



**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE AND THE END
OF THE COLD WAR**

by

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March 2008

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE March 2008	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Strategic Defense Initiative and the End of the Cold War			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Luigi L. Lazzari				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) The Cold War's end was sudden, unpredicted and the seminal event of the latter half of the twentieth century. Since the disintegration of the USSR, debate has centered on whom or what was responsible for the end of the conflict. Perhaps no issue is as controversial as the role the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) played in ending the Cold War. Today, there are three main schools of thought concerning SDI's impact on the end of the Cold War. The first sees the Strategic Defense Initiative as a primary factor in ending the conflict. Another argues the initiative extended the Cold War by creating one more hurdle to the negotiations between the two superpowers. A third school holds that while SDI had a positive impact on ending the Cold War, it was a secondary factor. The third school's position is best supported by the available evidence. "Ninety-nine percent of the Russian people believe that you won the Cold War because of your president's insistence on SDI." ¹ — Genrikh Trofimenko, one of Russia's leading specialists in international security and politics				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Strategic Defense, SDI, Star Wars, INF Treaty, Geneva Summit, Reykjavik Summit, End of the Cold War			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 117	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39-18

¹ Andrew Busch, *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 214.

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**THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE AND THE END OF THE COLD
WAR**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(EUROPE, EURASIA)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

The Cold War's end was sudden, unpredicted and the seminal event of the latter half of the twentieth century. Since the disintegration of the USSR, debate has centered on whom or what was responsible for the end of the conflict. Perhaps no issue is as controversial as the role the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) played in ending the Cold War.

Today, there are three main schools of thought concerning SDI's impact on the end of the Cold War. The first sees the Strategic Defense Initiative as a primary factor in ending the conflict. Another argues the initiative extended the Cold War by creating one more hurdle to the negotiations between the two superpowers. A third school holds that while SDI had a positive impact on ending the Cold War, it was a secondary factor. The third school's position is best supported by the available evidence.

“Ninety-nine percent of the Russian people believe that you won the Cold War because of your president's insistence on SDI.”²

— Genrikh Trofimenko, one of Russia's leading specialists in international security and politics

² Andrew Busch, *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 214.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The topic for this thesis is rooted in a conversation I had with Professor Mikhail Tsyarkin on why and how the Cold War ended. His guidance, experience and willingness to promptly and thoroughly answer questions has been invaluable; it has been an honor to work with him. I would also like to thank Professor Scott Siegel for his advice, attention to details, and pointed questions which greatly improved this paper.

As in past endeavors, I am most indebted to my wife, Regina, for her support and patience.

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I. THE ROLE OF THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE IN ENDING THE COLD WAR

The U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative's role in ending the Cold War is the subject of a strenuous debate involving three main schools of thought. The first sees the Strategic Defense Initiative as a primary factor in ending the conflict. Another argues the initiative extended the Cold War by creating one more hurdle to the negotiations between the two superpowers. A third school holds that while SDI had a positive impact on ending the Cold War, it was a secondary factor.

All of the arguments stem from several key questions. The central issue concerns the question, What drove Gorbachev's decision to exit the Cold War? This thesis rephrases that question more narrowly: What were the primary influences that motivated Gorbachev to sign the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles, (INF Treaty) — which arguably ended the conflict — and to what degree were they instrumental in its signing? Additional questions that will be addressed include the following: Did either the Soviet Union's investment in developing countermeasures to the U.S. defense initiative or its own ballistic missile defense (BMD) system severely strain the Soviet economy? Did Soviet fear of losing a new arms race in light of their economic and technological backwardness, as compared to the West, push them to negotiate? Were there other factors that would have driven Gorbachev to exit the Cold War regardless of the Strategic Defense Initiative?

In the early and mid 1990s, many texts were written to explain why the Cold War ended the way it did.³ Since then, however, memoirs, formerly classified documents, and additional critical analyses have since been published that support some of the earlier arguments but degrade others. In light of this new evidence, the Strategic Defense Initiative debate merits revisiting for two reasons. First, to coalesce the existing arguments with the information that is now available. This is worth doing for the historical value alone.

³ For example, Peter Schweizer's *Victory*, considered the standard bearer for the argument that Reagan won the Cold War, was published in 1994. Raymond Garthoff's *The Great Transition* also published in 1994 credits Gorbachev with ending the conflict. The same year, in *The Soviet Tragedy*, Martin Malia argued the U.S. arms build up triggered Perestroika.

Second, the SDI affair may prove useful for understanding the debate surrounding ballistic missile defense (BMD) today. This thesis examines the different points of view regarding the Strategic Defense Initiative's impact on the end of the Cold War and finds the evidence best supports the thesis that SDI was a secondary factor in ending the conflict.

The difference between the pro-SDI school and thesis that SDI was a secondary factor is one of degree but vital. In order for the pro-SDI school to be correct, the defense initiative would have to have been the primary factor behind Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to exit the Cold War. Instead, the evidence supports the counterfactual position that had the Strategic Defense Initiative never existed, Gorbachev would most likely have still pursued an end to the Cold War. This position also partially supports the anti-SDI school thesis that SDI prolonged the Cold War by creating a barrier in negotiations. However, SDI did of course exist and it presented Gorbachev with a strong incentive to negotiate an end to the Cold War in addition to other reasons such as a growing economic crisis, domestic politics, as well as non-SDI related actions taken by NATO and the United States. This thesis does not identify one primary trigger for the end of the Cold War but finds these other influences strong enough to discount the argument that the Strategic Defense Initiative was the driving force behind Gorbachev's decision to sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty and exit the Cold War.

To examine the evidence, this thesis is organized into six sections. Chapter II is divided into two parts. Part one argues that the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty marked the end of the Cold War. Part two reviews literature pertinent to the three schools of thought.

Chapter III discusses Reagan's foreign policy approach. It begins with a description of the status quo in 1981 when Reagan took office and then describes Reagan's rejection of the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD) and his vision for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

Chapters IV through VI focus on Soviet reactions to the defense initiative over three time periods. Within each of the three phases, the Soviet response is described in

relation to two groups of actors. The general secretary had the most power in shaping Soviet decision making. But a second group comprised of the national security community, including the defense industry, the KGB, the military, and the scientific community, also influenced the decision-making process.

The positions of these powerful secondary authority sources within the Soviet system are significant for two reasons. First, understanding the positions of these other actors sheds light on probable reasons for the decisions of the general secretaries. Second, the military and scientific groups held divergent views on SDI. Thus, it is useful to analyze each group's possible influence on the general secretary separately.

Chapter IV begins with the announcement of SDI in March 1983 and concludes in March 1985 with the death of General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko. This period was the initial response to SDI, which began under the leadership of General Secretary Yuri Andropov. Under Andropov and Chernenko, arms control policy was dominated by the Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko and the Defense Minister, Dimitri Ustinov, and later Ustinov's successor Sokolov.⁴ They were all geriatric members of the World War II generation and the passing of Andropov and Chernenko opened the door to the next generation of Soviet bureaucrats.

Chapter V begins with the selection of Mikhail S. Gorbachev, a "new" type of Soviet leader in March 1985. It concludes with the stalemate over the Strategic Defense Initiative at the Reykjavik Summit in October 1986. Chapter VI describes Gorbachev's decision to de-link SDI from the INF treaty and concludes with the signing of the treaty at the Washington Summit in December 1987. The final chapter assesses the role of SDI in the end of the Cold War as a secondary factor that helped end the conflict.

⁴ V. M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 276.

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II. THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT ON SDI

A. INTRODUCTION

The Cold War was rooted in an ideological struggle between communism and totalitarianism, represented by the Soviet Union, and capitalism and liberty, represented primarily by the United States. The most dangerous feature of the struggle was the nuclear stand-off which threatened both countries and much of the world with annihilation. The signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty effectively ended the stand-off and marked the end of the Cold War. It signified the abandonment of international class struggle, a tenet of communist ideology, and provided the framework for the first verifiable reduction in nuclear weapons.

The role the Strategic Defense Initiative played in ending the Cold War is represented by three schools of thought. The first argues that SDI was a primary factor in winning the Cold War. The second holds that SDI and Reagan's policies hindered negotiations and therefore prolonged the conflict. The third school contends that SDI was a positive but secondary factor in ending the Cold War.

B. THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The end of the Cold War is often defined as one of the landslide of events that took place in 1989 such as the Polish elections or the tearing down of the Berlin wall. Or it is associated with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991.⁵ However, the former events are better described as the end of the Soviet empire and the latter as the end of the Soviet regime. Gorbachev's 1988 speech to the United Nations announcing a dramatic unilateral reduction in forces in Europe is also sometimes cited as the end of the Cold War. But this, while significant, was in reality icing on the cake of

⁵ See: Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2000), xi., John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 257- 259.

the Washington Summit in December in 1987. There, with the signing of the INF treaty, the Cold War effectively ended. The treaty was the conclusion of the Cold War for three reasons.

First, the INF treaty essentially ended the U.S. - Soviet nuclear arms rivalry.⁶ It was the end of the military competition which had helped define the Cold War. For the first time both sides agreed to decrease the size of their nuclear arsenals, pledging to eliminate an entire class of missile. In addition, it was the first time the Soviets allowed for intrusive verifications. The Soviets agreed that Western experts could monitor and verify the removal and destruction of their intermediate range missiles.⁷ Thus the treaty marked a momentous change in U.S.–Soviet arms control, which had focused previously on capping levels of strategic weapons and did not include transparent verification.⁸

Second, by signing the INF Treaty Gorbachev formally abandoned the Marxist-Leninist idea of class struggle.⁹ No longer was nuclear war officially “thinkable.”¹⁰ It is true that words to this effect had been said earlier. For example, in 1982 the Soviet defense minister, Dimitri Ustinov, stated publicly that the USSR, “does not count on achieving victory in a nuclear war.”¹¹ And even earlier, Khrushchev had revived the concept of peaceful coexistence to justify avoiding nuclear war with the West.¹² The Soviets defined the term in 1960 as:

... *a specific form of class struggle between socialism and capitalism.*
The socialist system is victorious in worldwide competition with

⁶ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 18-19.

⁷ Matthew Evangelista, *Turning Points in Arms Control*, ed. Richard K. Herrmann and Richard Ned Lebow, *Ending the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 83.

⁸ Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994), p. 327.

⁹ Martin E. Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991* (New York: NY: Free Press, 1994), p. 416. Also see: Anatoly Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 85. Chernyaev describes Gorbachev’s Reykjavik proposal as the rejection of class struggle. But until the proposal was codified in the INF Treaty there was no real commitment, however sincere the intentions.

¹⁰ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, p. 416.

¹¹ Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War*, 272.

¹² Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 222.

capitalism because the socialist mode of production has a decisive advantage over the capitalist mode of production. There is no contradiction between the Marxist-Leninist position concerning the inevitability of communism and peaceful coexistence. It does not affect the internal relations of states and it does not affect the revolutionary struggle for the reconstruction of societies. Peaceful coexistence of the states of the two systems does not presuppose a compromise on ideological questions. It is impossible to reconcile the bourgeoisie and communist world outlooks and indeed this is not required for the peaceful coexistence of states.¹³

For Lenin, Khrushchev, and all Soviet leaders until Gorbachev, however, peaceful coexistence was a tactical pause in the strategic ideological class struggle between communism and capitalism. Gorbachev changed the dynamic. At the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), he ensured that the phrase “a specific form of class struggle” was removed from the definition of “peaceful coexistence.”¹⁴ Moreover, war was no longer viewed as inevitable.¹⁵ Instead, in 1986 Gorbachev stated that “the backbone of the new way of thinking is the recognition of the priority of human values.”¹⁶ Gorbachev’s departure in words from class struggle in favor of universal values was finalized in deed with the INF treaty. It marked the actual abandonment of the idea that confrontation with the capitalist countries was required and inevitable.

Finally, by the end of 1987, the genies of perestroika and glasnost had been released and were undermining the regime. Gorbachev’s 1998 speech to the United Nations signaled a major reduction of conventional forces in Europe, but this was a conventional arms repeat of the historic decision to rid Europe of intermediate nuclear missiles. Decisions still remained to be made about how the final curtain would fall on the Soviet Union, but in hindsight the INF treaty was the end of the external confrontational phase of the Cold War.

¹³ David Rees, *Peaceful Coexistence: A Study in Soviet Doctrine* (Washington: International Security Council, 1989), 40. Italics added.

¹⁴ Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 147.

¹⁵ Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, *The Challenges of Our Time: Disarmament and Social Progress* (New York: International Publishers, 1986), 201.

¹⁶ Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World*, 146.

C. THREE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT ON SDI'S ROLE IN ENDING THE COLD WAR

1. Pro-SDI Arguments

The first school credits SDI as a primary trigger in the end of the Cold.¹⁷ There are two lines of thought which fall under this argument.

One holds that the Soviets invested large amounts of time and resources to develop some sort of counter to the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative in the form of a Soviet strategic defense. But by the time of the Reykjavik Summit in the fall of 1986 they decided it was futile to try to match U.S. efforts.¹⁸ The only reasonable option left for Soviet policy makers was to negotiate with the West. The negotiations which resumed in 1985 at Geneva and culminated in the INF Treaty in December 1987 comprised a virtual surrender by the Soviets to the threat of the SDI and signaled their exit from the Cold War.¹⁹

The second version of this argument does not contend the Soviet Union devoted a large amount of wherewithal to counter the Strategic Defense Initiative. Instead, Soviet policy makers, especially Gorbachev, believed they could not afford to engage in a new space arms race. SDI highlighted the economic and technical backwardness of the USSR and was therefore, “a principle factor in triggering perestroika.”²⁰

According to this school, SDI and the dramatic increase in U.S. defense spending during the early 1980s was a critical concern to Soviet leaders. Gorbachev's perception that the Soviets did not have the resources to compete with the Americans in space was a primary factor for his entering into arms control negotiations with the United States. The general secretary wanted a reprieve from the expensive and increasingly unstable Cold

¹⁷ Mira Duric, *The Strategic Defence Initiative: US policy and the Soviet Union* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 53.

¹⁸ Thomas C. Reed, *At the Abyss: An Insider's History of the Cold War*, 1st ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), 256.

¹⁹ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 414.

²⁰ Ibid.

War so he could focus on revitalizing the USSR's domestic economy.²¹ The Reykjavik summit in October 1986 failed because the two leaders could not agree on SDI.²² Reagan offered to share SDI technology, if it was developed, with the Soviet Union. But Gorbachev wanted the strategic defense research confined solely to the laboratory and, anyway, did not believe the United States would share SDI technology.²³ Nonetheless, by December 1987 Gorbachev desperately wanted out of the Cold War. By that time, perestroika had greatly increased domestic instability and he felt he no longer had the time to negotiate over arms reductions. This is why he signed the INF Treaty in December without gaining any concessions from the United States on SDI.²⁴ In July 1991, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union but well after Gorbachev's 1987 exit from the Cold War, former President Reagan promoted the following thesis.

We knew, however, that the Soviets were spending such a large percentage of their national wealth on armaments that they were bankrupting their economy. We also knew that, if we showed the political resolve to develop SDI, the Soviets would have to face the awful truth: they did not have the resources to continue building a huge offensive arsenal and a defensive one simultaneously. At the same time, in 1983, the West German government decided to proceed with deployment of cruise missiles, checkmating Soviet forces facing NATO in Europe. Soviet negotiators in Geneva walked out and did not return until March, 1985, coinciding with Mikhail S. Gorbachev's succession to leadership. A realist, Gorbachev had no illusions about the desperate condition of his country's economy. At our first summit meeting in Geneva that November, he and I agreed to a goal of 50% reductions in nuclear weapons on both sides. He argued strenuously, as he did at subsequent summits, for a delay in the development, testing and deployment of SDI. But that was one element on which we could not afford to budge, and I did not. As we now know, Gorbachev concluded that the only practical thing was to embark on basic reforms at home, and without delay. Today, we see a Soviet Union undergoing fundamental change, politically and economically.²⁵

²¹ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 414.

²² Jack F. Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2004), 228.

²³ *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁴ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 416.

²⁵ Ronald Reagan, "It Was 'Star Wars' Muscle That Wrestled Arms Race to a Halt " *Los Angeles Times* July 31, 1991.

In short, SDI heightened Gorbachev's perceived need for reforming the Soviet Union by presenting his country with a threat they could not match unless the economy was overhauled. First, they were technologically too backward. Second their economy was already too much in favor of guns over butter; to increase the burden on the population anymore could be catastrophic for the regime. Reagan's intransigence over SDI at Geneva and Reykjavik constrained Gorbachev's ability to move forward with perestroika and brought him to the point where he was willing to unilaterally withdraw from the Cold War.

2. Anti-SDI Arguments

The second school of thought contends that SDI had little impact on the end of the Cold War. If anything, it extended the conflict by creating another hurdle to negotiations.²⁶ Proponents of this line of reasoning hold that SDI did not cause the Soviets to agree to return to strategic arms-control talks in November 1984 and that, at Geneva and Reykjavik, SDI was an obstacle to negotiations. But not because the Strategic Defense Initiative was in itself a primary concern to Gorbachev.²⁷ The Soviets were not worried about the potential threat SDI posed to the Soviet economy. Nor were they overly concerned with the USSR's technological ability to develop countermeasures to SDI. As Pavel Podvig points out, recently discovered Soviet documents suggest that the scientific community did not invest in developing an expensive Soviet SDI.²⁸ Instead, legacy programs were bundled together, which did not require a significant increase in costs.²⁹

The Strategic Defense Initiative complicated negotiations between the superpowers because Gorbachev and his advisors felt discussions on offensive weapons reductions could not move forward without an agreement first on a reduction in defensive

²⁶ Pavel Podvig, "Did Star Wars Win the Cold War? Soviet Response to the SDI Program," (March 2007), 19.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

weapons.³⁰ This concern arose out of Soviet domestic politics. Gorbachev viewed the defense industry as a powerful actor he needed to check in order to consolidate his own position and carry through perestroika and glasnost. Within the Soviet Union there was strong debate over arms negotiations and SDI. The Soviet political leaders, led by Gorbachev and supported by similar concerns from the scientific community, sought to limit SDI testing to the laboratory as a means of countering the Soviet defense industry as much as out of concern of SDI itself.³¹ The defense industry and military used SDI as an opportunity to demand a greater role in Soviet decision making and more spending for defense.³² Containing SDI then was a way for Gorbachev to outflank his own defense industry.

A corollary to this argument is that Soviet motivations in the arms negotiations are irrelevant because the negotiations had no impact on perestroika. Indeed, Roald Sagdeev, the former head of the Soviet Space Research Institute, claims that SDI had “absolute zero influence” on Soviet reforms.³³ The internal conflict between various Soviet actors was driven in part by the Soviet defense burden but not at all in reaction to SDI or any specific Western defense policy.³⁴ This is best summed up by Celeste Wallander: “There is no evidence that drastic cuts in defense based on negotiated arms control or disarmament agreements were a necessary condition for Gorbachev’s economic reforms.”³⁵ Perestroika was not dependent on Western policies; it was solely a reaction to internal economic issues. Thus, the Strategic Defense Initiative’s impact on the Soviet economy was minimal and only hindered arms negotiations and, by extension, the end of the Cold War.

³⁰ Podvig, “Did Star Wars Win the Cold War?,” 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

³² Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 414.

³³ Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement To End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 242.

³⁴ Celeste Wallander, “Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 147.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 155.

3. SDI as a Secondary Factor

The third school argues that SDI was a secondary factor in ending the Cold War, as one of many exogenous factors in the 1980s that accelerated the internal decay of the Soviet system. This theory is supported by some former Soviet experts such as Vladimir Lukin, chairman of the Supreme Soviet Foreign Relations Committee in the 1980's who said of SDI and the 1980's U.S. defense effort in general, "You accelerated our catastrophe by about five years."³⁶ According to this argument, SDI exploited the technology gap between the West and Soviets and presented a potential threat to the Soviet economy. It also helped convince Soviet leaders to return to negotiations with the West.

