

<sup>1216</sup> Daniel Graham, “Clancy’s Star Wars,” *The New York Times*, 28 August 1988.

<sup>1217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1219</sup> “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security”

dangerous and expensive scientific fantasy.”<sup>1220</sup> The reviewer then noted that Clancy had received special access to the Pentagon to explain the “esoteric details of lasers, mirrors, satellites, software, and heaven knows what else.”<sup>1221</sup> In doing so “they acted astutely,” as to Lekachman, the effort represented that even the Pentagon knew “the best defense of Star Wars [was] indeed fictional.”<sup>1222</sup>

Clancy did receive special access to the Pentagon while researching *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*. A *Newsweek* article that coincided with the release of the book highlighted the official support Clancy received. Clancy spent a rotation at the Army’s the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, spoke with sailors in Norfolk, Virginia, and visited the headquarters of the FBI and CIA.<sup>1223</sup> A Pentagon spokesman went on record with the magazine and enthused that “everybody’s willing to talk to Clancy” since “he’s one of the good guys.”<sup>1224</sup> The statement formally acknowledged the obvious truth that the defense establishment held Clancy in high esteem and valued his work.

The author also received classified information as part of the research. Clancy obtained the precise coordinates of a Soviet ABM research facility, along with a description of the number and type of buildings on the site. He then used this to order satellite imagery from a commercial vendor.<sup>1225</sup> A *Newsweek* source identified the

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<sup>1220</sup> Robert Lekachman “Clancy’s Star Wars,” *The New York Times*, 28 August 1988.

<sup>1221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1223</sup> Evan Thomas, “The Art of the Techno-Thriller,” *Newsweek*, 9 August 1998.

<sup>1224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1225</sup> Ibid.

information Clancy used as having clearly originated from intelligence that was Top Secret and part of a compartmentalized program. When confronted about this, Clancy declined to identify his source and argued that by using a civilian company the information was public domain and therefore fair to use in his novel.<sup>1226</sup>

Jerry Pournelle traveled with Clancy on one of these research trips and acknowledged that both authors knew things that they were not officially supposed to know.<sup>1227</sup> The two rarely talked about specific technological capabilities as a result, though it is likely that Pournelle influenced how Clancy described SDI in *Cardinal*. During these trips Clancy would frequent officer clubs on bases to converse with military officers and gain information about how they operated and what their systems could do.<sup>1228</sup> He referred to these informal interactions as “The Great Chain,” which gave him access to sensitive information. Clancy could then use the information to determine the accuracy of open source reporting or, as in the case of the imagery, find a way to source the intelligence publicly.<sup>1229</sup> These methods accounted for the detailed descriptions of Sary Shagan, the Soviet ABM test site, and the descriptions of US and Soviet ABM efforts with a level of detail that went beyond that publicly released by the Reagan administration. Peter Zimmerman, a former arms-control official, argued in *Newsweek* that Clancy was “the authorized winked-at way to leak information that would help the

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<sup>1226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1227</sup> Pournelle interview

<sup>1228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1229</sup> Thomas



military-procurement budget.”<sup>1230</sup> The active leaking to Clancy stands in stark contrast to the classification concerns that arose during the publication of *The Hunt for Red October*. The Naval Institute Press reached out to naval officers pre-publication to ensure there was no classified information in the work. Despite this, after reading Clancy’s first book, Secretary of the Navy John Lehman asked, “who the hell cleared this,” showing concern about the potential of American secrets leaking though a thriller. Just four years later, many in the Pentagon actively encouraged such leaks.

Clancy’s research for *Cardinal* also provided the US government with a way to advocate for unclassified systems. US Information Agency director Charles Wick invited the author to tour his agency’s WorldNet facility. The facility was a satellite television stations that sought to spread American viewpoints globally. After touring the station, Clancy wrote to Wick stating that it had “the potential to remake the world,” and could represent the “most useful, most cost-effective tool of American diplomacy.”<sup>1231</sup> Wick forwarded the letter to Reagan, who likely appreciated the Paine reference to remaking the world.<sup>1232</sup> The author then included WorldNet in *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*. Late in the novel, Jack Ryan asks if USIA still has that “global tv operation going,” prompting a response that identifies WorldNet as “one hell of a program.”<sup>1233</sup> The scene in question

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<sup>1230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1231</sup> Tom Clancy to Charles Wick, October 17, 1987 ID#525617, FG298, WHORM: Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>1232</sup> Charles Wick to Ronald Reagan, November 5, 1987, ID#525617, FG298, WHORM: Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>1233</sup> *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, 608.

adds little to the plot and the characters quickly move on to other topics, suggesting that the inclusion was solely to highlight the USIA's program.

The efforts of a variety of government agencies to place their projects into Clancy's novel show an active effort to shape popular culture. Reagan administration officials clearly felt that they could latch on to the popularity of Jack Ryan novels to build greater consensus for their policy. This directly benefitted Clancy, who in addition to agreeing with the administration's direction, received information and access impossible for most to achieve. The result provided specific detail to lend his story a greater sense of realism and allowed the author to pass himself off as a serious voice in the realm of national security. During his publicity tour for *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, he hinted that he would soon be working in the Pentagon. He was fond of mentioning that "there are people on the inside who say I belong there."<sup>1234</sup> However, Clancy would also add that if he did start working for the government, it "would have to be something useful," leaving it to the reader to imagine what that would be. It is unlikely that Clancy ever seriously considered giving up writing, and the millions it made for him, to work for the government. However, the idea that he might and that he would be assigned a portfolio of significance served both himself and the Reagan administration.

