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Book Author(s): Jonathan Haslam

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THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY

If one takes foreign policy, the period before Gorbachev's rise to power was a period amassed with lost opportunities.

—*Valentin Falin*

A trough in the economic cycle, runaway inflation, and rising unemployment on the back of stratospheric energy prices, plus a stagnant stock market, all contributed to Carter's political demise. But growing tension between the United States and the USSR, the storm in Europe over the SS-20, the abject failure of Carter to hold his own against fundamentalist Iran or contain the spread of revolution from Nicaragua, all ensured Reagan's election in November 1980.

On 17 January 1983 Reagan signed NSDD 75 setting the US government the task not only to contain but also "over time reverse Soviet expansionism" and to "promote" change within the USSR. Agreement with the Soviet regime was permissible only on the basis of "strict reciprocity."¹ Involved in its construction, Richard Pipes claims that in reality "subversion considerably exceeded the language of NSDD 75. Indeed," he adds, "at the December 1982 National Security Council meeting that reviewed NSDD 75, President Reagan insisted on the deletion from the document of certain points dealing with economic warfare lest they leak to the press and embarrass him."²

Moscow had reason to worry. According to the most authoritative estimates, national income fell from 3.4 percent average per annum for the period 1961–75 to 1.1 percent for the period 1976–90. And given a population increase of 13.9 percent in the latter period, per capita growth was less than 1 percent.³ Oil and gas predominated as exports and for their growing contribution to GDP despite the fall in the dollar. Whereas in 1970 oil was valued at only 15.6 percent of exports, by 1984 it accounted for no less than 54.4 percent. In new western

Siberian fields production rose from 31 million tons in 1970 to 312 million in 1980. Similarly, natural gas output rose from 9.5 million cubic meters in 1970 to 156 million in 1980.⁴ The real value of crude oil exports worldwide peaked in 1980 and dropped over 90 percent by 1988. Natural gas peaked in 1981 and dropped over 50 percent by 1988.⁵ If this were not bad enough, instead of re-investing in productive capacity, most proceeds went to the military-industrial sector, Third World aid, and imports of grain that tripled between 1973 and 1981.⁶ The trade balance thus faced a scissors in its foreign exchange position and threatened to lower even further national income and the standard of living. Moscow surreptitiously obtained the secret US assessment of this Soviet dilemma, National Intelligence Estimate 11-23-86, completed on 12 September 1986.⁷ It predicted bleak prospects for domestic reform.

Moreover, the Russians were chronically weak in all areas of technology and the West knew it. The coordinated embargo launched by the Western alliance in 1950 did not end with détente. Issued on 14 March 1974, NSDM 247—“U.S. Policy on the Export of Computers to Communist Countries”—prohibited the sale of the most powerful machines to the USSR and its allies. The Russians worked relentlessly to evade the restrictions. On 19 July 1981 President Mitterand revealed to Reagan the windfall of secret details on KGB technological espionage in the West obtained from Lieutenant-Colonel Vladimir Vetrov (agent “Farewell”) during the previous year.⁸ On 3 November 1982 Vetrov was found guilty of an horrific murder, however. Until that time, as deputy head of directorate T charged with scientific and technological espionage abroad, he handed over to the DST (*Direction de la surveillance territoire*) several thousand pages of documents, including the names of 450 intelligence officers and 78 traitors in OECD countries. As a result of a decision taken in January 1982, the Americans injected misleading data into the Soviet collection system which ultimately caused so much damage and chaos that Moscow began to distrust its own sources. From March 1983 the NATO countries, led by France, began winding up the Soviet network, as a result of which Vetrov’s treachery became obvious to the authorities, who condemned him for betraying his country on 14 December 1983 and shot him on 23 January 1984.⁹

The Cold War appeared to be turning full circle. The Americans had no intention of negotiating except from a position of strength (superiority). Critical to this was the fact that Reagan was “a conviction politician,” ideological to his fingertips. Ford had said that “détente must be—and, I trust, will be—a two-way relationship.”¹⁰ In contrast, Reagan argued that because of Moscow’s unrelenting “promotion of world revolution,” détente had been “a one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue its own aims.”¹¹ Moscow would no longer

get away with it. "To me," Reagan recalled some years later, no problem was "more serious than the fact America had lost faith in itself."¹² In a series of radio broadcasts from the mid-seventies, he preached a homespun philosophy. A regular theme was bitter distaste for the "SALT-sellers": those insistent on arms control with Moscow, to Reagan a vivid symptom of decline. It was clear that the Russians "make promises, they dont [*sic*] keep them."¹³ Reagan questioned the adequacy of defenses against incoming missiles, and he lambasted Soviet and Cuban subversion of the Western hemisphere.