President Reagan's "Star Wars" speech in March 1983 heightened Soviet fears. The speech reinforced Soviet beliefs that the American president was dangerous and as Andropov said, "unpredictable."³⁷ SDI helped destabilize the relationship between the superpowers and increased tensions. The level of Soviet unease with American intentions was demonstrated in the fall of 1983 when a Korean airliner that had wandered off course into Soviet airspace was shot down.

The relative backwardness of Soviet technology fed into Soviet apprehensions. As Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, noted, the Soviet leadership worried initially "that the great technological potential of the United States had scored again and treated Reagan's statement as a real threat."³⁸ But by 1986, Gorbachev recognized that SDI was not an imminent danger.³⁹ Still, at least one Soviet scientist, Roald Sagdeev, believed that "Americans oversold SDI" and "Russians overbought it."⁴⁰

³⁶ Robert McFarlane, "Consider What Star Wars Accomplished," *The New York Times*, August 24, 1993.

³⁷ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 228.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

³⁹ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 57.

⁴⁰ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 226.

Gorbachev was worried that while SDI might not be plausible, technological offshoots that resulted from strategic defense research could become a threat to Soviet security.⁴¹

Rather than a deterrent to negotiation or a primary factor, the defense initiative was one more reason for Gorbachev to begin talks with the West.⁴² To maintain his focus on domestic reform, Gorbachev first needed to reduce tensions with the West and the associated costs of competing with it. If he did not, the defense industry might use SDI as an excuse to dramatically increase spending which could then overwhelm the economy.⁴³ The failed talks at Geneva and Reykjavik constrained Gorbachev's efforts at reform communism. Domestically, he needed to demonstrate progress with the United States in order to quell the conservative voices in the defense industry. But, he also felt that if drawn into a new arms race, "We [the USSR] will lose, because right now we are already at the end of our tether."⁴⁴ After Reykjavik, Gorbachev concluded that Soviet foreign relations were inextricably tied to the domestic reforms which conservatives at home were becoming increasingly resistant to.⁴⁵ By the time of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in December 1987, Gorbachev was ready to postpone his objections to SDI, to exit the Cold War, and to focus on managing internal reforms and calming the growing instability in the empire.

D. CONCLUSION

Defining the INF Treaty as the end of the Cold War allows us to better examine what factors played a role in ending the conflict. This paper focuses on the role SDI played in the signing of the INF treaty and by extension, in the end of the Cold War. The historical analysis done to date can be divided into the three schools outlined above. The first contends SDI was a key driving factor in bringing an end to the Cold War. The second, anti-SDI school holds that the defense initiative extended and complicated the conflict. The third schools put forth a thesis that SDI was a strong secondary factor in ending the conflict.

⁴¹ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 227.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴⁴ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 84.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

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III. PRESIDENT REAGAN AND THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE

A. INTRODUCTION

For Ronald Reagan, the Strategic Defense Initiative primarily offered the promise of making nuclear weapons obsolete. However, it also fit into his administration's long-term plan to pressure the Soviet Union on multiple fronts and bring them into serious negotiations on everything from arms reductions to human rights. The evidence then supports the argument that SDI was a secondary factor in ending the Cold War in the sense that it was one of many strong policies put forth by the Reagan administration to challenge the USSR

Ronald Reagan's approach to U.S.–Soviet relations was a departure from the conventional status quo that began with President Eisenhower's belief in “massive retaliation” and later formalized during the Kennedy administration into the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD). It was the reasoning behind MAD that led to the U.S. decision to push for the ABM Treaty in 1972, which became part of the West's embrace of détente. Through détente the West hoped to increase transparency and communication between the superpowers, to reduce tensions, and to moderate Soviet behavior. The Soviets agreed to a dialogue to reduce tensions, but they also wanted the time, money, and technology to gain superiority over the West.⁴⁶ Détente began to fall apart with the Soviet deployment of SS-20s in Eastern Europe in 1977 and the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.⁴⁷

The collapse of détente was completed when Reagan actively challenged the Soviet Union. SDI was part of Reagan's “peace through strength” effort to leverage the United States' comparative advantages. His administration wanted to use technology, economic might, and the moral high ground to shape Soviet decision-making. But SDI

⁴⁶ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 378.

⁴⁷ Mike Bowkor, *Brezhnev and Superpower Relations*, ed. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, *Brezhnev Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 98.

also reflected Reagan's position as a nuclear abolitionist. He famously described MAD "like two cowboys in a frontier saloon aiming their guns at each other's head – permanently."⁴⁸ Reagan rejected the logic of MAD and turned instead toward protecting the United States and its allies through a focus on defense against nuclear weapons with the ultimate aim of ridding the world of nuclear arms and their threat of total annihilation.

By 1984, Reagan had come to believe that the Soviets were so unnerved by U.S. policies that they had almost gone to war over NATO's "Able Archer" exercise in November 1983. In part because of this, the president began to more aggressively seek a dialogue with Soviet leaders so as to mitigate the chance of misunderstandings.

B. THE STATUS QUO

The parameters of the Cold War were established in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. At first, President Eisenhower believed that nuclear weapons could be used like a "bullet," but he soon moved away from this position.⁴⁹ Eisenhower feared any strategy that allowed for a limited nuclear war would, in reality, quickly spiral out of control into total war.⁵⁰ Instead, he favored massive retaliation, believing that it was best to have and to communicate to the world the idea that the United States would counter direct Soviet aggression with massive nuclear strikes.⁵¹ Eisenhower believed that this strategy would deter Soviet use of nuclear weapons in Europe and elsewhere. During the Kennedy administration, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara developed Eisenhower's concept into the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), a doctrine that required the maintenance of a delicate balance.⁵² For it to work, each side had to believe it could absorb a horrendous nuclear barrage and still be able to launch a

⁴⁸ William J. Bennett, "Thank You, Ronald Reagan," *Reader's Digest* 147, no. 881 (1995): 74.

⁴⁹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁵¹ Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower Soldier and President* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 357.

⁵² Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 81.

retaliatory strike. Stability came from the knowledge that a nuclear exchange would result in the obliteration of not only the enemy but also one's own country.⁵³

However, according to the logic of MAD, missile defenses would disrupt the fragile equilibrium. Theoretically, the deployment of an effective defense system encouraged the notion that it was "safe" to launch a first strike, because the enemy's retaliatory strike could be adequately deflected. However, a state that lacked a ballistic-missile defense (BMD) system might also have an incentive to launch a preemptive first strike. Its objective would be to attack before the other side's defense system became operational. At a minimum, the deployment of missile defense systems could ignite an arms race as the side without an adequate defense might try to regain the equilibrium by increasing the size of its arsenal to improve the probability of penetrating its adversary's missile defenses.⁵⁴

1. D tente

MAD was codified in the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The ABM Treaty allowed for only limited defense against ballistic missiles; the US and USSR agreed to protect only one site each. In conjunction with the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty I (SALT I), also signed in 1972 in which the superpowers agreed to limit deployment of ICBMs, SSBNs, and SLBM launchers, the ABM Treaty ushered in a period of d tente.⁵⁵ At the time President Nixon remarked, "Although every instinct motivates me to provide the American people with complete protection against a major nuclear attack, it is not now in our power to do so."⁵⁶

The treaties reflected the belief in the West that nuclear war was not "winnable." The goal instead became stability. Echoing West Germany's Ostpolitik under Willy

⁵³ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 22.

⁵⁴ Paul Vorbeck Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2005), 22.

⁵⁵ "Interim Agreement Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Certain Measures With Respect to the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms ", May 26, 1972, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/t/ac/trt/4795.htm>, accessed January 28, 2008.

⁵⁶ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: the Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 322.

Brandt, the United States embraced a strategy aimed at decreasing tensions with the Soviets through dialogue, trade, and investment.⁵⁷ Henry Kissinger hoped that, “over time, trade and investment may leaven the autarchic tendencies of the Soviet system and by gradual association of the Soviet economy with the world economy, foster a degree of interdependence that adds an element of stability to the political equation.”⁵⁸

The strategy was exemplified in the Helsinki Final Act, signed in 1975, and split into three “baskets.” Basket I of the act addressed security. It granted the stability of current borders under “international law,” and the rights of states to form or end alliances.⁵⁹ Basket II promoted trade and investment between East and West. Basket III recognized the “universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”⁶⁰ The West believed that in exchange for favorable trade and accepting the legitimacy of Soviet territory the USSR would moderate its behavior internationally and domestically.

Détente did bring strategic stability.⁶¹ Conflict was confined to conventional proxy wars in the Third World, and even there the United States gave way after its experience in Vietnam. The West also continued to accept the human rights abuses of communism, as well as those of right-wing dictatorships that fought communists over the risk of direct confrontation. Stability, whatever the moral compromises required, was better than holocaust.

General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev saw the ABM treaty as a pause in the long-term competition against capitalism. Arms control in general not only minimized the risk of nuclear war but also gave the USSR time to catch up with the West in weapons and technology.⁶² In addition, at the time of the ABM Treaty, Soviet scientists believed it was not feasible to deploy an effective BMD system with the current technology. They

⁵⁷ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 376.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War*, p. 412.

⁶⁰ "The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe," August 1, 1975, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1975/08/4044_en.pdf, 6, accessed September 12, 2007.

⁶¹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 198.

⁶² Fritz Ermarth, *Soviet Military Thinking*, ed. Derek Leebaert (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 59.

had already tried to implement an anti-missile shield for Moscow, but the system was not promising.⁶³ The ABM Treaty served to hold the Soviet anti-ballistic missile system gains while essentially stopping U.S. missile defense research.⁶⁴ As a hedge, Soviet negotiators ensured that, should new technology “‘based on other physical principles’ than those employed in current systems” be developed, it would not be banned by the treaty.⁶⁵

The Soviets welcomed détente. In addition to strategic stability, the talks partially fulfilled the West’s goal of increased understanding. Through much of the 1960s the Soviet leadership did not fully understand or accept U.S. concepts of strategic stability or deterrence.⁶⁶ But dialogue during SALT I improved Soviet comprehension of the U.S. position that nuclear war was not winnable and must be avoided. In the Soviet Union, this stance was supported by many scientists and senior military officers.⁶⁷ However, the Soviet leadership still believed nuclear war *was* winnable. And thus, adherence to Soviet ideology meant that the strategic doctrine, the bundles of assorted documents and pronouncements that as a whole defined Soviet nuclear strategic thinking, demanded nuclear war be winnable.⁶⁸ While the United States negotiated from a position that held the avoidance of nuclear war as the primary goal, the Soviets strove to be ready to win a nuclear war. Fritz Ermarth, former Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, argued this logic had perverse consequences. As the USSR increased its number of nuclear weapons, the United States became more and more convinced that nuclear war must be avoided. Meanwhile, some in the USSR viewed their growing strategic

⁶³ A. G. Savel'yev and Nikolay N. Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), p. 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23., Donald R. Baucom, *The Origins of SDI, 1944-1983* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 71.

⁶⁵ "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems," May 26, 1972, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/treaties/abm/abm2.html>, accessed November 11, 2007., Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, p. 22.

⁶⁶ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

advantage as an assurance that nuclear war was possible.⁶⁹ That is, they believed they had the capability to completely destroy the West, and were willing to accept a relatively weak second strike in return.

Brezhnev also viewed the combination of détente and arms control as a tipping point in the class struggle against capitalism.⁷⁰ The United States had lost the Vietnam War and curtailed its efforts to actively counter communism in the Third World. And the worldwide recession, abandonment of the Bretton Woods international monetary system, and Watergate political crisis in the United States appeared to Soviet policymakers as the beginning of the end of capitalism and part of a “correlation of forces” tilting in favor of communism. At the Twenty-Fifth Party Congress in 1976, Brezhnev outlined these ideas in an address to the assembly, noting, “It is precisely during the past [five] years that the capitalist world has experienced an economic crisis, the seriousness and depth of which ... can only be compared with the crisis at the beginning of the 1930s.” He then went on to allude to Watergate as yet another signal of a bourgeoisie crisis.⁷¹ The general secretary concluded, “there is no future for capitalist society.”⁷²

This so-called correlation of forces also favored the Soviets because the West was providing them with financial and technological transfers which helped support the declining economies of their satellites states. After the Arab oil embargo of 1973, the Soviet economy benefited, in addition, from an influx of petrodollars, a massive inflow of money that infused some life into the weakened command economy.⁷³

⁶⁹ Ermarth, *Soviet Military Thinking*, 58.

⁷⁰ Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War*, 384.

⁷¹ Adam Bruno Ulam, *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union In World Politics, 1970-1982* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 146.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 147.

⁷³ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 377.

2. Unintended Consequences

Though the Soviets felt they had gotten the best of détente unintended consequences left the empire in a weakened state by 1981. The government overspent on defense and did not appreciate the human rights virus spreading throughout the empire.

Theoretically, arms control might have been a way for the Soviets to control defense spending, but they chose a dramatic increase instead. Moreover, because defense was the only economic sector that grew, the weight of it weakened the overall economy. Eventually, only the high prices of the raw materials and energy that the Soviets exported made their position tenable.⁷⁴

The Helsinki Final Act in 1975 defined international human rights norms as “standards of governance that impose positive and negative obligations on states and groups to ensure the basic security, freedom, and dignity of groups within their jurisdiction.”⁷⁵ Principles VI, VII, and VIII, respectively, called for the “nonintervention of the internal affairs of other participating states regardless of their mutual relations;” “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief;” and “respect [for] the equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination.”⁷⁶ Brezhnev signed the agreement, but had no intention of upholding human rights norms within the empire. He signed in exchange for technology and financial transfers and for the international legitimacy of the Soviet Union’s World War II gains.⁷⁷ In any case, the same rights were already guaranteed to Soviet citizens by their constitution and several treaties, none of which had affected the regime’s conduct toward its people.⁷⁸ The Helsinki Agreement, however, reverberated across the USSR in unanticipated ways. Human rights groups began to form within the communist countries,

⁷⁴ Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 79.

⁷⁵ Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 8.

⁷⁶ “The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

⁷⁷ Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 13-14.

⁷⁸ Bowkor, *Brezhnev and Superpower Relations*, 97.

demanding the rights set forth in the Helsinki Act's Basket III. The Catholic Church and NGO's assisted citizens within the Eastern bloc countries to form, fund, and support internal resistance organizations. In addition, people behind the Iron Curtain were less isolated. Their access to the Western press increased, undermining the empire's monopoly on information.⁷⁹ But eventually, the communist governments began to crack down on dissidents, encouraged in part by the willingness of the West to tolerate what were clearly violations of the Helsinki agreement. Nonetheless, the strain on the system continued to grow.⁸⁰

In the late 1970s, détente began to unravel. First, in 1977, the Soviets deployed newly developed SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missiles to Eastern Europe. From the Soviet perspective, the SS-20 was an uncontroversial upgrade of the old SS-4 and SS-5 missiles.⁸¹ It was more accurate and had a longer range, and each missile had three independent warheads.⁸² The West perceived their deployment as an attempt to break up NATO, fearing that European countries would doubt U.S. credibility in the event of an attack on Europe.⁸³ "Would America risk its cities and launch an attack if Europe were struck?" If the states' answer was no, they might then abandon NATO and seek separate deals with the Soviets.⁸⁴ In part to curtail the chances of such an event, in 1979 NATO launched a "dual track" response to the SS-20s. It prepared to deploy two new U.S. missile systems, while at the same time engaging in negotiations to find a different solution. If, by the fall of 1983, no agreement had been reached, 464 ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) and 108 Pershing II missiles would be deployed in Europe.⁸⁵

Second, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, after the pro-communist government there had been overthrown. Soviet decision makers saw

⁷⁹ Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*, 72.

⁸⁰ Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 217.

⁸¹ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 58.

⁸² Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 38.

⁸³ Richard L. Kugler, *Commitment To Purpose: How Alliance Partnership Won The Cold War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1993), 330.

⁸⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 39-40.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

Afghanistan as an ideological battle ground much like Hungary in 1956.⁸⁶ It was part of the “Brezhnev Doctrine,” the Soviets declared the right to intervene in neighboring countries should their socialist governments be threatened.⁸⁷ To many in the West, the invasion was perceived as part of a Soviet plan to expand into the Middle East. And the Soviet support of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua only added to the U.S. fears of a new Soviet push into the Third World. In addition, throughout the 1970s, the Soviets continued to significantly increase the size of their conventional forces.⁸⁸ All these factors played a role in President Carter’s decision in 1979 to increase defense spending and in 1980 to abandon his efforts to persuade the senate to ratify SALT II.⁸⁹ In addition, in 1980 the president declared the “Carter Doctrine;” any outside attack on the Persian Gulf states would be repelled by the United States.⁹⁰

C. REAGAN’S FOREIGN POLICY PLAN

When Ronald Reagan became president in 1981, the question facing the West was how to deal with a perceived resurgence of Soviet aggression, detente was in tatters. Between 1981 and 1983 the administration instigated a thorough rejection of the status quo. Reagan refused to accept the Soviet Union as a legitimate actor in the international system. In contrast to Eisenhower, who argued that “the communist objective is to make us spend ourselves into bankruptcy,”⁹¹ Reagan asked, “why can’t we just lean on the Soviets until they go broke?”⁹² In Reagan’s view, the Soviet regime was losing its ideological appeal both internally and externally. He also believed that the Soviets were plagued with a faltering economy, a claim supported by CIA estimates.⁹³ They projected

⁸⁶ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 380.

⁸⁷ Scott McMichael, “The Soviet-Afghan War,” in *The Military History of the Soviet Union*, ed. Robin D. S. Higham and Frederick W. Kagan (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 259.

⁸⁸ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*, 8.

⁸⁹ Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War*, 428, 438.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁹¹ Norman A. Graebner, *The National Security: Its Theory And Practice, 1945-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 55.

⁹² Reed, *At the Abyss*, 227.

⁹³ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 226.

that, by the end of the 1980s, Soviet defense spending could rise from about 13.5 percent of GNP to 20 percent; and that the expected expenditures would increase discontent among the population as it was squeezed even more to support defense.⁹⁴ The Reagan administration believed, therefore, that if the Soviets were pressured and challenged on multiple fronts, they could be forced to make concessions at the negotiating table.

In an October 1983 speech, Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam broadly outlined the administration's strategy, that the West should "strive to create an environment in which the Soviet Union is faced with...drastically reduced opportunities for adventurism and intimidation." This would push the Soviets, he argued, to "see restraint on their part as the most attractive option."⁹⁵

National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 75, distributed in January 1983, broadly laid out a three-pronged plan to employ positive and negative incentives to "shape" Soviet decision-making. Point one was to counter Soviet expansionism, which became the Reagan Doctrine, and would in time include operations in Angola, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and other Third World states to "roll back" Soviet efforts of global influence.

A corollary to this approach was to demonstrate that the use of force would no longer be tolerated to suppress dissidents. Thus, during the 1981 Solidarity movement in Poland, to persuade the Soviets that the use of Soviet troops was unacceptable, the administration initiated psychological warfare operations (PSYOPS).⁹⁶ These were only known at the highest levels of the United States government and of course by the Soviets. In the summer of 1981, a combined allied fleet of eighty-three ships transited the

⁹⁴ CIA, "Soviet Spending for Defense: Trends Since 1951 and Prospects for the 1980s," 1982, [http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse_docs.asp?doc_no=0000496806&title=SOVIET+SPENDING+FOR+DEFENSE:+TRENDS+SINCE+1951+AND+PROSPECTS+FOR+THE+1980S+\(SOV&abstract=&no_pages=0052&pub_date=4/1/1982&release_date=1/29/2001&keywords=SOVIET+ANALYSIS|SOVIET+MILITARY+ANALYSIS|SOVIET+ECONOMIC+ANALYSIS|ECONOMIC+MILITARY&case_no=CSI-2001-00002©right=0&release_dec=RIPPUB&classification=U&showPage=0001](http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse_docs.asp?doc_no=0000496806&title=SOVIET+SPENDING+FOR+DEFENSE:+TRENDS+SINCE+1951+AND+PROSPECTS+FOR+THE+1980S+(SOV&abstract=&no_pages=0052&pub_date=4/1/1982&release_date=1/29/2001&keywords=SOVIET+ANALYSIS|SOVIET+MILITARY+ANALYSIS|SOVIET+ECONOMIC+ANALYSIS|ECONOMIC+MILITARY&case_no=CSI-2001-00002©right=0&release_dec=RIPPUB&classification=U&showPage=0001), accessed August 20, 2007.