Just as with *Red Storm Rising*, members of Congress looked to use Clancy's views to assist in their advocacy for funding defense programs. Representative Robert Dornan from California referenced Clancy in debate over the viability of SDI. Upset that

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<sup>1234</sup> Thomas

a forthcoming Office of Technology Assessment review was likely to claim it to be technically infeasible, Dornan used Clancy to counter the analysis of “MADcapped scientists” he felt were bent on keeping “the American people hostage to the threat of nuclear annihilation.”<sup>1235</sup> Deriding the “ostrich-like attitude” of SDI opponents, Dornan exhorted his colleagues to consider a op-ed Clancy published in *The Wall Street Journal* earlier that day and take the time to “contemplate his analysis.”<sup>1236</sup> The op-ed claimed that the members of the OTA and SDI opponents were the equivalent of the Luddites who rejected the technology of the Industrial Revolution. Clancy inaccurately asserted in the piece that opposition to the program boiled down to a belief that “it can’t be done, because it hasn’t been done, and therefore we ought not even try doing it.”<sup>1237</sup> Clancy’s simplification ignored specific technical concerns over SDI’s feasibility. While these concerns did not mean SDI critics were necessarily right, they show a sophistication far beyond the Luddite label that Clancy and Dornan sought to affix.

One criticism that the op-ed addressed directly was the issue of processing speed. Clancy believed the development of the Apple Macintosh showed that it would be possible to have computers with SDI-capable chips soon. He also argued that complaints about the lack of a model to test SDI were inaccurate, as he “saw such a model last week” that would be used to test the concept in two months. The article mirrored Clancy’s fiction in that it sought to blend personal observations on technology with special access

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<sup>1235</sup> Robert Dornan, “OTA-The Home of Modern Day Luddites,” *Congressional Record*, April 28, 1988, 9484.

<sup>1236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1237</sup> Tom Clancy, “Luddites are Wrong About SDI Too,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 April 1988.

to advance a pet-issue of the Reagan administration. It concluded with a brief note about the forthcoming *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, which the editors helpfully noted was about SDI.<sup>1238</sup>

The speed with which Dornan brought Clancy's article to the House floor is telling. The article had appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* the same day that Dornan entered it into the *Congressional Record*. Dornan believed that the popularity of Clancy made it worthwhile to immediately point to the article in debate as a means of showing "expert" support and claim the popular mandate implied by the bestselling author's support. That Clancy had no scientific background, official access to the SDI program, or any specific counter to the issues the OTA was likely to raise did not matter. What was important to Dornan was the ability of the novelist to shape the public narrative in a way favorable to his policy goals. In doing so, Dornan played his part in a symbiotic relationship. His use of Clancy as a valid voice on the SDI program gave the author credibility as a national security voice which in turn meant that Clancy's advocacy was more effective.

Reagan appreciated Clancy's advocacy for SDI. Though he never publicly commented on the book, Reagan did read it and kept a copy behind his desk in his post-presidency office.<sup>1239</sup> Clancy's work was the only one of fiction among the forty-four in the office. The others were a mix of biographies about Reagan and topics of personal

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<sup>1238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1239</sup> "Books from Personal Bookshelves From Behind Ronald Reagan's Desk at Office of Ronald Reagan," Ronald Reagan Library

significance to the former president. *The Cardinal of the Kremlin* and its naked advocacy for SDI place it in the latter category. That the book remained in Reagan's office for over a decade and a half after its publication suggests the importance the ex-president placed on it and Clancy's work in general.

The US never successfully researched and deployed the system of Reagan's imagination. However, labeling the program a failure would ignore what is a complicated legacy. American research into an anti-missile shield both aided and hindered efforts to achieve nuclear abolition and peace with the Soviet Union. Soviet records show a deep concern with the program, and some senior leaders of the USSR felt the program hastened the end of the Cold War.<sup>1240</sup> Reagan's announcement of the program in 1983 and US efforts over the next two years, shaped how Gorbachev viewed the need for peace. As he took his place as leader of the USSR, Gorbachev feared that the program represented a technological innovation that the Soviets could not match and would require resources that would take away from his ability to undertake sweeping economic reform.<sup>1241</sup> Biographer William Taubman argues that this led to the need for a "sharp improvement of relations with the United States."<sup>1242</sup> However, the issue also delayed serious arms control agreements, and potentially prevented the two superpowers from complete disarmament, though much could have happened in the decade after Reykjavik to derail even a signed treaty.

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<sup>1240</sup> Hayward, 631.

<sup>1241</sup> William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and times*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 263.

<sup>1242</sup> Ibid.

The Soviets also undertook efforts to speed the response time of their nuclear forces.<sup>1243</sup> Reagan's announcement came at a time when Soviet leadership perceived their vulnerability to a US first strike. The deployment of Pershing II missiles meant that they would have approximately eight minutes to determine a response if the US launched first, a drastic and frightening reduction in the time available to make a decision that would determine the fate of millions.<sup>1244</sup> This compressed timeline for response combined with the lack of resources to effectively compete with American research in SDI led Soviet leadership to invest in a system known as "The Dead Hand" which would automatically launch a massive nuclear response intended to overwhelm any US defense.<sup>1245</sup> Soviet leadership considered building an entirely automated system that could order retaliatory strikes without human input. However, they opted against giving complete control to computers, instead placing the decision in the hands of duty officers located in concrete bunkers buried deep underground and untouchable by nuclear missiles.<sup>1246</sup> The officers provided a final failsafe, but once they issued the orders the entirety of the surviving Soviet arsenal would fire automatically at preselected targets.<sup>1247</sup> A successful test of the system took place in 1984, and was fully operational the next year.