No specific idea was ever offered as to what could be done, however. Carlucci, national security adviser in the second term, recalls: "Ronald Reagan clearly was not a detail person. He had a couple of issues he was interested in. He had a vision he liked to talk about. He had the jokes that he liked to tell, but he had uncanny instincts."¹⁴ The argument pressed upon him, for example, by Pipes and veteran of net assessments, chairman of the National Intelligence Committee, "Harry" Rowen, was to force the transformation of the Soviet Union from within. This was anathema to the left and the old Republican right. It was something that Kennan, a liberal on the Cold War and something of a Cassandra, condemned as both immoral and impracticable. "It is," he believed, "improper, confusing to everyone, and usually ineffective when a government tries to shape its policy in such a way as to work domestic-political changes in another country." On Kennan's cold-blooded view it was wrong to allow dissentients such as Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn to manipulate the United States into "an instrument in their struggle with their own government."¹⁵ Here, despite fundamental differences, two retirees from very different camps but looking down from the same Olympian heights, Kennan and Kissinger, coincided. In his deep conservatism, Kissinger expressed himself "not so foolish as to believe that we can pressure the USSR to change its internal order."¹⁶ His was, after all, a major premise underlying the Nixon policy of *détente*. This premise had already been unthinkingly dislodged by Carter in his opportunist pursuit of human rights as an election winner. It was now jettisoned by Reagan.

THE PROBLEM OF NICARAGUA AND CUBA

If Washington took seriously the idea of ending communism in the USSR, it could hardly tolerate the expansion of communist influence on its doorstep. In Latin America Reagan reverted to covert operations prohibited by Congress since the downfall of Allende's Chile. This inevitably led to circumvention of the law (the Iran-Contra affair) and a collision with Congress, though these risks were deemed worth taking. Armed support for insurgents in El Salvador

and the military buildup in Nicaragua had caused increasing alarm. “Cuba’s generosity was total,” recalls Sergio Ramírez, a leading Sandinista.¹⁷ But Washington felt impotent. The incoming administration could prove to be all sound and no bite. In January the Sandinistas were warned that CIA had discovered a secret air strip in El Papalonal near Lago de Managua. A C-47 had been photographed airlifting arms to El Salvador.¹⁸ Reagan had “absolute proof of Soviet & Cuban activity in delivering arms to rebels in El Salvador.” “Intelligence reports say Castro is very worried about me. I’m very worried that we can’t come up with something to justify his worrying.”¹⁹ Secretary of State Alexander Haig proposed normalizing relations in return for complete suspension of the arms traffic to El Salvador.²⁰ The Sandinistas then closed the runway but transported arms by other means—small wooden boats crossing the Golfo de Fonseca by night.²¹

Now head of the Latin American division at CIA, Duane Clarridge was sent in by the new director, William Casey, a veteran from operations, to get something done; which consisted of organizing an army—the Contras—that could operate across the Honduran border. It was conceived in cooperation with Argentina via the ruthless deputy director of military intelligence Colonel Mario Davico in the summer of 1981.²² The problem was that the administration would have to go cap-in-hand to Congress to launch a serious insurrection.

Hitherto Moscow had been uninterested in further complicating relations with the USA, particularly under Reagan. This was about to change. During the revolution Ramírez had received someone calling himself “Gabo” at government house. “Gabo” asked that a visitor be received the following day. This was an official from the Soviet embassy in Mexico called “Vladimir.” “Vladimir” immediately opened a mission in confiscated premises. The first Sandinista delegation reach Moscow at the end of May 1980 in search of arms, but the first shipments arrived via Algeria only after an agreement signed in 1981. Incoming Secretary of State George Shultz denounced the impending arrival of MiGs from the USSR in 1982. By then sixty pilots were already training in Bulgaria. They had to be withdrawn. Castro advised the Sandinistas to abandon their plans. Instead the Sandinistas ordered state-of-the-art attack helicopters—MI-25s—which actually proved more useful in counterinsurgency.²³