⁹⁵ Beth Fischer, "Toeing the Hardline? The Reagan Administration and the Cold War," *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 485-486.

⁹⁶ Benjamin Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," 1997, CIA, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm#HEADING1-11,22>, accessed February 5, 2008.

Greenland/Iceland/United Kingdom Gap undetected and conducted operations near Soviet territory.⁹⁷ And though the Polish crisis subsided in December 1981, the operations continued. In 1983, the Pacific Fleet conducted a three-carrier battle group exercise near Petropavlovsk, the Soviet's only open-sea naval base.⁹⁸ It was the largest-ever exercise in that area.⁹⁹ According to Dr. William Schneider, former undersecretary of state for military assistance and technology, the Soviets "did not know what it all meant. A squadron would fly straight at Soviet airspace, and other radars would light up and units would go on alert. Then at the last minute the squadron would peel off and return home."¹⁰⁰

Point two of NSDD 75 was to encourage the Soviets to undertake major internal policy changes toward a market-based economy and political liberty. Support for human rights reforms became a key piece of this effort. In the 1970s, the Soviets, especially the satellite states in Europe, took large Western loans, and high inflation had dramatically increased the cost of their debt.¹⁰¹ Reagan wanted to compound the problem. For example, according to Peter Schweizer, the United States went after the Soviet's petrodollar revenue, with the CIA playing a key role in three areas. They helped sabotage Soviet efforts to build a pipeline to Western Europe; convinced the Saudi government to lower the price of oil, which boosted the U.S. economy while damaging the Soviets'; and stopped critical technology transfers to the Soviet Union, including equipment necessary to maintain their oil fields.¹⁰² Finally, the Security Directive called for bilateral relations. Summits, like trade, were linked to other points of contention in the American-Soviet relationship, a line of thinking that was to play a part in the stalemate at Reykjavik when Reagan brought Soviet human-rights abuses into the

⁹⁷ Benjamin Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 32.

¹⁰² Peter Schweizer, *Victory: the Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, 1st ed. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994), 49.

discussions. Lastly, summits did not need to end with written agreements, but would be premised on overall improvements in Soviet conduct.¹⁰³ This was another departure from previous presidents who had not linked Soviet behavior to arms control agreements.¹⁰⁴

1. Early Talks

During the first two years of the Reagan administration, arms control seemed a low priority. In 1981, for example, Secretary of State Alexander Haig stated that “Arms control is no longer the centerpiece of U.S.–Soviet relations.”¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, the Reagan administration was reaching out. On November 30, 1981, negotiations over intermediate nuclear forces resumed, but were predicated on Reagan’s “zero option” proposal, which had been announced on the 18th. Under the “zero option,” the United States would not deploy either Pershing II or ground-based cruise missiles in Europe. In exchange, the Soviet Union would have to agree to remove all of its SS-4, SS-5, and SS-20 missiles deployed within range of Europe.¹⁰⁶ Reagan’s offer did not address the Soviets’ concern about French and British nuclear forces and was viewed by critics as a way to forestall productive agreements.

In 1981, Reagan also proposed replacing SALT II with Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START). Critics of the plan argued that, like the “zero option,” this U.S. position was decidedly one-sided. It called for a nuclear parity where the U.S. would maintain much of its level of land nuclear forces but that required the Soviets to destroy over half their land-based nuclear weapons.¹⁰⁷

In 1982, the lead American negotiator, Paul Nitze, tried to break the stalemate over intermediate nuclear forces by proposing that each side have a total of seventy-five intermediate launchers in Europe, and that the United States would deploy only cruise

¹⁰³ Ronald Reagan, "National Security Decision Directive 75," ed. National Security Council (Reagan Library, 1983), 6.

¹⁰⁴ Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War*, 427.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in: Beth Fischer, "Toeing the Hardline? The Reagan Administration and the Cold War," *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (Autumn 1997) (1997): 483.

¹⁰⁶ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 62.

¹⁰⁷ Fischer, "Toeing the Hard Line?," 483-485.

missiles.¹⁰⁸ The latter was a concession to the Soviets who feared, incorrectly, that the longer-range Pershing IIs based in Germany could strike Moscow.¹⁰⁹ It was entirely Nitze's idea and had not been cleared with Washington. The Soviet negotiator, Yuli Kvitsinsky, agreed to take the potential framework to Moscow, where the idea died, in part because the Soviet leaders did not want to undermine the nuclear freeze movement and the anti-missile communists in Europe.¹¹⁰

Early in his administration President Reagan tried to engage in meaningful dialogue. In April 1981, the president wrote a personal letter to General Secretary Brezhnev that was accompanied in the end by a stiffer letter from the State Department, which did not want to give too soft an impression to the Soviets.¹¹¹ In his letter, Reagan described the common human values that were sometimes hindered by state governments. Reagan's attempt at personal dialogue fell flat; Brezhnev's response was impersonal and interpreted by Reagan as an "icy reply."¹¹²

D. THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE AND REJECTION OF MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION

The Strategic Defense Initiative became the most controversial of Reagan's defense efforts. In a televised speech on March 23, 1983, the president asked,

What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant U.S. retaliation to deter a Soviet attack, that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?

¹⁰⁸ Strobe Talbott, *The Master Of The Game: Paul Nitze And The Nuclear Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1988), 174-175.

¹⁰⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 39.

¹¹⁰ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 66. Also See: Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 42-43. Matlock notes that had the Soviets been more receptive, the United States would have been forced to negotiate and the issue of verification could have drawn the issue out past the fall 1983 deadline set it NATO's "dual track."

¹¹¹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 21. Secretary Haig believed that Reagan's letter coupled with the recent U.S. decision to end the grain embargo against the Soviet Union would make the Russians think the United States had accepted the invasion of Afghanistan.

¹¹² Anatoliy Fedorovich Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)* (New York: Times Books, Random House, 1995), 493.

Noting that this would involve risks, the president continued,

I clearly recognize that defensive systems have limitations and raise certain problems and ambiguities. If paired with offensive systems, they can be viewed as fostering an aggressive policy, and no one wants that. But with these considerations firmly in mind, I call upon the scientific community in our country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.¹¹³

1. Roots of the Strategic Defense Initiative

SDI was a rejection of mutually assured destruction. It also reflected Reagan's nuclear abolitionism which stemmed from the 1940's. Then Reagan and many Americans, including President Truman and Edward Teller, a renowned physicist and member of the Manhattan project, for a time supported the "Baruch Plan" to turn nuclear weapons over to an international body.¹¹⁴ Reagan first became acquainted with the idea of missile defenses on November 22, 1967 when he was governor of California. That day, he took a tour of the federal government's nuclear research facility in Livermore, California at the behest of Edward Teller, a missile defense enthusiast, and received a detailed brief on current anti-missile technology.¹¹⁵ Reagan came away from the meeting believing that missile defenses might be possible, though apparently even then he was in favor of a non-nuclear defensive system.¹¹⁶ Then in 1979, when campaigning for president, Reagan and his policy aide Martin Anderson visited NORAD. The tour of the facilities reinforced Reagan's belief in the need for missile defenses and prompted an internal campaign memo to look into the feasibility of such systems.¹¹⁷ Once president, his administration began publicly talking about missile defenses in early 1981 after Reagan signed NSDD 12, one part of which stated a "vigorous research and development

¹¹³ Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security," March 23, 1983, The Ronald Reagan Presidential Archive, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/32383d.htm>, accessed September 15, 2007.

¹¹⁴ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

program will be conducted on ballistic missile defense systems.”¹¹⁸ Later, in September 1982, Edward Teller lobbied Reagan at the White House for support of a missile defense X-ray laser that would be powered by a nuclear explosion in space. The meeting was short, in Teller’s opinion he did not impress the president, and Reagan’s advisors were openly critical of Teller’s idea.¹¹⁹ Teller was surprised then, when Reagan announced SDI the following spring.

But the defense initiative was not the result of any single epiphany; it was a product of Reagan’s long held nuclear abolitionist beliefs. For Reagan, SDI was in part a return to the concept of international control of nuclear weapons and probably behind his offer to share SDI with the Soviets and the world.¹²⁰ If a system could be developed that would adequately defend against nuclear weapons than perhaps no one would want them. On March 29, 1983 in a conference with reporters the president stated his vision:

In my opinion, if a defensive weapon could be found and developed that would reduce the utility of these [ballistic missiles] or maybe even make them obsolete, then whenever that time came, a President of the United States would be able to say, ‘Now, we have both the deterrent, the missiles – as we’ve had in the past – but now this other thing has altered this.’ And he could follow any one of a number of courses...He could offer to give that same defensive weapon to them to prove that there was no longer any need for keeping these missiles. Or with that defense, he could then say to them, ‘I am willing to do away with all my missiles. You do away with yours.’¹²¹

2. SDI as a Way to Shape Soviet Decision Making

The Strategic Defense Initiative was also in keeping with NSDD 75 and played toward Reagan’s belief in the vulnerability of the Soviet economy.¹²² As he indicated in a June 1983 letter to a supporter, Reagan clearly saw SDI as a negative incentive for the Soviets to continue the arms race: “Hopefully a defense could result in real negotiations

¹¹⁸ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, 56.

¹¹⁹ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, 82.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 15.

leading to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.” Among other levers, Reagan wanted to use the initiative to persuade the Soviets to make concessions on arms reductions and change their nuclear posture. For instance, just after the Geneva summit in November 1985, Reagan wrote, “If he [Gorbachev] really wants an arms control agreement, it will only be because he wants to reduce the burden of defense spending that is staggering the Soviet economy. This could contribute to his opposition to our SDI. He doesn’t want to face the cost of competing with us...any new move on our part, such as SDI, forces them to revamp, and readjust their plan at great cost.”¹²³ In addition, he believed that a missile defense system could defend against minor nuclear powers. Even a partially effective ballistic-missile defense, he argued, would be useful against "A Middle East madman, an Asian dictator, a slip-up, a trigger-happy general, or some limited type of missile strike."¹²⁴

Within the administration there were multiple views on SDI. For example, National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, Secretary of State George Shultz, and lead negotiator Paul Nitze saw the defense initiative as a powerful bargaining chip to use in negotiations.¹²⁵ Caspar Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense, did not want the United States to even discuss missile defense in negotiations.¹²⁶ Chief of Naval Operations James Watkins shared Reagan’s belief that SDI should be explored and brought the Joints Chiefs of Staff aboard though they all thought the president’s March speech was premature.¹²⁷ There was some general agreement that missile defense did not have to be impenetrable to work. That is, it would be effective if a potential adversary believed enough of their missiles would be stopped such that their attack would fail.¹²⁸ In short, two things are important to note. First, no one within the administration completely

¹²³ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, 174-175.

¹²⁴ Paul Kengor, "The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism," *Heritage Lectures*, no. 1011 (2007), http://www.heritage.org/Research/WorldwideFreedom/upload/hl_1011.pdf, accessed October 24, 2007.

¹²⁵ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, 143-145.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

agreed with Reagan's vision for missile defense. Second, Reagan did not care. He was passionate about it because he believed it might eventually lead to the obsolescence of nuclear weapons and would not yield.¹²⁹

3. Understanding SDI

So what was SDI? Reagan had no set goal for what type of ballistic missile defense SDI would result in or even whether it would result in a feasible system. In a fall 1984 letter he stated, "Frankly, I have no idea what the nature of such a defense might be. I simply asked our scientists to explore the possibility of developing such a defense."¹³⁰ His only qualifier was that he wanted a non-nuclear system.¹³¹ General ideas for the project were described in 1983 by the CIA:

Ballistic missile defense systems could be on air, ground, and submarine platforms as well as on satellites; high energy lasers, particle beams, or microwave systems could become elements of a national ballistic missile defense (BMD) system along with improved conventional-technology systems.¹³²

Proponents of ballistic missile defense envisioned a multilayered approach. Depending on the phase of an incoming missile's flight, different tiers of defenses could be used to try and knock it down.¹³³ One benefit of this type of system was that no one layer had to be one hundred percent effective. For example, a five-layer defense with each section having an 85 percent success rate would be able to stop all but one missile in a ten-thousand missile attack.¹³⁴ The most famous and controversial aspect of SDI was research into space-based weapons. Edward Teller, inventor of the hydrogen bomb,

¹²⁹ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, 120.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹³¹ Cannon, *President Reagan: the Role of a Lifetime*, 321.

¹³² "Possible Soviet Responses to the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative," September 12, 1983, Central Intelligence Agency, http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse_docs.asp, 5, accessed September 15, 2007.

¹³³ Simon P. Worden, *SDI and the Alternatives* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1991), 167-193. Worden presents an SDI stalwart's perspective, his own outline for what a missile defense system might look like, and a hardliner's critique of the arguments put forward by SDI detractors at the time.

¹³⁴ Keith B. Payne, *Strategic Defense: "Star Wars" in Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Press, 1986), 76-77.

promoted the potential for a nuclear explosion–powered laser that would knock out Soviet ICBMs. By late 1987, “brilliant pebbles,” a series of kinetic warheads, became the main research focus of a way to knock out ICBMs in space.¹³⁵ What is important is that there was never a definite system, only research into various options. In brief, the Strategic Defense Initiative was a long-term research and development project into ballistic missile defenses.

E. A PUSH FOR DIALOGUE

Throughout 1983 the Reagan administration held a relatively hard line against the Soviets. Within the administration, the hard-liners pushed to postpone a summit until the Soviets made some concessions. Others, including most importantly the president, seemed willing to pursue a meeting with Andropov.¹³⁶ But, in September 1983, the Soviets shot down Korean Airlines flight 700 (KAL 700) as it flew off course in Soviet airspace. More than the act itself, the attempted Soviet cover-up temporarily dampened Reagan’s enthusiasm for engagement.¹³⁷ Then, in November, Reagan came to believe that the Soviets had almost mobilized in response to a NATO “Able Archer” exercise. In truth, a KGB mole in London probably exaggerated the Soviet reaction when he reported the incident to British intelligence. Nonetheless, Reagan seemed to believe it.¹³⁸ Moreover, this came on top of the abandoned intermediate nuclear forces (INF) talks, military threats to Poland, the ongoing war in Afghanistan, support of terrorism, aid to Third World revolutionaries, and the KAL affair.¹³⁹ Tensions were high and the administration decided to make a concerted effort for dialogue.

On January 16, 1984, President Reagan spoke to the American people on the subject of U.S.–Soviet relations. It was a call for dialogue. America, he said, was “in the strongest position in years to establish a constructive and realistic working relationship

¹³⁵ "Strategic Defense Initiative: Blueprint for a Layered Defense," *Aviation Week & Space Technology* (1987): 48.

¹³⁶ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 65-66.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹³⁸ Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," CIA, 14.

¹³⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 77.

with the Soviet Union.” The president laid out a three-part agenda that was complementary to National Security Decision Directives 75. First, lower the risk of confrontation with a long-term goal of eliminating the use of force in international disputes. Second, to increase trust and stability, reduce nuclear stockpiles. Third, increase understanding between the superpowers through dialogue, exchanges, and freedom of information regarding each other’s societies and respect for individual rights. Later because of its paramount importance, Secretary of State Shultz emphasized the human rights issue as a separate common interest. These four linked areas became the framework for all the administration’s future summits with the USSR¹⁴⁰

In March, Reagan pushed for a summit with General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko. The president’s letter stressed the need for a summit. In strategic weapons he offered “trade offs,” to find common ground. If the Soviets did not want to negotiate on strategic weapons, the president recommended talks to ban chemical weapons and developing improved communications between the superpowers. But Chernenko was not receptive to the offer.¹⁴¹

Soon, Reagan had reason to believe that the plan in NSDD 75 was working. A June 1984 CIA memorandum outlined U.S. successes and possible Soviet reactions. The American economy was strong and congress was debating, not the requested increase in defense spending per se, but only the size of the increase. Meanwhile, the Soviet economy was in decline, the empire was in its “terminal phase.” In addition, the United States was succeeding in its efforts to stop the flow of financial and technological transfers to the Soviet bloc, and Soviet expansionism in the Third World was on the defensive. The CIA memorandum predicted three possible outcomes. First, the Soviet Union could try to revive the economy either through drastic reform or by cutting defense spending. Second, the Soviets could “blow it,” by mismanaging the empire’s decline. A new type of society, democratic or authoritarian, might then emerge, but in the medium term it would probably be less of a threat than the Soviet Union to American interests. Third, the Soviets could embark on high-risk foreign policy gambits, such as a nuclear

¹⁴⁰ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 85.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

first strike, in an attempt to regain their lost power. Though the Soviets could be expected to bargain for Western loans and technology, the memo recommended that the United States only help if the Soviets engaged in reforms. At the same time, however, America needed to ensure that the Soviets did not decide it was in their best interest to launch a first strike.¹⁴²

F. CONCLUSION

The Strategic Defense Initiative was one of many levers the Reagan administration employed to try and shape Soviet decision making as outlined in NSDD 75. It fit into three key aspects of the administration's policy toward the Soviet Union and supports the thesis that SDI was a secondary factor in the end of the Cold War. First, SDI was part of an overall defense build-up to regain military strength, and second, it leveraged superior U.S. technology and economic power. It was hoped SDI would help shape Soviet decisions by making negotiations the most attractive option out of the arms race. In this sense, it was by design a secondary or contributing factor in the administration's overall effort.

The fall of 1983 marked the high point of U.S.–Soviet tensions in 1980s. In the winter of 1984, Reagan announced that the United States was now strong enough to work with the Soviets. The president wanted to maintain pressure on the Soviets but at the same time more actively sought to decrease tensions through dialogue. However, Reagan would have to wait until 1985, however, for a Soviet leader with whom he could “business together.”¹⁴³

The Strategic Defense Initiative also largely reflected Reagan's nuclear abolitionism and was a rejection of the doctrine of mutually assured destruction and the policy of detente. Reagan did not know whether a missile defense system was possible,

¹⁴² Herbert Meyer, "What Should We Do About The Russians?," 28 June 1984, Central Intelligence Agency, http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse_docs.asp, 3-9, accessed September 15, 2007.

¹⁴³ Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on Gorbachev in: John Cole, "Gorbachev: "We can do business together"," Margaret Thatcher Foundation, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=105592>, accessed November 10, 2007.

only that new technology might make it feasible. Unlike trade, for Reagan, SDI would never be a bargaining chip. He believed not only that arms reduction was an excellent way to reduce the potential for nuclear war, but also that the best way to rid the world of nuclear weapons would be to make them obsolete. This was his main attraction to strategic defense.

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IV. INITIAL REACTIONS: MARCH 1983-MARCH 1985

A. INTRODUCTION

There was no clear overall Soviet response to the Strategic Defense Initiative during this period until early 1985. While the Soviets were alarmed over SDI almost immediately after Reagan announced it, it was one of many issues they had to deal with relative to the West. The old guard dominated the government's initial response. Brezhnev had died in November 1982 so at the time of SDI's unveiling in March, 1983 the General Secretary was Yuri Andropov, who came from the same fold as previous Soviet leaders. Andropov broke precedent, however, by being the first former head of the KGB to become general secretary, having chaired that most paranoid and anti-Western of Soviet organizations from 1967 to 1982. In Soviet circles, Andropov was seen as an innovative leader who could revitalize the Soviet system. This was mostly myth however. He was aware there were serious problems but offered only cosmetic changes such as anti-corruption campaigns as solutions.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps his most important decision was naming Mikhail Gorbachev as his successor, though Konstantin Chernenko would eventually delay Gorbachev's ascension.¹⁴⁵ In foreign policy Andropov's views reflected the KGB's deep suspicion of capitalist provocation, and thus his reaction to SDI was severe.¹⁴⁶ He believed that SDI, in addition to a host of other provocations, had brought the Soviet Union and the United States close to war. But whatever direct impact Andropov's ideas may have had was curtailed by his failing health. After brief fifteen-month tenure, in February 1984 he died from kidney failure.