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<sup>1243</sup> David Hoffman, *The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and Its Dangerous Legacy*, (New York: Random House, 2009), 147.

<sup>1244</sup> The President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, "The Soviet War Scare" 15 February 1990, in *Able Archer 83: The Secret History of the NATO Exercise That Almost Triggered Nuclear War* edited by Nate Jones, (New York: New Press, 2016), 121.

<sup>1245</sup> David Hoffman, 152.

<sup>1246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1247</sup> Ibid.

SDI played a role in exposing Soviet vulnerabilities, both in terms defense capabilities and economic strength. Gorbachev realized the Soviet Union could not match US efforts in the field which increased his willingness to negotiate arms reductions. It underpinned a growing consensus among Soviet reformers about the need for change and helped support difficult decisions about maintaining Soviet proxies in Eastern Europe and the war in Afghanistan. While not decisive and never operational, SDI was an important strategic success for the US. Research in the program also advanced other technologies and led to the development of anti-missile, though not anti-ICBM, technology.<sup>1248</sup> The program was expensive, but this proved a feature rather than a flaw. It is unlikely the Soviets would have responded as strongly to a minimally funded program. The expense of SDI allowed the US to leverage its economic advantage and achieve important strategic concessions from the Soviet Union.

In *The Impossible Presidency*, historian Jeremi Suri notes that SDI reflected how Reagan sought to lead through vision and promise rather than a focus on specific details. In effect Reagan “returned the presidency to mission over management” by “focusing executive leadership on a few simple, deeply-held, and widely shared aspirations.”<sup>1249</sup> The breadth of response to the program from individuals normally outside governmental debate reflects this. Reagan’s ability to articulate his vision without specifics provided creative space for others to join in and reduced the barriers to significant political

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<sup>1248</sup> Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America’s Highest Office*, (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 239.

<sup>1249</sup> Ibid, 240.

dialogue. Reagan's speech in March of 1983 set off a creative frenzy, particularly among science-fiction authors, that focused foremost on visions of the near future and demonstrated the ability of political leadership to shape the narratives of popular culture.

Gil Troy argues in *Morning in America* that "Reagan's vision represented his keystone contribution to the 1980s."<sup>1250</sup> His presidency was a "cultural and political phenomenon" thanks to his "preference for story-telling over policy-making."<sup>1251</sup> Presidential use of parables and story to promote political vision expanded the dialogue around public policy. It removed the need to be a policy wonk and to wield command of arcane detail to influence national strategy. Both supporters and opponents of Reagan's views took advantage of this, and popular culture increasingly played an important role in shaping public opinion about strategic issues. The democratization of the debates allowed for greater creativity and imagination, but also risked over-simplification of critical issues.

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<sup>1250</sup> Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Reagan Invented the 1980s*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>1251</sup> *Ibid*, 11.



## Conclusion: Why Fiction Matters

Tom Clancy's *Clear and Present Danger* contained a surprising acknowledgement. The author credited General Colin Powell with providing him the idea for the book.<sup>1252</sup> Clancy and Powell met at a 1988 award ceremony in Nashville, while the general was still serving as Reagan's National Security Advisor. Powell remembered that the two "hit it off right away" since Clancy was "deeply involved in military affairs" and Powell respected what Clancy's work represented for the military.<sup>1253</sup> The two men developed a very close friendship which endured to Clancy's death in 2013.<sup>1254</sup>

Shortly after the Nashville ceremony, Clancy and Powell spoke "about the work the military was doing in South America to cut the flow of drugs."<sup>1255</sup> Powell talked about the challenges of the mission and identified some of the forces the US used to combat the cartels.<sup>1256</sup> The brief discussion helped Clancy identify a new theme for his forthcoming novel, which expanded on an idea he initially outlined in 1983.<sup>1257</sup> Clancy's original concept centered on a Coast Guard cutter, the *USS Panache*, involved in the drug war. The ship plays an important role in *Clear and Present Danger*, but the book's

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<sup>1252</sup> Tom Clancy, *Clear and Present Danger*, New York: Putnam, 1989.

<sup>1253</sup> Eliza Gray, "Colin Powell Remembers Tom Clancy," *Time*, October 2, 2013.

<sup>1254</sup> Colin Powell to Author, email, 25 August 2016, Secretary Powell communicated with the author through his longtime personal assistant Peggy Cifrino. Ms Cifrino relayed questions to him and sent the answers back to the author.

<sup>1255</sup> Gray, "Colin Powell Remembers Tom Clancy"

<sup>1256</sup> Powell to author.

<sup>1257</sup> Tom Clancy to Susan Richards, letter, 5 February 1983, accessed on piedtype.com

central focus on land-based special operations represented a shift from his nautical focus and showed clear signs of Powell's influence.