Meanwhile Washington was receiving reports that “Soviet officers are advising the Nicaraguan general staff and have helped in the preparation of military plans.” “Cubans are found in practically every Nicaraguan government agency,” US intelligence advised. Rebels from El Salvador took flights via Managua for training in Cuba.²⁴ The number of Cubans in Nicaragua was estimated at 6,000, of whom some 1,750 were military or security advisers.²⁵ By the

summer of 1983 the number of those advisers estimated had risen to 2,000 and included General Ochoa, deputy to Raúl Castro, Cuban Minister of Defense. Moreover, the GDR made available a massive \$247 million in credit between 1980 and 1985. And the Russians under Gorbachev promised more.²⁶

Ochoa had been credited with organizing the arms buildup in Angola in 1976 and in Ethiopia the year following.²⁷ Determined to put the Cuba in its place, Washington decided to act firmly through indirect means. Defying tough opposition on the Hill—the Boland amendment of 8 December 1982—early in September 1983 CIA Director Bill Casey authorized and received a proposal for covert action: “U.S. policy in Central America is to oppose the immediate and serious threat to Western Hemisphere peace caused by encroachments by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and their surrogates.” It proposed arming and supporting the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries.²⁸ On 19 September Reagan issued a “finding” “as a means to induce the Sandinistas and Cubans and their allies to cease their support for insurgencies to the region; to hamper Cuban/Nicaraguan arms trafficking; to divert Nicaragua’s resources and energies from support to Central American guerrilla movements; and to bring the Sandinistas into meaningful negotiations and constructive, verifiable agreement with their neighbors on peace in the region.”²⁹

MOSCOW’S FEARS

Reagan’s more conservative colleagues, including Casey and Defense Secretary Caspar (“Cap”) Weinberger, resolutely opposed negotiating with Moscow. Reagan, who disliked personal unpleasantness, dithered when the need arose to enforce policy. He wrote in November 1984: “I’m going to meet with Cap and Bill and lay it out to them. Won’t be fun but has to be done.”³⁰ By this time, Reagan realized that relations with Moscow were more complex than supposed. “Three years had taught me something surprising about the Russians,” he acknowledged later. “Many people at the top of the Soviet hierarchy were genuinely afraid of America and Americans. Perhaps this shouldn’t have surprised me, but it did. In fact, I had difficulty accepting my own conclusion at first.”³¹

When members of the administration and selected outsiders gathered in a day-long session to prepare Shultz for a meeting with Gromyko, they “painted a picture of formidable Soviet military power, of an aggressive foreign policy, of intransigence on human rights, and of Gromyko as an unbending and often insufferable interlocutor.”³² Tension nevertheless persisted between those at State who like Vance and Kissinger wanted arms control to revive détente and those

at Defense and the White House determined to break Moscow before substantive talks. Initially planning was accompanied by psychological warfare probing Soviet defenses worldwide through unauthorized penetration of air space—“exciter flights”—and sea space across the entire horizon for the purpose of intimidation.³³ It reinforced anxieties well entrenched in the Kremlin. Head of East German foreign intelligence Markus Wolf, on visiting Moscow in February 1980, was surprised at the extent of alarm. He and others met Andropov at the central clinical hospital—the so-called Kremlin hospital—in Kuntsevo, the Moscow suburbs.

Not only was Andropov seriously ill—his kidneys were failing—but Wolf had never seen him so seriously depressed. “He outlined a gloomy scenario in which nuclear war was a real threat.”³⁴ That this was not merely a product of illness is evident from GDR Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer’s “similar impressions” at meetings with Gromyko.³⁵ According to unconfirmed reports, after Reagan’s election Kissinger had been dispatched to warn of decisive retaliation in the event of provocation. This, no doubt, and other factors led directly to the announcement of a new information-gathering program—RYAN—in May 1981 involving the KGB, GRU, and sister services from the Warsaw Pact issuing fortnightly reports on the immediate threat of nuclear war. The initiative came from the normally unexcitable Andropov and the more emotional Ustinov.³⁶ That this program was wound down by 1985³⁷ though not abolished until 27 November 1991³⁸ suggests it was a momentary expression of heightened alarm institutionalized well beyond its original purpose (a classic instance of Soviet bureaucratic inertia).