Following a short succession dispute with Gorbachev supporters, an infirm Konstantin Chernenko, who had chaired Politburo meetings in Andropov's many absences, took over as general secretary. Like Andropov, Chernenko was a product of

¹⁴⁴ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 407-408.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 408.

¹⁴⁶ "Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov," *CNN Cold War Profile*
<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/kbank/profiles/andropov/>, accessed November 15, 2007.

the Stalinist system. But he, too, would reign only for a short time, holding the job for just over twelve months before his death. Foreign policy remained relatively stagnant during this period as, the first generation of Soviet leaders passed from the scene.

B. GENERAL SECRETARY

General Secretary Andropov took Reagan seriously. In a Politburo meeting on May 31, 1983, he remarked, “if you look at the events that are taking place in the Western countries, you can say that an anti-Soviet coalition is being formed out there. Of course, that’s not accidental and it’s highly dangerous.”¹⁴⁷ In keeping with his KGB roots, Andropov viewed Reagan with almost fanatical suspicion.¹⁴⁸ The Soviet leadership’s and KGB’s fears can be traced to Hitler’s surprise attack, codenamed operation BARBAROSSA, on the USSR in June, 1941.¹⁴⁹ The failure to predict BARBAROSSA was largely due to Stalin’s refusal to believe numerous reliable intelligence reports that indicated an attack was imminent.¹⁵⁰ Stalin, however, successfully blamed Soviet intelligence. The KGB probably derived from this experience a doctrine that it would never again allow the Soviet Union to be the victim of a surprise strike. This view persisted throughout the Cold War and partially accounts for the deep distrust Soviet intelligence had of Western motives.¹⁵¹ By the late 1970’s the Soviet leadership saw the “correlation of forces,” moving against them as their economy declined relative to the West and they fell behind Western technology.¹⁵² By 1980, Andropov, believed the United States was determined to gain nuclear superiority.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ "Session of the Politburo of CC CPSU ", May 31 1983, CNN, http://turnerlearning.com/cnn/coldwar/starwars/star_re1.html, accessed September 9, 2007.

¹⁴⁸ Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War*, 274.

¹⁴⁹ Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," CIA, 17,

¹⁵⁰ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 283.

¹⁵¹ Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," CIA, 17.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9.

Then Reagan's open push to increase U.S. strength exacerbated Andropov's, not wholly rational, fear of another surprise attack.¹⁵⁴ The announcement of SDI heightened Andropov's alarm.

Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States, indicated that the Andropov led Politburo considered the Strategic Defense Initiative a "real threat."¹⁵⁵ Andropov took three tacks with SDI. First, they engaged in an all-out propaganda campaign, many of whose themes were the same as those used against NATO's "dual track" to deploy intermediate missiles in Europe.¹⁵⁶ The campaign included accusations that SDI would kick off a new arms race, make arms control negotiations impossible, violated existing arms control agreements, and signified a U.S. abandonment of Europe. To these allegations, Andropov added that SDI would militarize space, was not technically feasible, and was too expensive.¹⁵⁷ In part, this was an effort to undermine U.S. domestic support for SDI as well as to drive an already wary Europe away from the president's initiative.¹⁵⁸ But it also reflected Andropov's beliefs. He thought that SDI signaled a new arms race in space, which he publicly pledged to match.¹⁵⁹ However, both Andropov and later Chernenko thought privately that the arms race was imperiling the Soviet economy and wanted to slow it down.¹⁶⁰

Andropov's second response to SDI was an attempt to manage the arms race by pursuing negotiations. In an interview reported in Pravda, Andropov stated:

Now a decisive moment is indeed at hand: Either the interested states sit down at the negotiating table without delay and take up the drafting of a treaty prohibiting the deployment of weapons of any kind in outer space,

¹⁵⁴ Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," CIA, 18.

¹⁵⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 528.

¹⁵⁶ Office of Public Affairs United States Arms Control And Disarmament Agency, *The Soviet Propaganda Campaign Against the US Strategic Defense Initiative* (Washington: United States Arms Control And Disarmament Agency, Office of Public Affairs, 1986), 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, i.

¹⁵⁹ Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, 237.

¹⁶⁰ Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War*, 307.

or the arms race will spill over into space.”¹⁶¹ Negotiations were a cheap way to kill SDI. In April, he proposed “Let the Soviet and American scientists...meet together and discuss the possible consequences of wide-scale ABM systems.”¹⁶²

In August, Andropov announced a unilateral moratorium on deploying any anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons in space and, in addition, called for a ban on space-based weapons. Both these efforts were obviously meant to kill the Strategic Defense Initiative and went nowhere with the United States. Andropov’s view of the talks was invariably one-sided. Until his death he believed that in negotiations, “If we begin to make concessions defeat would be inevitable.”¹⁶³

In the meantime, Andropov’s health continued to deteriorate and after August 1983, he stopped making public appearances.¹⁶⁴ Relations between the superpowers spiraled down and reached the bottom when the Soviets walked out of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces and Strategic Arms Reductions Talks in November 1983. The primary trigger was the West German vote to deploy Pershing IIs, a source of great Soviet concern because they believed, incorrectly, that the missiles could reach Moscow.¹⁶⁵ They demanded that the United States remove both the Pershing IIs and ground-based cruise missiles as a prerequisite to further arms control talks.¹⁶⁶ However, the Strategic Defense Initiative was probably also a factor.¹⁶⁷

After Andropov’s death, the Chernenko Politburo adjusted some of the Soviet arms control offers. On March 2, 1984, Chernenko proposed a ban on the militarization of space and called for U.S. withdrawal of its intermediate missiles from Europe. In June, the Soviets put forward a plan for talks in Vienna to negotiate a treaty that would

¹⁶¹ "Avert the threat of nuclear war in space," April 29 1983, CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/22/1st.draft/pravda.html>, accessed November 18, 2007.

¹⁶² Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 167.

¹⁶³ Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War*, 275.

¹⁶⁴ Arnold Horelick, "US-Soviet Relations: the Return of Arms Control," *Foreign Affairs* 63, no. 03 (1985.): 518.

¹⁶⁵ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 39.

¹⁶⁶ Horelick, "US-Soviet Relations: the Return of Arms Control," 515.

¹⁶⁷ Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 136.

ban weapons in space. The U.S. defense initiative was apparently becoming at least as much of a concern to the Soviets as the intermediate missiles. As was typical of Soviet propaganda proposals, the June offer was publicized within hours of its receipt by the U.S. State Department. While the Soviets expected an out-of-hand rejection, to their surprise, the United States offered to negotiate.¹⁶⁸ The American position was that space was already “militarized” by virtue of the ICBM’s that would pass through space in a nuclear exchange. Instead of a ban on weapons in space, therefore, the United States offered to discuss the *militarization* of space, to include offensive and defensive weapons.¹⁶⁹ The Soviets, caught off guard, evaded the issue, and both sides began to debate the title of the talks.¹⁷⁰

President Reagan’s landslide victory in November 1984 prompted the politburo to revisit negotiations with the United States and in January 1985, Secretary of State George Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko met in Geneva to discuss future talks.¹⁷¹ By this time, Chernenko was often incapacitated so it was Mikhail Gorbachev who led the politburo session that outlined a strategy for Gromyko.¹⁷² Gorbachev insisted that Gromyko tie all nuclear arms reductions to a ban on space weapons, thus Gorbachev was a key factor in devising the linkage that would become the major obstacle at Reykjavik. As Ambassador Dobrynin noted,

While Reagan doggedly stuck to his Strategic Defense Initiative, Gorbachev convinced himself and the rest of the Soviet leadership that it had to be thwarted at all costs. The clash of these two opposing but fixed positions dominated our negotiations for years to come...¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 100.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 559.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 561.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

Shultz and Gromyko eventually agreed on a framework in which intermediate-range missiles, space-based weapons, and strategic weapons would be discussed based on their “interrelationship.” This wording was vague. The three issues could either be considered as dependent on each other or, if there was no interrelationship, they might be negotiated separately. Three delegations, one for each area, were to independently or collectively negotiate as required.¹⁷⁴

Overall, until the meeting between Gromyko and Shultz in January, talks were not progressing in large part because of the Soviet hard line on euromissiles and SDI. This was exemplified in the Soviet walk out on negotiations in the fall of 1983. The leadership’s preconditions for resuming dialogue was predicated on the United States abandoning SDI and done more for propaganda value than a desire to negotiate. In addition, the Soviets hoped Reagan would lose his reelection bid in 1984 and were therefore hesitant to hand him a “victory” by agreeing to negotiations. Moreover, the linkage between SDI and arms reductions Gromyko outlined in the winter of 1985 at Geneva was, in part, a product of Gorbachev’s own desires.

C. THE NATIONAL SECURITY COMMUNITY

Since the late 1960s, Soviet arms control policy had been largely formulated by the “Big Five,” consisting of the heads or representatives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the KGB, and the Military Industrial Commission (VPK).¹⁷⁵ The idea was for the agencies to jointly determine coherent arms control objectives and policies.¹⁷⁶ However, in practice the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs drafted proposals that were accepted without comment by the other agencies on the commission. The proposals were then presented for approval to the Politburo, which also did not critically analyze them and almost always signed off on the proposals.¹⁷⁷ As a result, it

¹⁷⁴ Horelick, “US-Soviet Relations: the Return of Arms Control,” 522.

¹⁷⁵ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 20.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

was actually the foreign minister, the defense minister, and of course the general secretary, should he choose to intervene, who conducted arms control policies.

By the time the Soviets walked out on INF and START in the fall of 1983, the Big Five was nominally down to four. Dimitri Ustinov, the minister of defense, as a full member of the Politburo, represented the communist party.¹⁷⁸ In 1984, when Ustinov died, his replacement, seventy-three-year-old Marshall Sergey Sokolov, represented only the Ministry of Defense, so the CPSU was entirely left out of the details of arms control policy. Since 1967 Sokolov had been the deputy minister of defense and thus could be expected to promote conservative policies similar to those of his predecessor.¹⁷⁹ The Military Industrial Commission had been headed by Leonid Smirnov since 1963.¹⁸⁰ Andrei Gromyko, Stalin's onetime ambassador to America and the most senior representative, had been appointed foreign minister in 1957.¹⁸¹ Viktor Chebrikov was in charge of the KGB.¹⁸² Chebrikov, a protégé of Andropov, believed like his mentor that the system was stalled and could better be fixed by focusing on problems such as corruption.¹⁸³ All these decision makers were pickled in the Brezhnev-era arms control process.

The Soviet policy of linking intermediate-range nuclear forces, strategic offensive weapons, and a ban on "space strike weapons" [SDI] in negotiations had been staked out by the Big Five. Since the SALT II negotiations, the underlying logic was that Soviet strategic weapons could not be reduced until the threat of intermediate missiles in Europe was addressed. From the Soviets' perspective intermediate forces were also considered "strategic" if they could target Russia.¹⁸⁴ In addition, the advent of SDI meant additional

¹⁷⁸ "Soviet Union: New Minister of Defence," *OxResearch*, December 26, 1984.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Steven J. Dick, "Biographies of Aerospace Officials and Policymakers," *National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA History Division* (2007), <http://history.nasa.gov/bioso-s.html>, accessed January 31, 2008.

¹⁸¹ "Andrei Gromyko", CNN <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/kbank/profiles/gromyko/>, accessed January 31, 2008.

¹⁸² Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 83-84.

¹⁸³ Isobel Montgomery, "Viktor Chebrikov," *Guardian* July 7, 1999.

¹⁸⁴ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 85.

ballistic missiles would probably be needed to penetrate the United States' defense shield. Therefore, the Strategic Defense Initiative had to be stopped before the Soviets would consider reducing strategic forces.¹⁸⁵

The Big Five saw SDI as a long-term research project of fifteen to twenty years whose ultimate goal was to develop an impenetrable shield.¹⁸⁶ Their immediate concern was that in the near and mid-term, U.S. research could yield a system capable of stopping most missiles in a strike. This theoretically would enable America to launch a preemptive first strike and withstand a weakened second strike from the USSR. The Big Five all agreed that the main concern in negotiations was to stop the deployment of a U.S. missile defense. The most threatening aspect was space based missile defenses which from the Soviets' perspective undermined strategic stability by posing a threat to satellites that provided early-warning and command-and-control communications.¹⁸⁷ In negotiations, the Big Five believed the best option was to constrain SDI to their interpretation of the ABM Treaty. Gromyko decided that the Soviet position should be that the ABM Treaty banned all research in sea, air, and land based missile defenses, not to mention space, and the rest of Big Five signed off without comment.¹⁸⁸

Below the Big Five, the agencies independently wrestled with how to react to SDI. The Soviet general staff, for example, was not sure how to respond to either SDI or the Reagan defense buildup. Marshall Nikolai Ogarkov, the chief of the general staff, argued that the military industrial complex needed to be revived. Publicly, he called for a larger investment in defense. Privately, he believed that the Soviet Union was highly inefficient, stagnant, and overly concerned with matching every U.S. project.¹⁸⁹ Apparently, just after the U.S. announcement of the defense initiative, Ogarkov had a personal conversation, not reported at the time, with a U.S. journalist regarding SDI.

¹⁸⁵ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 85.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁸⁹ Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War*, 277.

We cannot equal the quality of U.S. arms for a generation or two. Modern military power is based on technology, and technology is based on computers...Here we don't even have computers in every office of the defense ministry. And for reasons you well know, we cannot make computers widely available in our society. We will never be able to catch up to you in modern arms until we have an economic revolution. And the question is whether we can have an economic revolution without a political revolution.¹⁹⁰

Ogarkov was fired, probably for his behind the scenes efforts, by his boss, Dimitri Ustinov, in 1984.¹⁹¹ Most of the general staff called for increased funding, demanding a fourteen percent increase in the military budget.¹⁹² Ambassador Dobrynin quotes Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, Ogarkov's replacement as chief of the General Staff, as stating he believed in a hard line across all fronts:

National security along all azimuths. We proceed from the worst conceivable scenario of having to fight the United States, its allies, and probably Japan. We must be prepared for any kind of fight with any kind of weapon. Soviet military doctrine can be summed as follows: 1941 shall never be repeated.¹⁹³

Akhromeyev did however, believe troops could be reduced in central Europe and supported negotiations with the United States, though he wanted much smaller concessions than Gorbachev would eventually make.¹⁹⁴

In the KGB, the senior leadership feared that Reagan was planning to preemptively strike the Soviet Union. To gather information on this plot, in 1981, Andropov, KGB head at the time, initiated an operation code-named RYAN.¹⁹⁵ It would remain the top priority of the First Chief (Foreign Intelligence) Directorate of the KGB

¹⁹⁰ Leslie Gelb, "Foreign Affairs; Who Won the Cold War?," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1992. Gelb describes the meeting taking place "days after" Reagan's "evil empire speech" which was given on March 8, 1983. The SDI speech was on March 23 and it seems likely to this author that Ogarkov's comments on technology were related to SDI.

¹⁹¹ Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War*, 277.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 525.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 525-526.

¹⁹⁵ Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," CIA, 4.

until Andropov's death.¹⁹⁶ By February 1983, the Soviet leadership was convinced that NATO would follow through with its "dual track" pledge and deploy Pershing II intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe.¹⁹⁷ To the KGB this meant the Reagan administration might be preparing for a preemptive nuclear strike. Adding to their concerns was the fact that U.S. fleets and squadrons were testing the Soviet alert systems. And thus Reagan's "Star Wars" speech only increased Soviet unease.

The Soviet's shooting down of the Korean airliner, flight 700, reflected the KGB and the military's anxiety. After the plane strayed into Soviet airspace, it was shot down, probably in international airspace, by a fighter jet interceptor.¹⁹⁸ All 269 passengers, including a U.S. congressman, were killed.¹⁹⁹ The military had been on high alert due to the U.S. Navy's recent testing of the Soviet defenses. This, along with the general heightening of tensions between the superpowers probably played a significant role in the decision to shoot down the plane. And the public relations fall-out from the incident only aroused even deeper suspicions of U.S. intentions and convinced the KGB that the whole episode was part of an American conspiracy.²⁰⁰

In the Strategic Defense Initiative, the Soviet defense industry saw an opportunity to expand its military projects.²⁰¹ But the Soviet scientific community's reaction to SDI was mixed. Since the 1960s, Soviet scientists had researched ballistic-missile defensive systems, and by 1972, the year of the ABM Treaty, they had concluded that missile defense was not possible with the available technology. However, in 1976, public comments by an American general, George Keegan, convinced some Soviet weapons designers that the United States was also engaged in missile defense research. This stimulated debate among Soviet scientists to reconsider its feasibility.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Christopher M. Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: the Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, 1st ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 213.

¹⁹⁷ Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, 241.

¹⁹⁸ Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," CIA, 11.

¹⁹⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 535-536.

²⁰⁰ Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," CIA, 12- 13.

²⁰¹ Podvig, "Did Star Wars Win the Cold War?," 5.

²⁰² Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, 234-235.

After the U.S. announcement of SDI, some scientists began to argue for the development of a Soviet missile defense system as well. They were probably following in the footsteps of Vladimir Cheleomei who had been a proponent of BMD since the 1960s.²⁰³ However, it does not appear, at least during this period, that the Soviets were seriously engaged in either research or testing of a missile defense system. But, they did initiate countermeasure programs designed to defeat an American missile defense. The “konkat” was one such program begun in direct response to SDI. Initiated in 1984 but never deployed, it was an anti-satellite weapon, a plane-launched missile that would target the low-orbiting satellites of an American missile defense system.²⁰⁴

Other prominent scientists, including Yevgeny Velikhov and Roald Sagdeev, argued that the Strategic Defense Initiative was just part of an American ruse to lure the Soviet Union into an expensive arms race that would undermine the Soviet economy.²⁰⁵ Instead of playing the U.S. game, they argued, the Soviets should respond with either arms control negotiations or relatively inexpensive countermeasures.²⁰⁶ Cheap alternatives could come from projects already in the works, such as the “Skif” project begun in 1976. It involved building a laser system that would be deployed in space as an anti-satellite weapon via Buran, the Soviet space shuttle. Until 1984, “Skif” had been stalled because no laser existed that could orbit in space. But that summer, Skif-D was authorized. It took a laser, the “Drief” airborne laser, from another project to aid in continuing the research while a suitable laser for “Skif” was being developed.²⁰⁷ By 1985, other low-cost solutions were also being discussed, which included concentrating mobile ICBMs, indirect countermeasures to lasers, and modifying missiles to decrease their boost-phase time.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, 236.

²⁰⁴ Podvig, "Did Star Wars Win the Cold War?," 6.

²⁰⁵ Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, 239.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Podvig, "Did Star Wars Win the Cold War?," 5-6.

²⁰⁸ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 86.

D. CONCLUSION

Information about the Soviet reaction to the Strategic Defense Initiative during the two-year period from 1983 to March 1985 sheds some light on the three schools of thought pertaining to the role of SDI in ending the Cold War. The pro SDI school falls short. For one thing, the Soviets did not invest many resources to counter SDI, and it does not appear that they seriously considered developing a Soviet SDI. Nor did the existence of SDI cause a Soviet reformation: there were no significant economic or other reforms under either Andropov or Chernenko. Moreover, during this period, the Soviet response to SDI was muddled. Andropov's reaction was paradoxical: he agreed that negotiations should take place but said that no concessions were permissible. Members of the defense bureaucracy seemed to believe that if negotiations failed, an arms race would be inevitable and would cripple the Soviet economy. But they offered no other solution. While the scientists did suggest an alternative in the form of cheap countermeasures, they were not sure what those countermeasures might be.

A second thing to consider is that it can be argued, in support of the anti-SDI school, that during this period, the defense initiative was a factor that extended the Cold War. The Soviet decision to suspend talks in the fall of 1983 was based largely on the euromissile issue; SDI's role was probably minimal. However, SDI was a factor in Soviet unwillingness to seriously negotiate until after Reagan's reelection, as the Soviets wanted Reagan to lose in the belief that another administration would be easier to work with. Thus in a sense, SDI helped extend the Cold War since it played a role in the Soviet decision to delay a resumption of negotiations.