*Clear and Present Danger* is more reflective than Clancy's previous work. In it, he clearly struggled with the legacy of the Iran-Contra scandal. In the acknowledgement thanking Colin Powell, he also expressed gratitude for active duty military personnel who assisted. The acknowledgement closed morosely wishing "that America serve [them] as faithfully as they serve her."<sup>1258</sup> In a review for *The New York Times*, David Wise noted "echoes of Iran-contra are clear and present" throughout the book, and Clancy raised issues about the military and the drug war that were concerning.<sup>1259</sup>

One of the book's villains is Vice Admiral James Cutter, the who serves as the National Security Advisor. Cutter uses the NSC to plan and control a secret war against Colombian drug cartels, while misleading the book's president about the nature of the operation. Once Jack Ryan threatens to expose the mission, Cutter reaches out to a Cuban working with the cartels, offering to provide the location of the US teams in exchange for a reduction in drugs sent to the US and periodic large busts. Ryan travels to Colombia and with the help of CIA operative Mr. Clark rescues a group of soldiers and eliminates the primary drug lord. Upon his return to the Washington, a CIA officer shows Cutter the taped confession of the Cuban and a photo of Cutter meeting with him. The agent notes he used to be in the Navy and warned Cutter about his imminent arrest,

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<sup>1258</sup> *Clear and Present Danger*

<sup>1259</sup> David Wise, "Clear and Present Danger," *The New York Times*, 13 August 1989.

so the admiral could “handle things himself—for the good of the service.”<sup>1260</sup> Cutter understands the intention and commits suicide by throwing himself in front of a bus while jogging.

Afterwards, Ryan goes to the White House with two members of Congress to confront the president. He lectures the president about his poor management and criticizes him for allowing the illegal operation to take place. Ryan is emotionally hurt by the president’s failure and internally ponders if it was possible for the president to “be connected with something like this... and not be corrupted by it.”<sup>1261</sup> Clancy’s fictional president eventually accepts his responsibility and intentionally loses his reelection to save the nation from a scandal and protect people who thought they were operating lawfully. Ryan concludes after the election that the president was “still a man of honor, whatever mistakes he’d made.”<sup>1262</sup>

The final oval office conversation in *Clear and Present Danger* was Clancy seeking to express his frustration, fears, and hurt to Reagan. His fictional president in *The Hunt for Red October*, *Cardinal of the Kremlin*, and *Clear and Present Danger* was a clear stand in for Reagan, and Clancy add character traits based on his own interaction with Reagan in 1985. The president and his policies inspired much of Clancy’s work and an endorsement from the Oval Office helped ignite his career change from insurance agent to best-selling author. Though hurt and surprised by the Iran-Contra scandal,

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<sup>1260</sup> *Clear and Present Danger*, 649.

<sup>1261</sup> *Ibid*, 650.

<sup>1262</sup> *Ibid*, 655.

Clancy and many Americans forgave Reagan who left office with a 63% approval rating, the highest recorded by Gallup to that point.<sup>1263</sup> H.W. Brands notes in *Reagan: A Life* that Reagan's televised apology in the wake of the Tower Commission drove approval of his handling of foreign policy to 33 percent.<sup>1264</sup> Reagan took solace in the positive reception of the speech, which his diary noted received more phone calls than any other and had a 93 percent favorable impression among Americans.<sup>1265</sup> Like Jack Ryan, it appeared that most Americans concluded Reagan remained "a man of honor," though not necessarily one to trust with power.

Clancy blamed Poindexter for Iran-Contra. A 1990s luncheon at Annapolis found the two men seated together at a table. Accurately recognizing Poindexter did not like him, Clancy disingenuously assured him that Poindexter was not the inspiration for Cutter.<sup>1266</sup> However, Clancy's penchant for drawing from real people and events and the synchronization of Poindexter real and Cutter's fictional biography strongly suggest the Poindexter was the primary inspiration. Cutter's suicide in the book likely referred to Bud McFarlane, Poindexter's predecessor as National Security Advisor. McFarlane, a former Marine, driven by "a sense of having failed the country" attempted suicide by

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<sup>1263</sup> Gerhard Peters. "Final Presidential Job Approval Ratings." [The American Presidency Project](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/final_approval.php). Ed. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California. 1999-2017. Available from the World Wide Web: [http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/final\\_approval.php](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/final_approval.php).

<sup>1264</sup> H.W. Brands, *Reagan: A Life*, 653.

<sup>1265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1266</sup> Poindexter interview.

overdosing on valium.<sup>1267</sup> For his part, Poindexter was unimpressed by Clancy finding him to be arrogant and insecure.<sup>1268</sup>

However, Poindexter remained in the minority and Clancy enjoyed great popularity in the White House of George H.W. Bush. Like Reagan, Bush read and enjoyed *Red Storm Rising* and counted it among his favorite books. He also developed a personal relationship with the author. Speaking in Baltimore to commemorate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” he expressed happiness that Clancy was present. Bush referred to the author as his friend and celebrated “the marvelous contribution he’s made to our literary world and... the national security interests of the United States.”<sup>1269</sup> Five months later Bush hosted Clancy at the White House.

In February of 1990, Bush personally called Jack Valenti, the head of the Motion Picture Association of America, to request an advance copy of the forthcoming movie *The Hunt for Red October* for a White House screening.<sup>1270</sup> Even though the film’s producer, Mace Neufeld, felt it was not ready he sent a copy to the White House.<sup>1271</sup> Bush hosted the screening on February 19<sup>th</sup>, two weeks before the movie’s March opening. Tom Clancy and James Earl Jones attended the screening along with a many high-ranking officials in the defense and intelligence establishment. Brent Scowcroft,

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<sup>1267</sup> Maureen Dowd, “The White House Crisis; McFarlane Suicide Attempt: ‘What Drove Me To Despair,’” *The New York Times*, 2 March 1987.

<sup>1268</sup> Poindexter interview.

<sup>1269</sup> George H.W. Bush, “Remarks at the Ceremony Commemorating the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ‘The Star-Spangled Banner,’ Baltimore, Maryland, 7 September 1989.