This was certainly the view of the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for the USSR at CIA, Fritz Ermarth. He produced an intelligence estimate dated 18 May 1984. On “very strong evidence, we judge that the Soviet leadership does not perceive an imminent danger of war.” Experts agreed “that there is currently a stable nuclear balance in which the United States does not have sufficient strength for a first strike. Moreover, the Soviets know that the United States is at present far from having accomplished all of its force buildup objectives.”³⁹

Ermarth subsequently confirmed “that what animated Soviet behavior and discontent was not fear of an imminent military confrontation but worry that Soviet economic and technological weaknesses and Reagan policies were turning the ‘correlation of forces’ against them on an historic scale.” Oleg Gordievsky, deputy head of KGB station in London until defection, “noted, interestingly that intelligence professionals on the Soviet side did not take seriously the much ballyhooed warning system called VRYAN or RYAN; it seemed more like a political instrument to energize the geriatric Politburo.”⁴⁰ The military did not

take seriously the civilian understanding of war, and that included Andropov, who, even as General Secretary, in the words of Danilevich, “did not have time to get involved.”⁴¹ “No one believed there was a real likelihood (immediate threat) of a nuclear strike from the U.S. or NATO,” Danilevich recalls. He “felt that the KGB may have overstated the level of tension because they are generally incompetent in military affairs and exaggerate what they do not understand.”⁴² Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, then Deputy Chief of the General Staff, concurred that “war was not considered imminent.”⁴³ Certainly Wolf doubted the premise behind RYAN. His key source within NATO, Rainer Rupp, made clear that there was, indeed, no danger of imminent nuclear war.⁴⁴

Before long the Kremlin understood Washington to be bluffing; a view always held among the more hard-bitten Americanists: “We will always be able to turn out more missiles than you,” an American diplomat was told. “The reason is that our people are willing to sacrifice for these things, and yours are not. Our people don’t require a dozen colors of toilet paper in six different scents to be happy. Americans do now; for that reason you will never be able to sustain public support for military expenditures as long as you are not directly attacked.”⁴⁵

THE POLISH PROBLEM

The heightened alert coincided with a crisis in Poland predicted by the Institute for the Economics of the World Socialist System, set up by Andropov in the late sixties under Bogomolov.⁴⁶ After 1970 Poland was never quiescent. And the election of a Polish Pope on 16 October 1978 undoubtedly excited extravagant hopes. Industrial unrest had become politicized with the creation of the independent trades union *Solidarność* (Solidarity) on 17 September 1980. Its success was due not merely to the alienation of the working class under communist rule. It was also intimately bound up with the consequences of a disastrously short-sighted economic policy that turned Poland from a net exporter of agricultural produce in 1974 to a net importer within the decade. The country’s trade turnover with the West increased over sixfold, entirely funded by credits, upon which payment fell due in the early eighties, when Poland was least able to afford it.

Strikes nationwide, on 28 August 1980 the Soviet Ministry of Defense had asked the Politburo “that in the event of military assistance being rendered to the PPR [Polish Peoples’ Republic] a group of forces be set up and that three tank divisions . . . and one motor-rifle division . . . initially be brought to complete readiness for military action.” It also requested bringing divisions within the Baltic, Byelorussian, and Trans-Carpathian military districts up to full com-

plement for war “and, in the event of the core of the Polish army coming to the aid of the counterrevolutionary forces,” the Defense Ministry also asked that Soviet troops in Poland be reinforced by five to seven divisions. For this purpose the ministry planned to call up as many as 75,000 men and requisition 9,000 automobiles. A further 25,000 men and 6,000 automobiles were also envisioned as part of the overall plan.⁴⁷