However, once Reagan won reelection and a mandate for his policies, SDI became a strong incentive for the USSR to negotiate. The Soviets were intimidated by the economic and technical challenges of the Strategic Defense Initiative, which underscored fears about the Soviets' weak economy and America's technological edge. As a result, Andropov and later Chernenko and even Gorbachev, along with the scientists, and the Big Five wanted to use negotiations to defeat the United States' initiative. In addition,

the unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing and the general themes of Soviet propaganda also appeared to be efforts to win world opinion toward stopping an arms race in space, in other words, to end SDI.

But, SDI was only one of many external factors influencing Soviet foreign policy. The euromissile situation was a factor, as were the American PSYOPs operations and the general increase in U.S. defense spending. The U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative contributed to U.S.-Soviet instability by initiating what was perceived by the Soviets as an initial step in an arms race that they could defeat only through negotiations. Andropov's public and private comments and Ambassador Dobrynin's statements make this clear. The reactions of the Soviet defense industry and scientific community also support this thesis. Overall, it is difficult to determine the degree to which SDI added to Soviet fears. It does seem evident, however, as we have shown here, that SDI was not, at least not yet, the number one foreign policy issue for the Soviet leadership. Therefore, of the three schools of thought, the argument that SDI was a secondary factor is the most accurate for the period from 1983 to 1985.

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V. ENTER GORBACHEV: MARCH 1985-OCTOBER 1986

A. INTRODUCTION

Soviet reactions to the Strategic Defense Initiative from March 1985 to October 1986 support the anti-SDI thesis that the defense initiative complicated talks and extended the Cold War. However, the evidence also shows that SDI was a positive secondary factor which gave Gorbachev another incentive to negotiate with the United States. The selection of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary in March 1985 marked the start of a new era in U.S.–Soviet relations. Gorbachev was a different type of leader than his predecessors. He was young, more than twenty years junior to the other members of the politburo.²⁰⁹ He grew up during the relatively nonviolent, at least compared to the Stalin era, political environment of Khrushchev. Khrushchev tried to adjust the Soviet system to make it more efficient but the underlying weaknesses of the command economy were not addressed and his efforts in part led to his fall from power. Similar to Khrushchev, Gorbachev moved to improve the system. He wanted to revive the domestic economy and sought a return to détente which had so benefited the Soviets in the 1970s. But in order to successfully enact domestic reforms, Gorbachev felt he needed first to come to terms with the United States and to defuse the growing tension between the superpowers. Consequently, Gorbachev’s first foreign policy objective was to meet with Reagan. He found a willing but tough partner in the American president.²¹⁰ As we have seen, Reagan had been pushing for a meeting with a Soviet leader since 1981 and had redoubled his efforts in early 1984. Reagan wanted to lower the risks of confrontation, eliminate nuclear weapons, increase understanding through dialogue, and encourage the Soviet Union to improve its behavior regarding human rights.²¹¹ For Reagan these four areas were linked, and on top of this, he would not budge on SDI. Though Reagan and Gorbachev both shared some common objectives, negotiations at the

²⁰⁹ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, ix.

²¹⁰ Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 208.

²¹¹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 85.

Geneva Summit, which took place November 19–21, 1985, were difficult and the Strategic Defense Initiative was the main source of contention. Reagan offered to work with the Soviets in research and testing but made clear that he would also move forward with the U.S. program regardless of Soviet opposition. For Gorbachev, SDI, which he described as “space based weapons,” was a deal breaker to any agreement. He did not believe the Americans would share technology and saw SDI as not only a defensive but also an offensive weapon system. Nevertheless, the Geneva Summit was judged a success by both sides: it was the first meeting in seven years between the leaders of the world’s two great powers, who agreed to meet again soon in Washington and Moscow for two more summits. However, the Reykjavik summit that was initiated by Gorbachev and took place in October 1986 was more ambiguous. With an ultimate aim to eliminate all nuclear weapons, the two sides came close to an agreement that would do away with all intermediate missiles in Europe and reduce all strategic nuclear weapons by fifty percent. But once again they could not agree on SDI and Reykjavik ended without a treaty. Still, Gorbachev came away from the meeting with the impression that a major agreement would soon be reached.

Between 1985 and the fall of 1986, the Soviet security community’s influence began to decline. While the role of the Big Five expanded, departments lead by Gorbachev’s allies became closely involved in formulating arms-control policies. The Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, a Cold War stalwart, retired and was replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze, a close ally of Gorbachev. The Ministry of Defense, which had been resistant to Gorbachev’s arms control ideas, was out-manuevered by the general secretary in 1986 and grudgingly supported the abolition of nuclear weapons. The April 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident also cost the military and defense industry political capital. However, the defense establishment probably played a role in ensuring the linkage between SDI, INF and START at the Reykjavik Summit. The KGB continued its history as more of an observer in arms control policy though it remained a part of the Big Five. Lastly, the scientific community probably supported Gorbachev’s overall efforts to reform the Soviet system and undermine the United States’ SDI effort. In short, though

Gorbachev had to contend with a number of domestic rivals, he was moderately successful in establishing control over the government bureaucracies and instituting his own policies.

B. GENERAL SECRETARY

1. A Different Type of Soviet Leader

Mikhail Sergei Gorbachev became General Secretary on March 11, 1985. At age fifty two, he was the youngest General Secretary since Stalin. His fast climb up the communist ladder was in part the result of his own talents. But he had also developed powerful contacts with influential Soviet decision-makers such as Andropov and Fedor Kulakov, head of the Department of Agriculture of the Central Committee.²¹² In 1978, when Kulakov died, Gorbachev returned to Moscow and was promoted from First Party Secretary of the Stavropol region to Kulakov's post. In 1980, he became a full member, by far its youngest, of the Politburo.²¹³ Within the party, Gorbachev was seen as Andropov's protégé, an agent for change in a system that most of the Politburo recognized was faltering. Five years later, following Chernenko's death, Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary.

But why Gorbachev? In addressing this question, Archie Brown describes four main factors that contributed to Gorbachev's ascension to General Secretary. First, on the night Chernenko died, Gorbachev and his supporters moved quickly. Gorbachev held a meeting to determine who would lead the funeral commission: he was chosen. This is significant because, since Stalin's death, whoever chaired the commission became the next General Secretary. They held the meeting immediately because three members of the Politburo who were not Gorbachev's allies were away from Moscow and thus unable to attend.²¹⁴ Second, at the time, Gorbachev showed no inclination to deviate from traditional Soviet foreign policy with the West. Therefore, the elders did not see in him

²¹² Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 38.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, ix.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

the radical reformer he would become. Third, like Andropov, he was seen as someone who could tinker with the system and improve it.²¹⁵ Fourth, Gorbachev was young, and the Politburo believed that, internationally, it was not advisable to present another geriatric Soviet leader to the world.²¹⁶

Gorbachev was a new type of Soviet leader. He was the only general secretary to have been born after the Russian Revolution, his most formative political years were not spent under Stalin, and his political education did not occur under a regime that routinely and violently purged its ranks. When Stalin died in 1953, Gorbachev was a twenty-two-year-old law student at Moscow State University.²¹⁷ Gorbachev's political coming-of-age was under Nikita Khrushchev, during what one Russian specialist, Martin Malia, describes as the first Soviet attempt at "reform communism."

Reform communism has three characteristics. First, it attempts to distance communism from Stalinism. Khrushchev did this when he released millions from the gulag and when he attacked the cult of Stalinism by admonishing some of Stalin's crimes in a speech to the twentieth congress in 1956.²¹⁸

In addition, reform communism tries to reinvigorate the economy through some decentralization of the command system and by providing incentives for individuals to profit. One major flaw of the command system was poor resource allocation. The state did not want any industries to fail and therefore imposed what economist Janos Kornai described as "soft budget" constraints.²¹⁹ Industries, specifically the defense industry, consumed large amounts of resources because they had no incentive to do otherwise. This then deprived Soviet citizens of goods and led to shortages.²²⁰ The terrible

²¹⁵ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 229.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 410.

²¹⁸ Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, "Special Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (excerpt)," 1956, CNN <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/07/documents/khrushchev/>, accessed January 25, 2008.

²¹⁹ Paul Gregory and Mark Harrison, "Allocation under Dictatorship: Research into Stalin's Archive," *Journal of Economic Literature* XLIII (2005): 743.

²²⁰ Paul Gregory and Mark Harrison, "Allocation under Dictatorship: Research into Stalin's Archive," *Journal of Economic Literature* XLIII (2005): 743.

inefficiencies eventually resulted in drastically diminishing returns that were difficult to improve because they were a direct result of the Soviet command system.²²¹ Khrushchev tried to improve the economic system and the welfare of the people by tinkering catastrophically with the agricultural industry and decentralizing some control of the economy, which was designed for war mobilization.²²² But he could not overcome the underlying weaknesses of the Soviet command economy because the system could not function unless it was centralized.

Finally, reform communism seeks to lower the tensions with the West to decrease the need for mobilization and constant preparation for war.²²³ Khrushchev sought “peaceful coexistence” with the West to decrease the risk of nuclear war and the economic burden on the Soviet Union.²²⁴ His various attempts at reform faced strong conservative domestic opposition that in part eventually led to his removal from power in 1964. A little over twenty years later, Gorbachev would pursue all three aspects of reform communism to try and overcome many of the same problems in the Soviet system.

Second, Gorbachev was the first college educated head of the Soviet Union since Lenin.²²⁵ He was comfortable with intellectuals and brought the inputs of Soviet academia into the government’s decision making process.²²⁶ This also reflected Gorbachev’s desire to constructively criticize the system in order to improve it. In addition, Gorbachev had traveled abroad much more often than his predecessors.²²⁷ He

²²¹ William Easterly and Stanley Fischer, "What We Can Learn from the Soviet Collapse," *Finance and Development* 31, no. 4 (1994): 5.

²²² Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 328-333.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 317.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.

²²⁵ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 229.

²²⁶ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 59.

²²⁷ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 42, 74-75. For example, as First Secretary of Stavropol, Gorbachev traveled to countries such as Belgium and Holland. As a tourist he and his wife traveled through France and Italy. In the early 1980’s he made official visits to Canada and the United Kingdom. In contrast, from Stalin on the leaders of the Soviet Union were provincials.

saw first hand the sharp contrast in living standards between East and West.²²⁸ Also, because of his experiences in the West, Gorbachev was perhaps more willing and better able to work with Western leaders.

2. Perestroika and Foreign Policy

Gorbachev, a true believer in communism, wanted to strengthen the Soviet Union relative to the West. Like his predecessors, he believed socialism was the next inevitable stage after capitalism.²²⁹ In a speech to the Politburo in 1985, he noted, “We do not need to change policy. It is correct and it is true. It is genuine Leninist Policy. We need, however, to accelerate, to move forward, to disclose shortcomings and overcome them and realize our shining future.”²³⁰ In fulfilling that agenda, the acceleration of reform became Gorbachev’s chief obsession. He wanted to revive the entire system, as Lenin had supposedly done with his New Economic Policy (NEP) in the 1920s.²³¹ As defined by Anatoly Chernyaev, Gorbachev’s chief foreign policy aide, the central issue of what became known as perestroika, or economic restructuring, was that “the improvement and consequent strengthening of the socialist system, its increasing power, were meant to attain a stronger position in the competition with capitalism.”²³²

To be successful in this effort of perestroika, Gorbachev felt he had to “create favorable external conditions,” and thus Soviet foreign policy became closely tied to domestic reform.²³³ There were three main reasons for this. First, the Soviet Union’s economic resources were terribly misallocated in favor of “guns over butter.” Estimates

²²⁸ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 42, 74-75. For example, as First Secretary of Stavropol, Gorbachev traveled to countries such as Belgium and Holland. As a tourist he and his wife traveled through France and Italy. In the early 1980’s he made official visits to Canada and the United Kingdom. In contrast, from Stalin on the leaders of the Soviet Union were provincials,⁴³.

²²⁹ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 100.

²³⁰ Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 205- 206.

²³¹ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 418.; Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, p. 223. Archie Brown notes that Gorbachev studied Lenin’s publications on the NEP for guidance.

²³² Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 102.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 144.

of the economy's dedication to military affairs range from twenty to forty percent.²³⁴ Gorbachev believed that, if he could reduce tensions with the West, he might gain the domestic political power necessary to override the defense industry's hold on the economy.²³⁵ Second, better relations with the West would also mean greater access to financial and technological transfers that could be used to revive the Soviet economy. Third, Soviet foreign policy was the one area of the government that Gorbachev found relatively easy to control. Unlike the multiple bureaucracies that were involved in managing the economy, relations with the West were dominated by the foreign and defense ministries.²³⁶ And on the public stage, Gorbachev could more easily outmaneuver the defense establishment. Under the scrutiny of the international arena, it would be less able to offer mere platitudes while at the same time doing nothing to change the status quo.²³⁷

Gorbachev and his advisors decided that the best way to start was to formulate an intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty.²³⁸ This was a practical approach for two main reasons. First, since the Soviet Union believed that Pershing II missiles could launch a decapitating strike on Moscow, the intermediate-missile situation was seen as a clear and present danger. Second, the whole affair had greatly increased tensions with Europe and America, and reducing that tension would not only ease the threat to Moscow, but also help bring a return to detente.

3. Centralizing Power

Although Gorbachev was the most powerful person in the Soviet Union, to implement his policies he needed to either replace the old guard or gain their support. Initially, he managed to appease conservatives by publicly maintaining much of the current foreign policy toward the West. At the same time, however, Gorbachev moved to

²³⁴ William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 119.

²³⁵ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 212.

²³⁶ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 123.

²³⁷ Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*, 123-124.

²³⁸ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 127.

take the reins of foreign policy firmly in his own hands. He made an important foreign-affairs personnel move in July 1985 by replacing the foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, who had been a key player in Gorbachev's appointment as general secretary.²³⁹ Nonetheless, it would not be easy for Gorbachev to change direction with him in place since Gromyko had helped formulate the policies Gorbachev wanted to alter.²⁴⁰ In making the decision, Gorbachev was helped by Gromyko's desire to retire to the largely ceremonial position of chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.²⁴¹ The new foreign minister was Eduard Shevardnadze, the former head of the Georgian communist party and a politician with no foreign policy experience.²⁴² Shevardnadze's major qualification was his close relationship with Gorbachev.²⁴³ They had been friends for over twenty years. Also, Shevardnadze had no strong connections in the Kremlin; he was somebody Gorbachev could entirely depend on.²⁴⁴ Gorbachev's reasoning for establishing new blood in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is reflected in his conversations with both Shevardnadze and Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States. In April, Gorbachev told Dobrynin privately that Soviet domestic reforms could not move forward until the arms race was brought to an end.²⁴⁵ And when Shevardnadze was appointed, Gorbachev revealed his belief that the arms race would never end unless Gromyko and his allies were replaced.²⁴⁶

That same year, Gorbachev also promoted Alexander Yakovlev to the Central Committee's Propaganda Department. Yakovlev had been considered too liberal in the Brezhnev years and in 1972 was sent far from Moscow to be ambassador to Canada. In 1983, Gorbachev had brought him back from political exile to head the Institute for

²³⁹ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 87.

²⁴⁰ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 409.

²⁴¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 51.

²⁴² Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*, 100.

²⁴³ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 415.

²⁴⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 575.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 570.

²⁴⁶ Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*, 99.

International Relations and World Economy.²⁴⁷ When Gorbachev became general secretary, Yakovlev quickly became another trusted foreign and domestic policy advisor.²⁴⁸

In yet another political move, in February 1986, Anatoly Chernyaev became Gorbachev's personal assistant for foreign affairs. Chernyaev had previously worked in the Central Committee International Department which, before Gorbachev, was considered a rival of the foreign ministry. Chernyaev was well versed in Soviet foreign policy and often critical of the way it had been conducted.²⁴⁹ Finally, Gorbachev departed from his predecessors by actively consulting with international affairs specialists in the academic institutes.²⁵⁰ These early changes in advisors and the inclusion of the academic institutes were a strong signal that the old ways of conducting foreign policy were over.

4. LEAD UP TO GENEVA

The day after Gorbachev became General Secretary, Reagan sent a letter requesting a meeting which commenced a flurry of high-level dialogue between the superpowers.²⁵¹ Gorbachev and Reagan exchanged numerous letters that covered a wide range of issues – from human rights to Afghanistan to the shooting of U.S. Army Major Arthur Nicholson in East Germany – and focused on setting a date for a summit. Over the summer they finally agreed to have a meeting on “nuclear and space talks” to be held at Geneva in November, 1985.

On September 27, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze met with Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz at the White House and presented the Soviet position: both sides

²⁴⁷ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 136.

²⁴⁸ Svetlana Savranskaya, "Alexander Yakovlev and the Roots of the Soviet Reforms," *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 168* (2005), <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB168/index.htm>, accessed January 23, 2008.

²⁴⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 179-180.

²⁵⁰ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, p. 218. Brown also notes (57-61) that this was not new for Gorbachev. He consulted with Soviet specialists often after returning to Moscow in 1978.

²⁵¹ "Reagan Letter to Gorbachev," March 11, 1985, National Security Archive <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172/Doc2.pdf>, accessed November 20, 2007.

should agree to ban weapons in space and to reduce their total number of strategic missiles by fifty percent. Then, a separate agreement could be reached on all intermediate-range missiles in Europe, including Britain and France.²⁵² The offer was probably in part a reaction to Reagan's speech four days earlier announcing the formation of the American Armed Forces United Space Command, the organization that would manage the strategic defense initiative.²⁵³ The preliminary talks continued at high levels through October and November. The defense initiative dominated these meetings and was a source of great tension. For example, during a conversation with Shultz on November 5, Gorbachev claimed that the military industrial complex governed U.S. foreign policy and that the defense initiative was meant solely to gain an edge over the Soviet Union.²⁵⁴

During the summer, Gorbachev focused on Europe as well. One reason for this effort was probably a memorandum by Alexander Yakovlev which surmised that a motive behind Reagan's invitation to meet was to "confine our relations with the West to the Soviet-American framework (the USA is watching its allies with concern)."²⁵⁵ Consequently, Gorbachev spent much of the summer trying to widen the cleavage between Europe and the United States. He wanted to turn public opinion in Europe completely against both the "euromissiles" and SDI.

In April, for example, Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union would halt its deployment of 414 SS-20s in Europe until November and would end the deployments thereafter if the United States pledged to end the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles to its NATO allies. This offer was rejected by NATO.²⁵⁶ In July, Gorbachev declared a unilateral five month moratorium on nuclear tests beginning in August and extending indefinitely, again, if the United States would agree to do the same. But

²⁵² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 578-579.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 578.

²⁵⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 144.

²⁵⁵ Alexander Yakovlev, "About Reagan," March 12 1985, National Security Archive <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172/Doc3.pdf>, accessed November 10, 2007.

²⁵⁶ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 116.

because the ban would not be verified, the Americans rejected the offer.²⁵⁷ In Paris in October, Gorbachev announced a new modified plan for intermediate-range nuclear forces, offering to reduce the total number of SS-20s that could reach Europe to pre-Pershing levels. That meant that the Soviets would cut the number of SS-20s to 243, the quantity in place before the Pershing IIs were deployed. In exchange, according to his plan, the United States would remove all its Pershing II missiles from Europe.²⁵⁸ This, like the April offer was a departure from the previous Soviet position that strategic weapons, intermediate weapons, and missile defense be all part of one package.²⁵⁹ However, all these offers were sprung on the United States with little warning, which implied to American policy makers that Gorbachev was merely acting on the well-worn Soviet propaganda stage.²⁶⁰

Gorbachev's public relations campaign also involved many interviews, one of which, in *Time Magazine* in August 1985, indicated that SDI, arms control, and financial transfers were high on his list of priorities. "You ask what changes in the world economy could be of benefit to the Soviet Union," Gorbachev said. "First of all, although this belongs more to politics than economics, an end to the arms race. We should prefer to use every ruble that today goes for defense in order to meet civilian, peaceful needs."²⁶¹ He went on to comment on the need for more free trade in general and greater trade between the Soviet Union and the United States in particular. On SDI, the general secretary claimed that it would "whip up an arms race."