<sup>1270</sup> Tevi Troy, “What’s Playing at the White House Movie Theater?” *Washingtonian Magazine*, February 2011.

<sup>1271</sup> *Ibid.*

Colin Powell, Robert Gates, and Bobby Inman all attended as did many naval officers and CIA employees.<sup>1272</sup> The attendance of so many prominent defense and intelligence officials implies that the highest ranks of the Pentagon and Langley continued to view Clancy's work as an important contribution to the broader strategic and public discourses. The author's themes matched the way the administration portrayed American military capability. Though Bush struggled with the "whole vision thing," his White House did present Americans with a vision of war as a clean and surgical endeavor.<sup>1273</sup> Rapid, nearly-bloodless success for the US in the First Iraq War promised a future of uncontested military interventions to assist the development of a new world order.

However, the narrative ignored the perils of outsourcing diplomatic and strategic planning to the military. The decision of the Bush administration to allow military leadership in theater to dictate the terms that ended the war broke with the characteristic caution of the administration in foreign affairs. General Norman Schwarzkopf and his staff negotiated a deal allowing Hussein to retain much of his military power, most notably helicopters the dictator quickly turned against his own people who rebelled in the vain hope of US aide. It ensured a long-term US military presence in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to counter the still threatening Iraqi regime, led to a large-scale humanitarian

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<sup>1272</sup> Matt Novak, "The White House Screening of *The Hunt for Red October* had Celebrities, Spies and (Maybe) a Sex Scandal," *Gizmodo.com*, 26 April 2016 <https://paleofuture.gizmodo.com/the-white-house-screening-of-the-hunt-for-red-october-h-1772109543> Though not a typical academic source, the article in question features photo rolls and a guest list obtained via FOIA request from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library.

<sup>1273</sup> Jeffrey Engel, *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 8.

crisis within Iraq, and set the conditions for over a decade and a half of war in Iraq just twelve years later. Bush failed to subordinate military preference to clearly defined political objectives. Though not apparent in 1991, the end of the First Iraq War was the Bush administration's most spectacular failure of vision and an embodiment of haphazard decision making, that marked a sharp contrast from the careful and deliberate way Bush approached eastern Europe.

Bush accepted a tempting and apparently easy peace in Iraq, underpinned by overwhelming US military power. He resisted a similar peace in Europe. Early in the administration, Bush and Baker greatly disappointed Gorbachev by not immediately embracing friendly Soviet overtures. Instead, the administration undertook a deliberate review of US-Soviet policy that lasted several months.<sup>1274</sup> The cautious approach to the collapsing Soviet Empire lasted throughout the Bush administration, even though it did adopt the Reagan-era approach to Gorbachev. The reluctance to embrace calls for the immediate independence of the Soviet republics drew criticism domestically and abroad. In a 1991 speech before the Ukrainian Parliament, Bush warned “freedom is not the same as independence,” and promised his audience “Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace far-off tyranny with a local despotism.”<sup>1275</sup> Critics labeled it Bush's “chicken Kiev” speech, and assumed the president's intention was to

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<sup>1274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1275</sup> George H.W. Bush, “Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Ukraine,” Kiev, Ukraine, 1 August 1991.

support Gorbachev at the expense of those seeking democracy and freedom.<sup>1276</sup> In his memoirs, *A World Transformed*, Bush defended his speech on the basis that he feared pushing too hard for Soviet republics to breakaway could lead to violence.<sup>1277</sup> The caution exhibited by Bush's words reflected the administration's recognition of the delicate and dangerous situation created by the evident decline of the USSR. In Iraq, the decisive violence of military operations and a lack of cultural understanding prevented recognition of the fragility of the Middle East.

In the final chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said stridently criticized Operation Desert Storm. While his characterization of the conflict as part of a "cultural war against Arabs" rings hollow, he does identify a crucial change of American cultural perception of its own power.<sup>1278</sup> He criticizes the administration of George H.W. Bush for portraying the war "as a painless Nintendo exercise" and for propagating the "image of Americans as virtuous, clean warriors."<sup>1279</sup> Popular culture embraced these images. The war crossed into the cultural realm, as companies marketed the war with t-shirts, patriotic commercials, and even trading cards.<sup>1280</sup> The short period of hostilities, small number of American casualties, and prominent public gratitude of Kuwait reinforced the

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<sup>1276</sup> John-Thor Dahlburg, "New Analysis: Bush's 'Chicken Kiev Talk—an Ill Fated US Policy,'" *The Los Angeles Times*, 19 December 1991.

<sup>1277</sup> George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1998), 592.

<sup>1278</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 301.

<sup>1279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1280</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 241. As a 7-year-old, the author was very proud of his complete collection of Pro Set Desert Storm Trading Cards.



cultural themes that Reagan introduced during his presidency. American technical superiority changed the conflict from a war into “a turkey-shoot.”<sup>1281</sup> Images of miles of flaming wreckage of Iraqi tanks and trucks attested to the reemergence of American military power, and created a sense that interventions could be clean, quick, and decisive.

In many ways the war was a Clancy novel come to life. In addition to the obvious technical superiority, the media portrayed American service members, from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell down to privates in the field, as representatives of the best America had to offer. Melani McAlister notes in *Epic Encounters*, that the media identified the military as “a microcosm of the US population... drawn from small towns and communities around the nation.” The military represented the “diversity of the United States.”<sup>1282</sup> Such language mirrored Reagan’s answer to the query of Michener’s Admiral Tarrant who marveling at the sacrifice of his command asks, “Where did we get such men?”<sup>1283</sup> Reagan responded as he presented the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez that, “We find them where we’ve always found them, in our villages and towns, on our city streets, in our shops, and on our farms.”<sup>1284</sup> The combination of military success and public support of Desert Storm marked the culmination of the policies started while Reagan was in the White House. It also represents the ideal of the US military. At its best, military service brings together people from all backgrounds in

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<sup>1281</sup> Rick Atkinson and William Claiborne, “Allies Surround Republican Guard, Say Crippled Iraqis Are Near Defeat,” *The Washington Post*, February 27, 1991.

<sup>1282</sup> McAlister, 250

<sup>1283</sup> James Michener, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, (New York: Fawcett Books, 1953), 126.

<sup>1284</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez,” Arlington, Virginia February 27, 1981.

America. The potential for the military to embody the vast diversity of the United States is one of its greatest strengths. It allows the military to tap into the variety of experiences and perspectives embodied by the American people and use them to develop creative and effective operations.

Reagan's language propagated the ideal throughout his tenure as president. He portrayed US service members as "gallant and brave" and argued they represented the country's best citizens.<sup>1285</sup> His language helped shift American attitudes towards their military and was a welcome and necessary corrective at the beginning of his administration. Reagan's understanding of the need for broad support of the military to support his Cold War policy demonstrated a recognition of their influence and the importance of national will in achieving strategic success. Such support was largely absent as he entered office, placing the US at a significant strategic disadvantage in the Cold War.

However, while Reagan's glowing rhetoric about the military helped reverse the strategic standing of the US and revitalized American hard power, it also incentivized simplistic discussion of the military for future leaders. Reagan depicted service members as universally heroic and as a small final bastion against overwhelming forces of tyranny. His use of fiction and anecdote conveyed this message in a memorable, but unnuanced, way to the American public. The resulting surge in support for the military made the institution a politically popular one to draw on to build electoral support, subverting the

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<sup>1285</sup> Representative Dana Rohrabacher, interview with author, telephone, West Point, NY, 18 July 2017.

civil-military relationship. Politicians running for office almost universally sought to demonstrate that they supported the troops and expanded on Reagan's effusive rhetoric without deepening the discussion.

In *The New American Militarism*, Andrew Bacevich argues "no one did more to affirm [Reagan's] military mythology and to perpetuate the use of soldiers as political props than did Bill Clinton."<sup>1286</sup> Clinton's previous protestations about loving his country but hating the military and avoidance of service in Vietnam were significant liabilities during the 1992 election. He actively sought worked to counter this legacy during the election and adopted many of Reagan's rhetorical tendencies in his 1991 proposal on "A New Covenant for American Security."<sup>1287</sup> Clinton affirmed his support for the robust use of military power in American statecraft and argued the candidate wanted to enhance the strength of the US armed forces. He concluded the speech by sharing an anecdote about a parade honoring soldiers he organized in Little Rock. Clinton invited veterans of all wars to take part and spoke of his pride in seeing "Vietnam veterans finally being given the honor they deserved all along."<sup>1288</sup> Clinton felt compelled to praise the veterans of a war he despised and members of the military he disdained as a youth. Any other language risked furthering a narrative about the weakness of Democrats on national security and would likely render Clinton unelectable for a broad swathe of the American public. The politically safest course, and most

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<sup>1286</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 117.

<sup>1287</sup> Ibid, 119

<sup>1288</sup> Ibid, 121

beneficial one, was to adopt the feel-good message about the men and women in the military, rather than engage in a serious discourse about their employment throughout the world.

Clinton was a fan of Tom Clancy's books as well. A *New York Times* profile after the 1992 election highlighted the president-elect's reading habits. It praised his reading of biographies and works by Marcus Aurelius and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The article also dismissed Clinton's fondness for both Clancy and Ludlum as partaking in "grocery store trash."<sup>1289</sup> Another favorite of Ronald Reagan received mention in the profile. A week before the profile's publication Clinton hosted a viewing of *High Noon*, marking the president-elect's nineteenth viewing of the film.<sup>1290</sup> In discussing popular culture, Clinton demonstrated a "memory for characters, actors, directors, situations and punchlines," which he employed while campaigning.<sup>1291</sup>

While Clinton shared Reagan's love of Clancy and *High Noon* and employed cultural references and anecdotes to build rapport with voters, there is little evidence to suggest he used the stories in policy planning. Clancy did not return Clinton's support. The author described Clinton's charm as something hit "like a physical force," a remarkably like the way he described Reagan's charisma. However, the author strongly disagreed with both the defense and foreign policy of the administration and argued

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<sup>1289</sup> William Honan, "Books, Books, and More Books: Clinton an Omnivorous Reader," *The New York Times*, 10 December 1992.

<sup>1290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1291</sup> Ibid.

Clinton “shit on the military pretty comprehensively.”<sup>1292</sup> The author’s distaste with the political environment likely contributed to the climax of 1994’s *Debt of Honor*, which elevated Jack Ryan to the presidency after a Japanese pilot crashed his airliner into the US Capitol Building, killing the president and most of Congress.<sup>1293</sup> After the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, commentators quickly noted the similarity between the terrorists use of airplanes and Clancy’s fiction.