First of all, we do not consider it to be a research program. In our view it is the first stage of the project to develop a new ABM system prohibited under the relevant treaty of 1972.²⁶²

²⁵⁷Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 116.

²⁵⁸ A. G. Savel'yev letter to Mikhail Tsyarkin, January 16, 2008.

²⁵⁹ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 127.

²⁶⁰ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 116-117.

²⁶¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Mikhail Gorbachev's Answers to Questions put by Time Magazine* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Pub. House, 1985), 11.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 8.

Finally, in discussing the economy, Gorbachev blustered, “Countless attempts were made in the past to force the Soviet Union to its knees, to exhaust it. All those attempts failed and such attempts in the future will fail too.”²⁶³

5. Geneva: November 19-20, 1985

The United States and the Soviet Union saw the Geneva Summit as a first step in returning to dialogue and reducing tension. It was the first summit in almost seven years, so holding high-level talks was seen by both sides as a success in itself.²⁶⁴ The Reagan administration addressed four areas (outlined here in chapter III): human rights, third world expansionism, arms reductions and ballistic missile defense, and increased exchanges and cooperation.²⁶⁵ Trade was not on the U.S. agenda; in keeping with National Security Decision Directive 75, Reagan wanted to use trade as a carrot to help shape Soviet behavior.²⁶⁶ Gorbachev was focused on stopping the arms race. The Soviet approach remained the same as that outlined in the January 1985 meeting between Shultz and Gromyko: strategic arms reductions, intermediate-range forces reductions, and strategic defense issues were linked. Gorbachev’s April and October offers for a separate agreement on the euromissiles were not a part of his negotiating position at Geneva.²⁶⁷

Gorbachev began the summit by reiterating his claim that the Soviet economy was stronger than ever and that America could not hope to weaken it with an arms race. But he also called for more trade with the United States. Both countries, he said, needed to decrease their defense burdens to free up resources for civilian consumption.²⁶⁸ In that regard, Ambassador Jack Matlock believed Gorbachev was “leading with his chin.”²⁶⁹ It

²⁶³ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Mikhail Gorbachev's Answers to Questions put by Time Magazine* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Pub. House, 1985), 17.

²⁶⁴ See: Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, p. 149. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 586.

²⁶⁵ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 140-141.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁶⁷ A.G. Savel'yev email to Mikhail Tsyarkin, January 16, 2008.

²⁶⁸ "Geneva Summit Plenary Session 11:27 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.," November 19, 1985, National Security Archive <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172/Doc16.pdf>, accessed November 15, 2007.

Geneva Summit (1985).

²⁶⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 156.

was no secret that the Soviet economy was in trouble. Gorbachev's statements, therefore, simply reinforced Reagan's decision to use trade as a leverage to gain concessions.²⁷⁰ In addition, they probably also strengthened Reagan's belief that Gorbachev's economic and technological based fears of SDI could be used to pry concessions.

Ultimately, the Strategic Defense Initiative was the main point of contention at Geneva. On this issue, disagreements between the two sides were highlighted during a private conversation between Reagan and Gorbachev on November 19. Reagan modified Shevardnadze's September proposal to reduce strategic weapons by fifty percent in exchange for an agreement to ban weapons in space. But instead of banning space-based weapons, Reagan proposed that both countries do joint research on strategic defense in "open laboratories," meaning that Soviet and American experts would monitor each other's work. If a feasible missile defense was discovered, the two superpowers would share it. Then, he added, they could jointly eliminate all of their nuclear stockpiles.²⁷¹ Reagan also noted that any missile defense was in the distant future and that SDI was a long-term research project. In addition, he proposed an intermediate nuclear forces treaty, an agreement that would exclude British and French missiles.

Gorbachev had four issues with Reagan's offer. First, the Strategic Defense Initiative could never result in a defensive system that would be able to stop a large strike. Therefore, he reasoned, "the only possible use of a strategic defense was to defend against a weakened retaliatory second strike, not a first strike." To talk of reducing strategic nuclear weapons was folly then, since the Soviet response to SDI would probably involve an increase of strategic nuclear missiles.²⁷²

Second, Gorbachev addressed Reagan's offer for a separate INF Treaty aimed at eliminating all intermediate-range nuclear missiles.²⁷³ Gorbachev implied that an agreement would have to include British and French intermediate-range forces as well.

²⁷⁰ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 156.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

²⁷² "Reagan-Gorbachev Meetings in Geneva, Second Private Meeting 3:40 P.M.-4:45 P.M.," November 19, 1985, National Security Archive <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172/Doc19.pdf>, 4, accessed November 20, 2007.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5.

In addition, Reagan's offer only addressed land-based cruise missiles, not those launched from sea or air. Third, Gorbachev argued, testing of ballistic missile defenses should be confined to laboratories. Under his interpretation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, no testing of prototypes was allowed.

So, in regard to strategic arms reductions (START), Gorbachev tied limitations to ballistic-missile defense research. His proposed offer was a joint statement banning strategic defense research. His fall-back position seemed to be to confine SDI to a strict interpretation of the ABM treaty, whereby no testing would be done outside laboratories. Gorbachev did not directly link SDI to the proposed elimination of intermediate-range missiles. Instead, the hold-up was British and French missiles and his desire to include sea and air-launched cruise missiles. The overall Soviet position, in place since the fall of 1984, was to link strategic defense, strategic arms reductions, and intermediate-range forces. Therefore, whatever held up one area of negotiations held up the entire package. Gorbachev implied that if Reagan would end the Strategic Defense Initiative an Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty was possible. With the SDI, no treaty was doable. At one point on the last day of talks, when Reagan once again proposed an INF agreement and shared SDI research, Gorbachev lost his temper and exclaimed, "Do you take us for idiots?"²⁷⁴

Despite its conflicts, the Geneva Summit ended with an agreement to hold two more summits over two years, one in Washington and another in Moscow. In addition, the superpowers agreed to continue high-level dialogue on arms control and other issues. Even though a treaty was not signed, Geneva was judged a success by both sides and the world.²⁷⁵ Tensions between the superpowers lessened as Reagan and Gorbachev developed a relationship. On nuclear arsenals there was some agreement. The Soviets for the first time approved, in principal, to on-site verification of any disarmament agreements.²⁷⁶ Both sides also agreed to discuss a fifty percent reduction in strategic weapons. The United States altered its position on intermediate-range forces, taking the

²⁷⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 162.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

global “zero option” off the table: not all intermediate missiles needed to be eliminated.²⁷⁷ But, as noted, Reagan and Gorbachev were deadlocked over SDI. Gorbachev was hindered somewhat in the negotiations not only by the framework but also by Soviet violations of the ABM Treaty. Gorbachev called SDI, “space weapons,” and denied the Soviets possessed any. But by Gromyko’s 1984 definition, the Soviet’s anti-satellite weapons tests and the BMD system around Moscow were space weapons.²⁷⁸

Gorbachev also accused Reagan of violating the ABM Treaty with SDI. The American side pointed to the Krasnoyarsk radar station, citing Article VI of the ABM Treaty which called on the signatories “not to deploy in the future radars for early warning of strategic ballistic missile attack except at locations along the periphery of its national territory and oriented outward.”²⁷⁹ But the Krasnoyarsk station was well within Soviet boundaries, and the Americans were able to show it could be part of an early-warning missile defense system.²⁸⁰ The United States clearly indicated it was grounds for America to walk away from the ABM Treaty and not adhere to any of its possible limits on strategic defense research and deployment.²⁸¹

6. After Geneva

The months following Geneva were not promising. Reagan pushed Gorbachev for a date on the Washington Summit which was originally supposed to occur sometime in the summer of 1986. But Gorbachev refused, arguing that he would not agree to a summit unless the working groups could develop a substantial arms-control agreement in which the United States would also agree to constrain SDI.²⁸²

²⁷⁷ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 166-167.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁷⁹ "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems," U.S. Department of State.

²⁸⁰ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 103.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 104. On page 106, Savel'yev notes the Soviets eventually conceded the radar station was a violation of the ABM Treaty and agreed in 1989 to dismantle it.

²⁸² Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, 209.

Nonetheless, Gorbachev did want to expand on the groundwork laid at Geneva. He coveted an arms control agreement to curtail the arms race, decrease tension between the superpowers, and reach an agreement to remove intermediate-range missiles from Western Europe, which he described as a “pistol to our head.”²⁸³ Moreover, an agreement would decrease the defense burden on the Soviet economy and allow him to move more quickly with Perestroika.²⁸⁴ He spoke about this to the Politburo in January 1986.

Our main goal now is to prevent the arms race from reaching a new stage. If we don't do that the danger will increase.... We will be drawn into an arms race that we cannot manage. We will lose, because right now we are already at the end of our tether.²⁸⁵

The “arms race,” in large part, was SDI.

For Gorbachev to maintain his power base during the challenging efforts of perestroika, he had to be seen within the Soviet apparatchik as defending Soviet interests abroad.²⁸⁶ The central security threat, as perceived by Gorbachev, was SDI.²⁸⁷ He continued to push, therefore, for an agreement to reduce nuclear stockpiles contingent on restricting the strategic defense initiative. For instance, on January 16, 1986, Gorbachev unveiled a new proposal to eliminate all nuclear weapons, including those owned by Britain and France, by the year 2000. The process would begin with an agreement to cut strategic forces by fifty percent. But a prerequisite was that the United States abandon SDI. As with the Soviet proposals in 1985, the United States was given no time to respond before the offer was made public. Still, the Americans at least entertained the idea, while the British and French refused to consider it.²⁸⁸

²⁸³ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 83.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁸⁶ Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 265.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 264.

²⁸⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 177-178.

7. To a Surprise Summit

Throughout the summer of 1986 Gorbachev felt his reforms were not moving quickly enough.²⁸⁹ He constantly urged his bureaucracy to move faster. But, for Gorbachev, domestic and foreign policy were linked and the Cold War was stifling his efforts. Consequently, he decided on a bold move: to invite Reagan to a surprise summit and present him with a new initiative. According to Chernyaev, Gorbachev's goal was "to force Reagan to agree to the summit that was necessary for one vital goal of perestroika – the easing of the military burden."²⁹⁰ Gorbachev explained this in a speech to the Politburo in October: "The United States has an interest in keeping the negotiations machine running idle, while the arms race overburdens our economy. That is why we need a breakthrough; we need the process to start moving." He went on to add, "The most important task is to prevent a new round of arms race, [and] 'Tridents,' 'Minuteman' . . . entering space with weapons. Then [we will face] a loss on all sides, because first and foremost it will lead to a wearing-out of our economy."²⁹¹

As a site for the surprise summit, Gorbachev chose Reykjavik, in part because it was half way between the superpowers, but also because Gorbachev did not want to go to Washington until he was sure there would be an agreement to sign. Chernyaev advised Gorbachev to use a three-part strategy at Reykjavik. First, the Strategic Defense Initiative should be de-linked from strategic arms reductions, and the fifty-percent reduction emphasized by Gorbachev should be agreed on regardless of other issues. Second, on intermediate-range missiles, the Soviet position should be no intermediate missiles in Europe. However, they should go along with the American position that French and British missiles should be excluded from an agreement.²⁹² Third, the ABM treaty should be tied to SDI by emphasizing a nuclear test ban. Chernyaev recommended this because, at the time, SDI was largely associated with Edward Teller's idea of a space

²⁸⁹ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 68.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁹¹ Anatoly Chernyaev, "Notes from the Politburo Session " October 8, 1986, National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB203/Document08.pdf>, 4, accessed November 7, 2007.

²⁹² Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 82-83.

based laser powered by a nuclear explosion in space.²⁹³ According to Chernyaev's thinking, "if there is no testing, there will be no SDI."²⁹⁴ Gorbachev accepted most of Chernyaev's proposals, but he made a key decision to keep SDI linked to both an INF treaty and strategic weapons reduction.

Gorbachev advised his group preparing for the Reykjavik summit that, regarding SDI, "Our goal is to prevent the next round of an arms race. If we do not do this ... we will lose this race because we are presently at the limit of our capability."²⁹⁵ He stressed this idea repeatedly. Gorbachev pushed his advisors and the Politburo to be prepared to make real concessions in order to reach an agreement with the United States.²⁹⁶ He also explained the reasoning behind the Soviet position that SDI should be confined to the laboratory.

We must bring out the ABM [anti-missile defense] issue and link it with the ban on nuclear testing. How do we approach this? Start with the fact that up until now orders to resume talks on a full testing ban have not been issued. Are the Americans going to join the moratorium or not? We will not raise this question for now, as well as the question whether we ourselves will resume [testing]. Because if we sit down at the negotiating table with a goal to reach an agreement within two years, why would Congress assign money for this. But if testing is stopped and we do not pull out of the ABM treaty (beyond laboratory experiments), it will be a blow to the SDI and to prospects of space weapons development in general.

Gorbachev felt an agreement was not only necessary for him, but for Reagan as well. The summit, scheduled for October, was carefully timed to occur just before U.S. congressional elections. No agreement reached at Reykjavik, therefore, was expected to hurt Republican chances of keeping a senate majority. Gorbachev sensed that Reagan

²⁹³ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 82-83.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁹⁵ Anatoly Chernyaev, "Gorbachev's Instructions to the Reykjavik Preparation Group," October 4, 1986, National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB203/Document05.pdf>, accessed October 4, 2007.

²⁹⁶ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 81.

wanted to go down in history as a peace president and that that would override the efforts of right-wingers and the military-industrial complex to push the president to hold fast on SDI.²⁹⁷

8. The Reykjavik Summit: 11-12 October, 1986

During the opening days of the Reykjavik Summit, Reagan attempted to tie arms control reductions to the issue of improved human rights in the Soviet Union and, more specifically, to the need for improved emigration policies.²⁹⁸ Gorbachev was not interested in that linkage; he wanted to focus only on arms control.²⁹⁹ He offered a three-point proposal, presented as a package.

Point one: Both sides would reduce strategic nuclear weapons by fifty percent. But the American negotiators disagreed on the use of the term “strategic,” arguing these were not nuclear weapons launched from carrier planes, etc., but rather weapons such as intercontinental ballistic missiles. The Soviets eventually accepted the U.S. definition.³⁰⁰ Gorbachev also seemed to agree with a new Reagan proposal offered late in the summit to eliminate all nuclear weapons within ten years.³⁰¹

Point two of the Soviet package: In regard to intermediate nuclear forces (INF), Gorbachev dropped the Soviet requirement that British and French missiles also be included in negotiations. He proposed instead a “zero option in Europe” and negotiation on the number of Soviet intermediate missiles in Asia.³⁰² Reagan disagreed. The president’s “zero option” had been for a global zero, the elimination of all intermediate missiles. He argued that because intermediate missiles were highly mobile, they could be moved easily from Asia to target Europe.³⁰³ Nonetheless, after substantial discussion,

²⁹⁷ Chernyaev, "Notes from the Politburo Session " National Security Archive, 2.

²⁹⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 218.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 220.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 221.

Reagan agreed to Gorbachev's proposal, and both agreed that one hundred Soviet intermediate missiles could remain in Asia.³⁰⁴

Point three: Both sides would adhere to the Soviet interpretation of the ABM Treaty for ten years, during which time missile defense research would be confined to the laboratory, and all nuclear testing and anti-satellite weapons would be banned.³⁰⁵ On the issue of nuclear testing, Reagan and Gorbachev found a middle ground that would allow for a step-by-step approach.³⁰⁶ But they could not agree on the Strategic Defense Initiative. Thus, their respective interpretations of the ABM treaty remained a sticking point. Gorbachev argued that it precluded testing outside the laboratory. Reagan contended that even a strict interpretation allowed for research and testing of missile defenses. While admitting that he did not know whether SDI would result in a feasible missile defense, Reagan would not agree to constrain research to the laboratory because that would violate the pledge he had made in his 1983 speech to the American people.

Reagan suggested that they replace the ABM treaty with a new agreement which would allow missile defense research and development within America's interpretation of the ABM treaty. If either country decided to go beyond those limits, it would be required to invite experts from the other to observe the tests. If either country developed a workable missile defense, it would share it and eliminate all of its remaining strategic missiles within three years.³⁰⁷ Gorbachev was against the offer.

I cannot take your idea of sharing SDI seriously. You are not willing to share with us your oil-well equipment, digitally guided machine tools, or even milking machines. Sharing SDI would provoke a second American revolution! Let's be realistic and pragmatic.³⁰⁸

In reality, the argument over testing and sharing was a battle over the continuation of the Strategic Defense Initiative. Like Gorbachev, Reagan believed that if he agreed to

³⁰⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 222.

³⁰⁵ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 220.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

limit SDI to laboratory testing, Congress would cut its funding and the initiative would die on the vine.³⁰⁹ So Reagan refused to limit SDI testing and Gorbachev refused to break up his three-point package to at least allow agreements on their common-ground issues. As a result, the Reykjavik Summit ended in a stalemate.

C. NATIONAL SECURITY COMMUNITY

By late 1986, the national security community had lost some influence in formulating Soviet foreign policy but remained a powerful set of actors Gorbachev had to negotiate with to institute arms control policies and of course perestroika. Gorbachev modified the way the Big Five formulated arms negotiations, increasing its role in formulating policy. But he also increased the roles of the Central Committee of the CPSU which as noted had faded away from the Big Five and the International Department, formerly seen by Gromyko as a foreign policy rival. The interagency process of formulating policy was revived but under the careful watch of Gorbachev and his confidants.

The power of all the resistant bureaucracies were weakened because of the lack of support they found in Shevardnadze, the new foreign minister. For example, under Gromyko, the Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense had often dictated arms control agreements, with Shevardnadze this was impossible.

While Gorbachev did not seriously contend with entrenched military spending habits until 1988, he did immediately take steps to minimize the political power of the military establishment. He chose not to elevate Minister of Defense Marshall Sergei Sokolov, who had taken Dimitri Ustinov's place in 1984, to be a full member of the Politburo. It was the first time since the 1960's the Minister of Defense was left out of the inner circle of power.³¹⁰

Gorbachev also outmaneuvered Sokolov. Soon after Geneva, as the general secretary pushed the defense industry to develop a compromise that would assure an

³⁰⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 229.

³¹⁰ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 415.

agreement with the Americans, the military moved to outflank him. Sokolov, in coordination with the General Staff, produced what they believed was an impossible proposition: total nuclear disarmament within a fifteen-year timeframe.³¹¹ Apparently, Sokolov and the military leadership thought this would show the world that the Soviet Union wanted to eliminate nuclear weapons and therefore help it gain the moral high ground. However, they also thought the idea would be rejected by the United States and thus would have no impact on negotiations. In this way, they hoped to assuage Gorbachev while actually changing nothing. Gorbachev happily endorsed the proposal and announced the initiative on January 16, 1986. And, much to the military's dismay, Reagan also was in favor of abolishing nuclear weapons. The military had fallen into its own trap. Having been the originators of the dramatic idea, they could hardly protest Gorbachev's nuclear disarmament proposals once they were accepted by Reagan.³¹²

Nonetheless, the military and defense industries, still powerful actors, were probably behind Gorbachev's decision to re-link SDI to an INF treaty at Reykjavík. Sokolov's role may have been to gain Gorbachev's agreement to keep the link between strategic defenses, INF, and strategic weapons agreements, in exchange for excluding British and French intermediate missiles in Europe from an INF treaty.³¹³

Regarding SDI, the early consensus among the Soviet leadership was that the United States was trying to "develop an impenetrable ABM shield capable of intercepting all the ballistic missiles targeted against the United States and its allies."³¹⁴ It was believed such a system was at least fifteen to twenty years away. However, they also believed there was potential in the future for a ballistic missile defense that could intercept a large portion of incoming missiles. Therefore in the near term, a U.S. ballistic missile defense could be used to stop a weakened second strike from the Soviet Union.³¹⁵

³¹¹ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 92.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 93.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

From the Soviets' perspective, even the concept of "space-based weapons" undermined strategic stability by posing a threat to satellites that provided early-warning and command-and-control communications. Furthermore, the strategic defense initiative presented a roadblock to arms reductions because a cheap way to counter SDI would be to build more strategic weapons. In light of these concerns, the Big Five "unanimously concurred" in 1985 that SDI was the number-one priority in negotiations with the United States, and they maintained this position throughout the discussions at Reykjavik.³¹⁶

More important, the Big Five devised a strategy to derail the U.S. initiative. In January 1986 Gorbachev had proposed on his own initiative a policy of non-withdrawal from the ABM Treaty for fifteen years.³¹⁷ In addition, based on recommendations from the Big Five, the Soviets proposed a ban on anti-satellite weapons and deployment of weapons in space in May 1986.³¹⁸ And, in modified form, Gorbachev presented both proposals during the fall at Reykjavik.