Throughout the 1990s, Clancy’s media presence expanded. He continued to write novels, though at a slower pace than before, and saw his works adapted into successful movies and video games. *Patriot Games* and *Clear and Present Danger* followed *The Hunt for Red October* into movie theaters, all with modest success. *Rainbow Six*, a 1998 novel that made Mr. Clark the leader of a multi-national anti-terrorist force, spawned a video game franchise with regular iterations into the present day. “Tom Clancy’s” became a label affixed to products to promise high-tech military adventure. In 2018, Clancy remains a significant media presence, though most are likely to encounter his work digitally.

Years after death, Clancy remains relevant and is still used by policymakers to score partisan points. In March of 2018 a House Intelligence Committee report sought to exonerate the Trump Campaign of collusion with Russia and counter an intelligence community conclusion of Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election. The

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<sup>1292</sup> Blake Hounshell, “Tom Clancy sounds off on Colin Powell, politicians,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, 20 October 2008.

<sup>1293</sup> Tom Clancy, *Debt of Honor* (New York: Putnam, 1994)

report's primary author, Representative K. Michael Conaway, claimed that "only Tom Clancy...could take this series of inadvertent contacts with each other, or meetings, whatever, and weave that into some sort of fictional page-turner spy thriller."<sup>1294</sup> Shortly afterward, the Russian Embassy in the US tweeted a declaration that "all Russia investigations" would "end [Conaway] brilliant concluded" and included images of the Russian covers of Clancy's *Rainbow Six* and *Debt of Honor*.<sup>1295</sup> Both Conaway and the Russian Embassy used Clancy in a way which intended to dismiss the notion that fiction was a valuable contribution to policy. However, they both also recognized the prominence of the Clancy brand and intended to use it to subvert and minimize discussion about electoral interference. The tension between the desire to minimize and capitalize on the importance of popular culture is part of the challenge in using it in a serious manner.

Fiction is a potentially powerful tool in developing policy. It affords policy makers with a way to gain experience with systems and scenarios they are unfamiliar with. Effective narratives force those engaging with them to identify with the characters and challenges presented by the work. This identification creates a personal and potentially permanent bond with the work, making it more memorable and useful for the intended audience. These effects mirror the expected outcomes of wargames, which are generally regarded as an essential part of the development of strategy. Like a wargame,

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<sup>1294</sup> Nicholas Fandos, "Despite Mueller's Push, House Republicans Declare No Evidence of Collusion," *The New York Times*, 12 March 2018.

<sup>1295</sup> @RusEMBUSA, Twitter.com, 12 March 2018

narratives can identify critical decision points and their immersive nature leads audiences to ask important questions about why events unfold as they do, how that will shape the future, and what choices could lead to better outcomes. Narrative allows exploration of branches and sequels of a plan.

Reagan's use of *Red Storm Rising* fit this framework. He used the book as a personal wargame. The narrative tested the information he received in briefings and policy makers. It allowed Reagan to simulate the Third World War in a contemporary or near-future environment. The conclusions he derived from using the book as a creative space suggested the strategic success of "Peace through Strength," leading to more aggressive negotiations and sweeping arms reduction proposals beyond any conducted by previous administrations. Reagan found *Red Storm Rising* so compelling a scenario, that he recommended it to allied leaders and aides, expecting that if they read it they would gain the same synthetic experience and share his conclusions about NATO's conventional readiness. However, it was entirely possible those Reagan recommended the book to would draw entirely different conclusions than the president. Elements Reagan found compelling, another may see as unrealistic or take a very different idea from. Without clear communication of strategic intent and active review of policies the benefits of fiction, or any strategy, would be lost.

A critical aspect of strategy is vision. Leaders need to define what success looks like and why their goals are the right ones. They must then communicate their vision in broadly in a compelling way. Reagan's strategic vision, and the boldness of that vision,

was the greatest strength of his administration. The reestablishment of the Cold War as an existential moral struggle paired with a reinvigoration of the US military provided Americans with a narrative they largely understood and supported. In contrast, Bush's admission of struggles with the "vision-thing," was particularly damning. It indicated that despite the careful statecraft surrounding the end of the Cold War, the administration lacked a real sense of what it wanted to build and was unable to explain to the American people why their goals mattered.

Envisioning, and selling, a national future requires imagination and creativity. It also requires fiction. A good strategy imagines an environment that does not yet exist and identifies ways to make that vision a reality. The process of developing policy is effectively the creation and communication of a narrative. Leaders should then include fictional sources in developing their strategy. Reagan's use of science fiction offers a powerful example of how the inclusion of fiction can benefit leaders. His reading of the genre helped instill a love of technology and made him imagine what was possible with the pairing of advanced technology and a free people. His vision of unlimited potential suffused both his rhetoric and the policy of the administration. Additionally, the message resonated with the American people because Reagan communicated it through relatable and optimistic stories.

Leveraging popular culture in the development and discussion of policy does come with risk. It can lead to oversimplification or the use of bad assumptions in planning. The resulting strategy could then not only be ineffective, but actually work



against policy goals. Reagan's use of *High Noon* and westerns demonstrates the risk. He effectively used the moral rhetoric of the genre to build the will of Americans and US allies to wage the Cold War. In Europe, the white hat versus black hat morality largely fit. However, the administration's attempts to apply the same rhetoric and policy in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa were unsuccessful as it oversimplified the nature of conflicts in the region and ignored the largely negative legacies of western involvement. Reagan's narrow reading interests and lack of intellectual curiosity about the much of the world undermined his administration and led to significant suffering.

Reagan's presidency demonstrates that leaders should read broadly and seek to challenge their assumptions through engagement with material that explicitly contradicts their world view. At its best, such reading can engender empathy. At its best, fiction can capture the humanity of groups that are ostensibly hostile. It can also demonstrate the value of diversity of thought and experience. The immersive nature of fiction can force a reader to consider the world from a radically different perspective and contribute to a more nuanced and compassionate view. While reading broadly does not guarantee understanding and strategic success, it can facilitate a more adaptable strategy and superior recognition of the root cause of conflict.

Reagan read broadly about the experience of Russians and eastern Europeans. The works of Koestler, Massie, and others helped humanize the populations of an empire Reagan regarded as inherently evil and bent on extinguishing freedom globally. The lead to his recognition that the people of the USSR were victims of their government and that

they likely wanted many of the same things Americans did. The empathy displayed in the Anya and Ivan speech offered a powerful recognition of the basic humanity of Soviets, and starkly contrasts past American propaganda which often explicitly dehumanized the nation's enemies. Depictions of Native Americans during the settlement of the west, Germans in the First World War, the Japanese in the Second World War, and Soviets in the 1950s all sought to instill a belief that America's foes were uncivilized, barbaric, and subhuman. Reagan's explicit and public recognition of the difference between the Soviet government and people added nuance to his strategy and the public debate.

The nuance was absent in Reagan's view of the global Cold War. He failed to understand the desires of non-white populations or recognize why many throughout the world did not see a moral distinction between the US and USSR and felt arguments about it were disingenuous at best. This is partly due to Reagan's reading of fiction as well. He most frequently encountered Africa and the Middle East in the writings of Kipling, and Latin America in westerns. Both sets of writings rarely depicted local populations in a positive light, often stripping their agency to support the civilizing mission of the narrative's protagonist. Reagan's uncritical reading of the work, and the absence of countervailing narratives, reinforced bad assumptions, contributing to policy and leadership failures that could have brought down his presidency.

Reagan is far from the only political figure to read narrowly. In the decades since his administration the proliferation of media and popular culture sources due to the

internet allows individuals to ensconce themselves in comfortable narratives that do not challenge their world view. The result is an environment that demonizes those with differing perspective and an often-toxic public discourse. Political leaders increasingly use the plethora of sources to cherry-pick favorable ones and develop preferred narratives. While this practice does resemble Reagan's use of fiction and parable, the modern usage often has a remarkably different tone and purpose. Reagan sought to use stories to unify the American people domestically and its allies abroad. While many groups fairly felt excluded by Reagan's rhetoric, it is difficult to argue this was his express intent. The exclusion and tone-deafness on issues of race and sexuality by Reagan was the result of a lack of empathy and understanding rather than intentional malice. While the absence of intent does not excuse poor policy, it does offer an important distinction from more modern political narratives which often actively seek to divide and factionalize Americans. The tendency of modern political leaders to self-aggrandize, openly attack unfavorable media, and openly disregard the views and interests of large portions of the population is cynical, exploitive, and emblematic of the style of politics Reagan explicitly rejected. Engaging with a broader array of popular culture offers a potential fix. Reagan used stories to build bridges, but the narrowness of his reading limited their effectiveness. Expansive cultural engagement could help a new generation of leaders to develop a similarly optimistic vision to Reagan's, but also one that is explicitly inclusive and therefore more compelling.

The rhetoric and actions of Reagan helped create the contemporary environment and he remains a prominent figure in political debate. Somewhat ironically, Reagan's legacy receives the same simplification and compression that Reagan used when telling stories. Modern politicians are eager to cast him as a saint or demon and use caricatures of his views to highlight their own. The continued prominence of Reagan in political discussion thirty years after his presidency highlights the historic importance of his time in office. Reagan's presidency was a successful one. He entered office with the intent of improving the US position in the Cold War. Rather than accepting the conflict as a permanent facet of geo-politics, Reagan wanted to set the US on a path that would lead to the defeat of the Soviet Union. US victory in the Cold War came far sooner than Reagan envisioned, and its peaceful end is a near-miraculous event given the widespread violence of the twentieth century. Reagan was not solely responsible for this. The Cold War ended peacefully because of a remarkable confluence of far-sighted political leadership in both the US and USSR, courageous resistance by the people of Eastern Europe, and economic realities forcing Soviet retrenchment. The Reagan administration played an important role in each of these areas and set conditions that hastened the end of the conflict.

Reagan's policies largely failed in the developing world. Although much of modern Latin America embraces democratic norms, it is likely that this is despite Reagan's efforts in the region, which empowered dictators, drug cartels, and other undemocratic actors. While the US was not the only malign actor in the region, the

disregard for human rights by Cuba, the Sandinistas, and others does not excuse the violence and authoritarianism supported by the administration. Reagan failed to recognize the problematic legacy of the US in the region and continued policies that perpetuated belief in US imperialism in the region. While the failures in the developing world are a major part of Reagan's legacy, they do not erase his more important successes in Europe. The Cold War represented an existential threat to the US and Reagan's visionary and nuanced plan was one of the most effective grand strategies employed by the nation.

Fictional sources provided inspiration and validation for Reagan's strategy. Narratives provided both synthetic experiences that aided his understanding of a variety of situations and creative spaces that allowed Reagan to imagine and anticipate how policies would play out in the near future. Fiction contributed significantly to Reagan's vision of an America made strong through the pairing of technology and freedom. It also helped him communicate his vision in a powerful and seductive manner. Though intentional and extensive use of fiction does carry risk, the Reagan administration's use of narrative demonstrates the potential for popular culture to contribute to effective and nuanced grand strategy.

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