The power of the defense establishment fell suddenly on April 26, 1986, with the explosion of one of the four nuclear power plants at Chernobyl, killing at least eight thousand people and spreading nuclear fallout over Western Europe and the Ukraine.³¹⁹ The Chernobyl power plants were under the Military Industrial Commission (VPK) and the catastrophe revealed more than their incompetence. As Gorbachev soon learned, they had hidden safety issues from the Politburo.³²⁰ And earlier in 1986, with perestroika stalled in the halls of his bureaucracies, Gorbachev had instituted glasnost, a term meaning "openness" and dating from the days of Alexander II when the government wanted to officially spur open constructive political debate.³²¹ Glasnost made it impossible to hide the Chernobyl disaster from the Soviet people.³²² Thus, the image of

³¹⁶Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 175.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War*, 288.

³²⁰ Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*, 143.

³²¹ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 421.

³²² Ibid.

the military was seriously tarnished and with it the old guard lost valuable political capital. Chernobyl also left the military leadership deeply shaken, for it brought home what a nuclear war might really be. To Marshall Akhromeyev, it revealed for the first time that there could be no victory in nuclear war.³²³

Throughout the time period from March 1985 to November 1986, the scientific community engaged in missile defense related research. In July 1985, the Central Committee approved “long-term research and development aimed at exploring the ways to create a multi-layered defense system with ground based and space-based elements.”³²⁴ The goal was to develop by 1995 the technical expertise to design and deploy a missile defense system.³²⁵ Research included, anti-satellite weapons, space based missile defenses, and lasers.³²⁶ Meanwhile, Soviet scientists also continued to develop countermeasures to SDI in conjunction with the defense industry.

In addition, before Reykjavik, prominent scientists such as Roald Sagdeev and Yevgeny Velikhov counseled Gorbachev that SDI was not a short term or even medium term threat.³²⁷ By this time they did not believe it was physically possible to make a complete missile defense system and therefore saw no need for the Soviet Union to try and match the American defense initiative. Moreover, these same scientists did not expect Gorbachev to make SDI a major issue at Reykjavik and were taken aback at the lost opportunity to make progress on intermediate and strategic nuclear force reductions.³²⁸ And to Sagdeev, Gorbachev’s insistence on confining SDI to laboratories also did not make much sense since the Soviet Union had in the past put laboratories in space; therefore it would be easy for the Americans to turn this against them.³²⁹ In fact,

³²³ Zubok, *The Soviet Union in the Cold War*, 288.

³²⁴ Podvig, "Did Star Wars Win the Cold War?," 8.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid., 9-10.

³²⁷ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 248.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

at Shevardnadze's behest, Sagdeev went public with his comments and was quoted as early as November 1986 in the American press on this issue.³³⁰

However, they also worked as part of an international peace movement to end the arms race. Yevgeny Velikhov, vice president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, for example, used Gorbachev's concern over the Strategic Defense Initiative to convince him that a nuclear test ban moratorium would be useful. It would not only help the Soviets gain the moral high ground, but also, if the United States agreed to a moratorium it would hinder SDI's development.³³¹

D. CONCLUSION

Interestingly both the anti-SDI school and the thesis that SDI was a secondary factor in ending the Cold War are correct during this period. The pro-SDI school fails because the defense initiative was not a primary factor driving Gorbachev's foreign policy, though he was obsessed with stopping SDI. In addition, it does not appear there was any immediate concern that Soviet research into missile defenses critically threatened the Soviet economy.

Two key factors support the anti-SDI argument. First, as noted, it appears the Soviets did not invest significant resources to develop either their own missile defense or extensive countermeasures during this time frame. They did authorize a long-term research project, but did not dedicate significant resources to it. Second, SDI was definitely an obstacle in the negotiations and extended the Cold War. Had Reagan traded SDI away or Gorbachev de-linked it from his other agendas, the Cold War would most likely have ended at the Reykjavik summit. And the reason Gorbachev maintained the linkage, despite Chernyaev's and the scientists' advice is probably, at least in part, because of an agreement Gorbachev worked out with the defense ministry. Gorbachev had to balance the concerns of the Politburo or risk being deposed like Khrushchev, the last General Secretary who seriously tried to reform the system. The domestic

³³⁰ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 248.; Robert Toth, "Shultz and Shevardnadze Meet Today in Bid to Salvage Iceland Progress," *Los Angeles Times* November 5, 1986.

³³¹ Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, 271.

bureaucratic politics surrounding SDI were certainly evident after Reykjavik when Shevardnadze asked Sagdeev to publicly undermine Gorbachev's position on laboratories by noting the Soviets had put them in space in the past. This was most likely a move by Shevardnadze to outflank the defense ministry's position and to help him convince Gorbachev to abandon this argument.

All of this begs an important question: would Gorbachev have pursued negotiations with Reagan even if there had never been a Strategic Defense Initiative? While it is difficult to engage in counterfactuals, the answer in this instance is most certainly yes. After all, Gorbachev had described the euromissiles as "a pistol to our head," and would no doubt have attempted to reach an arms control agreement even if Reagan had never announced SDI. Thus, SDI created hurdles for Gorbachev not only in his own aims, but also in terms of convincing domestic partners to engage in meaningful negotiations and to enact perestroika. That said, it is also difficult to gauge what the bureaucrats' resistance to negotiations would have been had there been no SDI. For example, in the absence of SDI, one can imagine the defense industry maintaining their stiff insistence on the inclusion of British and French missiles in INF talks.

Regardless, SDI did exist and though it extended the Cold War, it also motivated Gorbachev to engage in dialogue and reach an arms control treaty. If he could not stop the U.S. initiative, he foresaw an arms race that would greatly increase the economic burden of the Soviet Union. And he would not be able to reallocate resources to perestroika with an arms race fueled by SDI in high gear. Also, as long as tensions were high, he could reasonably expect the United States to continue to hinder Soviet access to financial and technology transfers. As he proclaimed to the Politburo, if the arms race continued, he expected the Soviets would lose. This supports the thesis that Gorbachev perceived SDI as technological and economic threat the Soviet Union could not match. Moreover, Gorbachev believed the Strategic Defense Initiative would continue to destabilize relations between the superpowers and might result in war. To Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership, the initiative was an offensive weapons system that would encourage a first strike by the United States. So SDI encouraged negotiation on many levels. But as noted there were other factors such as the euromissiles and the underlying reason remained the economy which was weak enough to push Gorbachev towards negotiations regardless of SDI.

VI. EXITING THE COLD WAR: NOVEMBER 1986–DECEMBER 1987

A. INTRODUCTION

Between November 1986 and December 1987 the Strategic Defense Initiative was a secondary factor driving the Soviet Union to exit the Cold War. In February 1987, just four months after the stalemate at Reykjavik, Gorbachev removed the linkage between SDI and an INF treaty. Though he and the Big Five still wanted to kill the defense initiative, Gorbachev needed the arms control agreement quickly to move forward with perestroika. In part, one reason Gorbachev likely felt time was running out was the growing economic crisis, as his ill-fated anti-alcohol campaign and a precipitous drop in oil prices threatened to overwhelm the Soviet economy. However, Gorbachev's decision also reflected the view of his policy and scientific advisors that SDI was a long-term threat and a future U.S. administration would probably be more willing to negotiate it away. In addition, in the spring of 1987, the military, a strong source of opposition to Gorbachev's arms control efforts, was discredited when Mathias Rust landed his Cessna in Red Square, making it much easier for Gorbachev to implement policies. Thus, on December 8, 1987, Gorbachev and Reagan signed the INF Treaty. In addition to his previous concessions, Gorbachev relented on SDI and agreed to a global zero on intermediate missiles as well the inclusion of a global zero on Soviet land-based short-range missiles. Both sides also agreed to thorough verification of the treaty.

B. GENERAL SECRETARY

After Reykjavik Gorbachev was initially optimistic. Though there was no agreement, he came away believing that one was possible in the near future, that he and Reagan had an understanding of what had to be done.³³² He attributed Reagan's attachment to SDI to his being a prisoner to the military-industrial complex and to his

³³² Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 85.

desire to gain superiority over the Soviet Union.³³³ But some of Gorbachev's reactions to the failed summit reflected a frustrated hardliner. For example, for a time during the fall of 1986, Gorbachev apparently believed, despite the advice of Chernyaev and others, that the Soviet Union would develop its own missile defense system and that this would take the Americans by "surprise."³³⁴ And in December 1986, he ordered the resumption of nuclear tests, thereby ending the Soviet's eighteen-month unilateral moratorium.³³⁵ During this time the United States had conducted twenty four tests, mostly in support of SDI, and Soviet representatives stated their own tests would resume unless America agreed to negotiate a complete ban on nuclear trials.³³⁶ By late February 1987 however, Gorbachev decided to remove limits on SDI as a precondition for INF talks in order to reach an arms agreement. There appear to be three primary factors which influenced his decision.

One was the economy. On October 30, 1986, he told the Politburo, "the [economic] situation has us all by the throat."³³⁷ In April 1987, he stated that "Our financial position has reached the point of crisis," a crisis that was exacerbated by two factors. First, the anti-alcohol campaign begun in 1985 was an unmitigated disaster. Gorbachev hoped it would increase productivity, save the government money in terms of lost work hours, and help maintain order.³³⁸ When warned by both his finance minister and the first deputy of Gosplan that the campaign would result in revenue and budget shortfalls, Gorbachev declared, "We cannot tolerate our drunk budget any longer."³³⁹ By the end of 1986 alcohol production had been severely cut and sales had fallen by almost forty percent, with a corresponding fall in much-needed revenues.³⁴⁰ In 1984, alcohol

³³³ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 87.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

³³⁶ "Soviets to End A-Moratorium ", *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1986.

³³⁷ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 91.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ "Session of the Politburo of the CC CPSU, April 4 1985", National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172/Doc8.pdf>, accessed January 15, 2008.

³⁴⁰ Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*, p. 135. Calculated from table 5-14.

revenues had accounted for 4.8 percent of the budget. By 1986, it accounted for only 3.4 percent and there was nothing to replace the loss.³⁴¹ Moreover, products containing alcohol, from cologne to window-washing fluid, were flying off the shelves. Government supplies of sugar, a key ingredient in distilling alcohol, were plummeting. Rationing of basic goods was a very real possibility.³⁴²

Even worse and beyond Gorbachev's control was the crisis in oil, which for decades had been the keystone of the Soviet economy. It brought in by far the most revenue and was the main source of hard currency, which was critical for buying grain.³⁴³ The Soviet Union had been the world's largest grain importer since the 1960s, and without imported grain the USSR could not feed its people.³⁴⁴ As long as the price of oil remained high and the cost of extracting oil remained low, the Soviets were able to manage. But in 1985, Saudi Arabia tripled its production and the price of oil plummeted: crude-oil prices fell from more than twenty-six dollars a barrel in 1985 to just over fourteen dollars in 1986.³⁴⁵ Soviet revenues also collapsed. In addition, the Soviets had not invested in technology and had over-used their wells to meet previous short-term needs. This meant that on top of the drop in prices, Soviet oil production was falling and the cost of extracting oil was rising.³⁴⁶ Finally, the Soviets were obligated to sell discounted oil to their satellites or risk greater instability in the empire.

In short, the loss in revenues from the oil shock and the anti-alcohol campaign threatened the stability of the Soviet Union. One way out might have been foreign loans, but with the Cold War still on and with Reagan in office there was little opportunity for foreign aid.³⁴⁷ Ending the Cold War was another solution, and it would also reduce

³⁴¹ Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*, p. 135. Calculated from table 5-14.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁴⁵ Calculated from: Energy Information Administration, "Petroleum Marketing Monthly," January 2008, http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil_gas/petroleum/data_publications/petroleum_marketing_monthly/current/pdf/pmmtab1.pdf, accessed January 20, 2008.

³⁴⁶ Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*, 109.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

military costs. As Abel Aganbegian, one of Gorbachev's leading economic advisors, pointed out, "Naturally we are interested in disarmament, because then we can implement perestroika faster."³⁴⁸ So in 1987 there was a strong, almost imperative, underlying economic incentive for Gorbachev to negotiate an end to the Cold War. Yet another factor was the push by prominent Soviet scientists to promote the view that SDI was a long-term threat that the Soviet Union could postpone addressing. This aspect will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

An event that was to prove very significant occurred on February 25, 1987. Alexander Yakovlev, a trusted foreign policy advisor, sent a memorandum to Gorbachev, reviewing a recent Moscow visit by the U.S. Foreign Relations Council.³⁴⁹ Among Yakovlev's conclusions was the notion that the Reagan administration would never give up SDI, but if Gorbachev were to remove the linkage to SDI, an INF Treaty could be signed quickly.³⁵⁰ Yakovlev also noted that support for SDI in the United States was waning and that American hardliners were counting on the Soviets to stick to their package proposal to help save the defense initiative. Therefore, to outmaneuver the Americans, Gorbachev should de-link SDI from the INF talks. This would also result in better relations with Europe and China. And, in any case, it was unlikely that intermediate missiles would be needed to penetrate a U.S. missile defense system. Thus, the SDI issue could be deferred and linked to future talks with a new administration that would probably be more willing to negotiate.³⁵¹ Finally, though Yakovlev admitted it would appear Gorbachev was making a concession to the United States, the decision on

³⁴⁸ Hedrick Smith, "Gorbachev's Shrewd Summitry," *The New York Times*, December 6, 1987.

³⁴⁹ The members included among others, former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance; former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General David C. Jones; and Jeane Kirkpatrick, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

³⁵⁰ Alexander Yakovlev, "Memorandum for Gorbachev, "To the Analysis of the Fact of the Visit of Prominent American Political Leaders to the USSR (Kissinger, Vance, Kirkpatrick, Brown, and others)," February 25, 1987, National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/russian/Final1987-02-25%20Yakovlev%20memo.pdf>, accessed February 8, 2008.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

linkage needed to be made quickly so the Soviets could regain the initiative.³⁵² In regard to START, Yakovlev recommended a fifty percent reduction in strategic forces.³⁵³

The next day, Gorbachev and the Politburo agreed to untie the Reykjavik package and pursue a separate INF Treaty. Gorbachev's reasoning closely followed the Yakovlev memo. At the meeting, Marshal Sokolov, the defense minister, agreed to break the linkage but noted that British and French missiles were already excluded from an INF agreement, perhaps a reminder to Gorbachev that in his view enough concessions had been made.³⁵⁴ On March 2, Gorbachev officially announced the decision to remove the link between an INF treaty and SDI. However, he maintained that SDI would still be linked to a START agreement.

Of course the conclusion of such an agreement....should be conditioned by a decision on preventing deployment of weapons in outer space, in view of the organic connection of these [offensive parity] issues.³⁵⁵

Negotiations for an INF agreement with the United States moved quickly. In an April meeting with Secretary of State Schultz, Gorbachev agreed to include Soviet shorter-range missiles and expanded on the types of on-site verification that would be included in the treaty. They also discussed strategic arms reductions, and here Gorbachev touched on SDI and expanded his definition of laboratory testing to include field testing but not space testing.³⁵⁶ So even with START, Gorbachev indicated he was willing to move past his Reykjavik position regarding SDI. But this clarification could

³⁵² Yakovlev, "Memorandum for Gorbachev, "To the Analysis of the Fact of the Visit of Prominent American Political Leaders to the USSR (Kissinger, Vance, Kirkpatrick, Brown, and others)," National Security Archive, 10-11.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵⁴ "On Soviet-American Relations and Negotiations on Nuclear and Space Armaments ", February 26, 1987, National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/russian/Final1987-02-26%20Politburo.pdf>, accessed December 18, 2007.

³⁵⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Speeches and Writings Volume 2*, 1st ed. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987), 181.

³⁵⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev and U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, October 23, 1987" National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/russian/Final1987-04-14%20Gorbachev-Shultz.pdf>, accessed February 5, 2008.

also be seen as a move by Gorbachev to preemptively defeat any attempt by the United States to use Sagdeev's argument that laboratories could be in space.

Then in October, Secretary Shultz met with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze to go over the final plans for the Washington Summit and hit an unexpected bump over SDI. By this time, both sides had agreed that the Washington Summit would focus on signing an INF treaty but now Gorbachev called for an agenda that would also include strategic arms reductions (START), implying that an INF treaty would not be sufficient reason to hold a summit.³⁵⁷ And START was linked to the Soviet proposal that both sides agree to not withdraw from the ABM Treaty for a period of ten years, which in Gorbachev's view meant no testing or deploying of weapons in space.³⁵⁸ So, again Gorbachev was apparently making an effort to contain SDI and essentially re-linking all three issues. Ambassador Jack Matlock and Pavel Palazchenko, Gorbachev's interpreter, attribute Gorbachev's evident backsliding to a Central Committee meeting only days before where Boris Yeltsin, a non-voting member of the Politburo, openly criticized Gorbachev for the lack of progress on perestroika and announced his decision to resign from the party leadership.³⁵⁹ This surprising turn of events put Gorbachev on shaky ground and, they argue, he feared that looking weak towards the Americans would bolster the conservatives in the party who were against any concessions and would somehow be able to use the Yelstin incident to their advantage. In any case, Shevardnadze moved quickly to repair the damage and put the summit back on track.³⁶⁰

Gorbachev and Reagan signed the INF treaty on December 8, 1987, fourteen months after the stalemate at Reykjavik. Notably, it was the general secretary who made all the compromises, agreeing to even more than Reagan's 1981 "zero option" proposal.

³⁵⁷ Pavel Palazhchenko, *My Years With Gorbachev And Shevardnadze: The Memoir Of A Soviet Interpreter* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 73.

³⁵⁸ "October 23, 1987: Memorandum of conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and U.S. Secretary of State G. Shultz. Excerpt.," December 10, 2007, National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/russian/Final1987-10-28%20Gorbachev%20Letter%20to%20Reagan.pdf>, accessed December 15, 2007.

³⁵⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 267.; Palazhchenko, *My years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze*, 74.

³⁶⁰ Palazhchenko, *My years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze*, 74.

In what became known as the “double zero option,” the Soviet Union pledged to eliminate not only all intermediate range missiles but also all short-range intermediate missiles, of which the West had none.³⁶¹ This was a reversal of the compromise reached at Reykjavik, where Reagan had agreed that the Soviets could keep one hundred intermediate missiles in Asia. In the talks, Gorbachev refrained from discussing SDI, until Reagan mentioned his intention to move forward with research and possible deployment.

Mr. President, you do what you have to do.... And if in the end you think you have a system you want to deploy, go ahead and deploy it. Who am I to tell you what to do? I think you're wasting money.... We are moving in another direction, and we preserve our option to do what we think is necessary in our own national interest at the time. And we think we can do it less expensively and with greater effectiveness.³⁶²

But as noted, the Soviets did not discount SDI and the initiative would continue to be an obstacle in negotiating a START treaty, which was not accomplished until July 1991. Soviet negotiators were still trying to find a compromise on SDI when the empire dissolved later that year.³⁶³

C. THE NATIONAL SECURITY COMMUNITY

The defense community tacitly approved of Gorbachev's decision to remove the linkage between SDI and an INF treaty. But the defense minister, Sokolov, was against the concessions Gorbachev was making and fought constantly with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze over the arms control negotiations.³⁶⁴ While Sokolov was unable to stop Gorbachev's foreign policy, his views had to be accounted for. For instance, Gorbachev's decision in December 1986 to end the nuclear test moratorium was strongly influenced by the military and defense industry which argued that the Soviets might fall

³⁶¹ Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 557.

³⁶² Talbott, *The Master of the Game*, 363-364.

³⁶³ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 181.

³⁶⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 624.

behind in developing strategic technology if tests were not resumed.³⁶⁵ However, due to an unprecedented event that occurred on May 29, 1987, the defense community lost a great deal of political clout. Mathias Rust, a West German teenager, piloted a single-engine Cessna undetected from West Germany through Soviet air defenses and landed in Red Square. The episode brought international embarrassment on the Soviet military, and Gorbachev used the incident to remove many of his domestic adversaries. Sokolov and numerous generals and senior officers who had reservations about perestroika and Gorbachev's "new thinking" were retired. Marshal Akhromeyev remained: he had been supportive of Gorbachev's efforts in the INF treaty because it would remove the threat of the Pershing II missiles.³⁶⁶ The new defense minister Gorbachev selected, Dimitri Yazov, was ignorant of the arms control talks, which gave Gorbachev more flexibility in negotiations.³⁶⁷

While SDI was no longer linked to an INF treaty after February 1987, the members of the Big Five continued their efforts to stop the defense initiative. In June, they proposed an agreement to adhere to a strict interpretation of the ABM Treaty for ten years, with testing conducted literally only in the laboratory and with a ban on any testing of missile defenses that could potentially be based in space.³⁶⁸ The agreement was approved by Gorbachev but rejected by the Americans who argued it would essentially add new provisions to the ABM Treaty.³⁶⁹

The Big Five was generally supportive of the intermediate range missile reduction proposals in the months before the Washington Summit.³⁷⁰ But the representatives, especially from the Ministry of Defense and Military Industrial Commission, strongly objected to Gorbachev's September concession to include shorter-range SS-23 missiles in the proposed INF Treaty. They argued that the proposed treaty covered missiles whose

³⁶⁵ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 89.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 103n.

³⁶⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 625-626.

³⁶⁸ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 177-178.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁷⁰ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 139.

range was greater than 500 kilometers, while the SS-23's range was only 400 kilometers. Therefore, the Big Five argued that the INF treaty should be adjusted to include all missiles whose range was greater than 400 kilometers, which would bring the American Lance 2 missiles into the agreement. Gorbachev's simply ignored their proposal.³⁷¹ That he was able to do so with no repercussions is one indication that his domestic opponents no longer were a significant threat to his freedom of movement.

During this period, Soviet scientists also influenced Gorbachev's decision to remove the linkage between SDI and an arms control agreement. First, to its own comparative advantage, the scientific community had by this time shifted its focus to inexpensive anti-satellite countermeasures that could destroy the space components of a SDI system if the United States ever put them in place.³⁷² They offered the potential for a viable alternative to defeat SDI that would not demand too much from the Soviet economy and could give Gorbachev an opportunity to concede on SDI but maintain some of his domestic political support.

Second, prominent scientists with access to Gorbachev continued to urge him to remove SDI as an obstacle to arms control. In December 1986, Gorbachev allowed the physicist Andrei Sakharov to return from internal exile. He had been banished in 1980 for protesting Soviet human rights violations and the Afghan war.³⁷³ In a speech on February 15, 1987, at an international nuclear disarmament forum in Moscow, Sakharov pushed to break the linkage between the Strategic Defense Initiative and INF or START. If anything, he argued SDI was a long-term threat and should not deter arms reductions in the near term.³⁷⁴ According to Strobe Talbott, influenced by Sakharov, Roald Sagdeev and other leading Soviet scientists came to believe that they had "overestimated how much damage SDI could do to strategic stability in the short and even medium term."³⁷⁵ But Sagdeev had already given similar opinions to Gorbachev before Reykjavik. More

³⁷¹ Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 133-135.

³⁷² Podvig, "Did Star Wars Win the Cold War?," 21.

³⁷³ Frances FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 436.

³⁷⁴ Talbott, *The Master of the Game*, 360.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

likely, Sakharov's comments reinforced Sagdeev's beliefs and may have changed the opinion of other influential scientists such as Velikhov who according to Sakharov, argued privately in support of maintaining the linkage between SDI and an INF agreement.³⁷⁶ Certainly, Gorbachev's statement to Reagan at Reykjavik echoed the opinion of his scientific advisers and Sakharov.³⁷⁷ However, the scientists remained concerned over SDI in the Strategic Arms Reductions Talks. For example, at the end of the Washington summit, Velikhov, vice president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, commented,

Lets go for the 50% cut in strategic weapons. Don't test weapons in space for the period it takes to make these cuts, and by the end of the process, see what you want – more cuts or “Star Wars.” By then, most people in the world will prefer more cuts.³⁷⁸

D. CONCLUSION

In the signing of the INF Treaty in 1987, SDI was a secondary factor. There is no evidence that SDI was a primary factor for Gorbachev to enter into negotiations during this time frame, instead it was one of many factors. The economy was in turmoil but this was more because of the drop in oil prices and the anti-alcohol campaign, than any increase in defense spending to research means to defeat SDI.

There is evidence to support the anti-SDI school in that the defense initiative remained a domestic political hurdle for Gorbachev. The Rust affair checked the power of the defense community but the growing instability of the regime, exemplified by Yeltsin's resignation, still made Gorbachev vulnerable to hard line conservatives. But these difficulties did not prevent or prolong the signing of the INF Treaty in December. And this also can be seen as another reason to negotiate. The sooner Gorbachev could declare peace with the United States the better able he would be to justify better relations with the West.

³⁷⁶ Andrei Sakharov, *Gor'kii, Moskva, Daleye Vezde* (New York: 1990), 50.

³⁷⁷ FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 436.

³⁷⁸ Robert Sheer, "Members of Soviet Team Privately Concede Disappointment With Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1987.

And if there was to be any hope of righting the economy and moving forward with perestroika, he would need Western technology, loans, and to reallocate defense resources to domestic needs. All of these options would remain blocked as long as the Cold War continued: time was not on his side. The most viable way to end the conflict was through arms control and the best option remained an INF treaty. But as Gorbachev had learned at Reykjavik, as long as the Soviets linked SDI to negotiations there would be no agreement while Reagan was in office. Therefore, the obstacle of SDI had to be removed.

By February 26, 1987, Gorbachev had decided it was in the Soviet interest to untie the Reykjavik package and remove the linkage between the Strategic Defense Initiative and the INF talks. His argument to the Politburo to remove the linkage was that the Reagan administration, beholden as it was to the military industrial complex, wanted negotiations to fail. Therefore, to outmaneuver them, the Soviets should de-link SDI at least from an INF agreement. This is interesting because he was essentially arguing that in order to beat the Americans, the Soviet Union should accede to U.S. terms.

The opinion of Soviet scientists regarding SDI also contributed to the change in direction. They still considered SDI a threat in the long-term, but believed it was no longer a real threat in the near- or mid-term. However, leaders in the Soviet scientific community had held this opinion before Reykjavik and had advised Gorbachev that SDI was not a real threat. Therefore the difference in this time frame was the prominence of the scientists' views which probably helped give Gorbachev the political room he needed to remove the linkage.

In addition, over the coming months Gorbachev conceded again to American wishes, agreeing to include Soviet short-range missiles in the treaty. In this decision, the diminished power of the defense bureaucracy was evident in that Gorbachev was simply able to disregard their protests. Moreover, it also reflected Gorbachev's desire to reach an agreement and reduce nuclear stockpiles. However, as noted, Gorbachev was still under strong pressure from the conservatives in the communist party. His brief backpedaling in the October meeting with Secretary Shultz shows that domestic politics was still a factor in foreign policy.

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VII. ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF SDI IN THE END OF THE COLD WAR

A. INTRODUCTION

This thesis examined three schools of thought on the role of the Strategic Defense Initiative in the end of the Cold War. The two positions of the pro-SDI school are not supported by the available evidence. The argument that the Soviet's tried and failed to create either missile defense systems or effective countermeasures is clearly not true. Indeed, the USSR did not invest a crippling amount of resources into developing a Soviet SDI but instead, for the most part, bundled existing programs together into relatively inexpensive countermeasures. The second position, that in light of SDI the Soviet leadership perceived they could never win an arms race and therefore sought negotiations, is to a degree correct. However, since SDI was not a primary trigger but was instead one of many factors threatening the Soviet system this argument does not support the pro-SDI school. The anti-SDI school is correct that the defense initiative often hindered negotiations and probably prolonged the conflict. But, even though this is true, SDI was also one more strong reason for the Soviet Union to negotiate with the United States and in the end may have contributed to a more comprehensive arms agreement. Finally, the anti-SDI school argument that Soviet economy was not threatened by SDI may or may not be correct but it is clear that Gorbachev perceived SDI would mean an arms race in space that would ruin the economy. Therefore, this anti-SDI argument is not accurate. The case that SDI was a secondary factor is best supported by the available evidence. SDI highlighted the Soviet Union's economic and technological backwardness relative to the West but was one of many pressures on the declining Soviet empire that influenced Gorbachev's ability and desire to exit the Cold War.

B. THE PRO-SDI SCHOOL

The pro SDI school, that argues SDI was a primary factor in ending the Cold War, is based on two lines of thought, neither of which is supported by the available evidence.

One, the position that the Soviets tried and failed to make their own missile defense system and that this drove them to exit the Cold War, is clearly incorrect. In 1985, the Soviets launched an in depth research program to develop the technical capabilities to make and deploy a missile defense system by 1995, should it be required. But their own research helped convince the scientists that a complete missile defense shield was not feasible with the available technology, at least not in the near or mid term. By early 1987, they also came to believe that even practicable partial defenses could not be deployed in the mid term. In fact, by the time of the Reykjavik summit, prominent scientists such as Roald Sagdeev were discounting the threat of SDI. So while Soviet scientists did fail to develop an effective missile defense system, this brought them, by late 1986 to early 1987, to discount the ability of the Americans to do the same. Their concern over SDI also diminished because they found relatively cheap countermeasures were an effective alternative. Therefore, in order for this argument to be correct, Gorbachev would have to have believed the Americans were able to do something his scientific advisors said was impossible. Gorbachev's decision to maintain the linkage between SDI and nuclear arms reductions at the Reykjavik Summit superficially supports this thesis. But in reality, Gorbachev's reasons for keeping the linkage seems to be the result of choosing the more conservative advice of his scientific advisors and of bureaucratic bargaining with the ministry of defense. His decision to remove the linkage in February 1987 was not a result of the belief that SDI was an unmatched threat but instead reflected, in part, the belief that SDI should not be treated as an immediate concern. Finally, at no time does it appear that the Soviet Union invested significant additional resources in this research project. That is, many of the programs they investigated had already existed in some form before the announcement of SDI, and while the additional resources dedicated to researching countermeasures or missile defense systems did add some burden to the economy, its impact was minimal.

The second argument that SDI highlighted the economic and technical backwardness of the Soviet Union and thus convinced them they could not afford to compete with the United States is more ambiguous. In a sense it is true, as Gorbachev flatly told to the Politburo in January 1986, that the main goal was to avoid an arms race

in space because the Soviets would lose it.³⁷⁹ But for the pro-SDI school to be correct the Strategic Defense Initiative would have to have been the primary factor for the Soviets to enter into arms control negotiations with the United States and for Gorbachev to sign the INF Treaty. It is here that this position of the pro-SDI school falls short.

First, beginning in the Carter administration, influential Soviet leaders like Yuri Andropov began to believe the correlation of forces was moving against the USSR. In 1981, Andropov initiated operation RYAN to gather information on the purported American plans for a surprise attack. This level of paranoia, that probably reflected the stain of Hitler's surprise invasion in 1941, continued to increase with the euromissile issue and Reagan's military buildup. The president's announcement of SDI sent it to a fever pitch. But the point is Andropov was already significantly alarmed without SDI.

A year later, the decision to resume negotiations was not driven entirely by SDI, though Gorbachev was appreciably alarmed by the American initiative and insisted it be tied to the reduction of intermediate and strategic weapons. But, SDI was not a primary factor in seeking negotiations and a drawback from the Cold War, there were multiple reasons to negotiate in the absence of SDI. And this is a key point, as we have seen had SDI never been announced it is still very likely that Gorbachev would have sought negotiations and a reprieve from the Cold War. Therefore SDI was neither a necessary nor sufficient as a single factor for ending the conflict.

C. THE ANTI-SDI SCHOOL

The anti-SDI school is correct that SDI added another layer to negotiations and in that sense prolonged the Cold War. In the fall of 1983, SDI was probably one more reason, on top of the euromissiles, to walk out on the INF and START negotiations. And SDI was probably also a factor in the Soviet decision to avoid negotiations until after Reagan's reelection. The defense initiative reinforced Soviet beliefs that Reagan was "unpredictable," and not serious about negotiations, and they therefore did not want to hand him a "victory" by agreeing to talks before the November elections.

³⁷⁹ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 84.

At the Geneva and especially the Reykjavik summit, SDI was a roadblock to reaching the INF and START treaties. At Reykjavik, had Reagan agreed to trade the Strategic Defense Initiative away in exchange for the significant nuclear arms reductions Gorbachev offered, or had Gorbachev agreed to de-link SDI from INF and START, the Cold War would probably have ended in October 1986. And the anti-SDI school is also correct that domestic politics played a role in maintaining the linkage. Both Chernyaev and scientists such as Roald Sagdeev told Gorbachev that SDI was not a threat and Chernyaev recommended removing the linkage. Gorbachev may not have done this in part because he had made an agreement with the ministry of defense to maintain the linkage in order to gain their support to remove British and French intermediate forces from the Soviet position.

The anti-SDI school falls short though in its argument that SDI did not threaten the Soviet economy. It may very well be true that technically the Soviet economy had the capacity maintain an incremental increase in defense spending. But the perception by key decision makers, most importantly Gorbachev, was that the economy could not afford to favor defense anymore than it was and that in fact a reduction in defense spending was imperative. Gorbachev was adamant in his belief that an arms race in space would break the Soviet economy and ruin perestroika.

D. SDI WAS A SECONDARY FACTOR

The evidence best supports the thesis that the Strategic Defense Initiative was one of many factors which helped end the Cold War. As a tool of U.S. foreign policy, it was an important but not primary lever used by the Reagan administration to try and shape Soviet behavior. For example, as outlined in National Security Decision Directive 75, the administration also moved to counter the Soviet Union in the Third World, dramatically increased the size of American conventional forces, and linked human rights to negotiations and tied trade directly to human rights. In addition, the United States tried to undermine the Soviet economy by pressuring Western banks and allies from giving loans

to the USSR, and helped convince the Saudis to drop the price of oil. For Reagan, SDI was also part of his personal dream to make nuclear missiles obsolete and to provide a real defense for his country.

The initial Soviet reactions from March 1983 to March 1985 also support the thesis that SDI was a secondary factor in ending the Cold War. The gravest concern for Soviet leaders in 1983 seemed to be the euromissiles but SDI, along with all the other American efforts were also factors. After Reagan's reelection, Gorbachev, leading the Politburo in Chernenko's absence, along with scientists, and the Big Five accepted that concerted dialogue was the best option to solve the euromissiles issue, negotiate strategic weapons reductions, and defeat SDI.

During the period from March 1985 to October 1986, the defense initiative remained a secondary factor. Gorbachev's main concern when he became general secretary in March 1985 was to improve the Soviet economy to catch up to the West and to improve the lives of Soviet citizens. As general secretary, Gorbachev believed he had to "create favorable external conditions," to successfully engage in perestroika, thus Soviet foreign policy was closely tied to domestic reform.³⁸⁰ Gorbachev apparently believed the best way to reduce the defense burden would be to defuse tensions with the United States which would help him outflank domestic bureaucrats who justified their defense budgets by pointing to the American threat. Better relations with the West could also allow more access to financial and technological transfers that could help revive the Soviet economy. And unlike the multiple bureaucracies that were involved in managing the economy, relations with the West were dominated only by the foreign and defense ministries so Gorbachev could more quickly implement his policies in this area. Therefore the state of the Soviet economy and American posturing even without SDI would probably have been enough to persuade Gorbachev to negotiate with the United States and exit the Cold War. However, the existence of the defense initiative added another important reason to engage in dialogue with the United States. Gorbachev and

³⁸⁰ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 144.

the Soviet leadership initially saw SDI as an offensive weapons system that would encourage a first strike by the United States and therefore it was inherently destabilizing and needed to be stopped.

By the time of the Reykjavik Summit in the fall of 1986, SDI was a strong reason to negotiate. Gorbachev may have seen the defense initiative as a real technological and economic challenge the Soviet Union could not match and therefore he felt he had to somehow defeat it at the Reykjavik Summit. He was probably advised by some in the scientific community such as Velikhov to maintain the linkage between SDI and intermediate range nuclear forces. This is an extrapolation but since as late as February 1987 Velikhov was privately defending the linkage to Sakharov, one can expect that he was supporting it before the Reykjavik summit. This could explain why Gorbachev ignored Chernyaev's advice to remove the linkage between SDI and intermediate range nuclear forces talks and disregarded Sagdeev's assessment that SDI was, at best, a long term threat. Gorbachev's position may also have been influenced by a bargain he made with the defense industry to maintain the linkage in exchange for their support to drop British and French missiles from INF negotiations. In this case Gorbachev may have feared that unless he defeated SDI via negotiations, his military industrial complex would use SDI as a means to justify increased military spending. At the very least SDI would make it difficult for Gorbachev to reduce defense spending which he saw as critical to perestroika. But as noted there were other factors, such as the euromissiles and the weak economy.

Why Gorbachev changed his position on the linkage of SDI only four months later is up for debate. One factor was the change of heart of the majority of the scientific community which apparently happened at a nuclear disarmament forum in February 1987. But as we have seen, Roald Sagdeev, an influential Soviet scientist, had told Gorbachev before Reykjavik that SDI was not an immediate threat. Another factor was the realization, as outlined in Yakovlev's February 25 memo to Gorbachev, that the Reagan administration would not give in on SDI. A third factor was the rapidly deteriorating economic situation. The confluence of these events may have convinced Gorbachev that SDI was no longer a near term threat, or made him feel he now had the

political power to remove the linkage. Perhaps the economy was collapsing around him and he felt he had to reach an agreement quickly, declare the Cold War over, and focus on perestroika. Whatever the reason, after February 1987, SDI became linked only to START. What is important to note is SDI remained a reason to negotiate an end to the Cold War but was not the only or most important factor.

The question is if the positions of both the anti-SDI school and the SDI as a secondary factor schools offer valid arguments than who is really “right?” Overall, the secondary factor school is most correct. First, while SDI did complicate negotiations, it was also a secondary factor driving Soviet leaders to negotiate. Gorbachev was wary of the perceived strategic instability a missile defense system would cause and he shared Reagan’s goal of decreasing tensions and avoiding nuclear war. Gorbachev also believed the USSR would lose the technological and economic competition involved in a new arms race in space. In addition, he wanted to negotiate SDI away to help him overcome domestic opponents that resisted his efforts to decrease the defense burden. Therefore, SDI was a positive factor in that it was one more reason, sometimes a very important reason, for Gorbachev to negotiate with the United States. In addition, while SDI may have delayed the end of the Cold War by fourteen months it also then allowed for a more comprehensive treaty. The INF Treaty signed at the Washington Summit included a global zero of intermediate missiles vice the tentative agreement at Reykjavik which would have allowed for one hundred Soviet missiles in Asia to remain. In addition, the Soviet Union also agreed to eliminate its shorter range nuclear missiles by the time of the Washington Summit, something that had not been on the table at the Reykjavik Summit.

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