Military action, though planned, was not taken, however,⁴⁸ despite Brezhnev’s belief that this was “an entire orgy of counter-revolution” and Gromyko’s insistence that they “must not under any circumstances lose Poland.”⁴⁹ A show of force *was* required, however. Ustinov called in Chief of Staff of Warsaw Pact forces General Anatolii Gribkov and First Deputy Minister of Defense and Commander-in-Chief of Warsaw Pact forces Marshal Viktor Kulikov to arrange Warsaw Pact exercises—“Alliance”—to begin at short notice on 8–10 December. Given festivities in most of the allied countries, they tried in vain to dissuade him. But this was not merely Ustinov’s idea: the exercises went ahead. The entire staff were flown into the Polish garrison at Legnitz, where they remained until March 1981. They were due to close with a review on 21 December. But at the last minute Ustinov asked for an additional exercise. “The aim of this maneuver was clear to all,” Gribkov recalls “to continue the exertion of pressure on the Polish government and society.” The exercises therefore lasted several months. The Warsaw Pact staff stayed on in Legnitz without any plausible explanation to give puzzled officers from the northern group of forces in the building opposite. Finally after rumors appeared in the Western press that the headquarters of the Warsaw Pact would be moving from Moscow to Legnitz, in late April an irritable Ustinov telephoned and demanded that they leave.⁵⁰

Adamishin was told that the government was “gravitating towards the standard options, however much force had to be used.” But it was reported that Brezhnev—in remission—was “resolutely opposed” on the grounds that this would be “a real tragedy.” Defeating the Poles would take more than a year, and then they would have to be fed.⁵¹ The memories of both Hungary and Czechoslovakia only too fresh, and Afghanistan an open wound, Andropov also robustly resisted Soviet military action. On 3 April 1981 a secret meeting was arranged in Brest, on the border with Poland, between Andropov and Ustinov on the one side and Prime Minister Stanisław Kania and General Wojciech Jaruzelski—Defense Minister and Foreign Minister—on the other. At a six-hour meeting the Poles were asked to sign plans for martial law. Jaruzelski said the documents would be examined on 11 April and signed.⁵²

Despite the agreement, martial law was not effected, and by September the situation looked increasingly desperate. Gromyko pointed out that “now little

power remains” in government hands.⁵³ In these circumstances Moscow instead on 19 October secured Jaruzelski as Kania’s replacement in the expectation that he would institute martial law. When the general tried to find a middle way, as had Kania, he was promptly scolded: “We are not against agreements,” the Soviet Politburo said, somewhat liberally, only to add somewhat less so: “But they must not contain concessions to the enemies of socialism.”⁵⁴ To find a way out Jaruzelski, now also First Secretary of the Party, hinted that the USSR intervene. Ustinov contacted senior military officers but only Kulikov was explicitly and dogmatically in favor of intervention.⁵⁵ The Kremlin rejected that option outright. Gromyko led the chorus: “There can be no introduction of forces into Poland.” Suslov pointed out Moscow was trying to lead a peace campaign in Europe and “world public opinion would not understand us.” He dismissed the prospect of introducing troops as “a catastrophe.”⁵⁶ From conversations with Andropov and Kryuchkov, head of KGB foreign intelligence, the clear impression given was that, after the invasion of Afghanistan, continued tension with China, and US belligerence, there was no question of military action.⁵⁷

At a Politburo meeting on 10 December chairman of Gosplan Nikolai Baibakov reported on Poland’s economic situation following his visit. The most serious problem was payment of debts owed to the West. He reported that Jaruzelski envisaged military intervention if the authorities could not handle resistance to martial law. Jaruzelski quoted Kulikov to the effect that if necessary the rest of the Warsaw Pact would aid them militarily. When Andropov heard this, he vented his anger at requests for economic insistence—“impertinent”—that if denied would heap the blame for failure on Moscow. Moreover, “if Kulikov actually talked of our forces going in, then I consider this incorrect!” It remained out of the question. They would have to find another way of safeguarding communications with the Soviet group of forces in Germany.⁵⁸ That afternoon at 4:35 p.m. Jaruzelski raised these questions directly with Soviet ambassador Averkii Aristov who contacted Konstantin Rusakov at the Central Committee. Jaruzelski was rebutted on each point. A day later Jaruzelski repeated his request for a commitment to intervene, a request directed at Kulikov, then in Poland. Finally, with nothing useful forthcoming, martial law was declared on 13 December.⁵⁹

Reagan regarded the Polish situation as “the last chance in a lifetime . . . this is a revolution started against this ‘damned force.’” But, since he did not want to abandon negotiations on theater nuclear weapons, options were limited.⁶⁰ Poland was, however, denied vital financial support from the IMF. And in February 1982 a CIA program of aid to *Solidarność* came into effect. Within months

the union had received \$8 million in aid.⁶¹ Reversal of martial law would clearly take years rather than months, however.

ANDROPOV IN POWER

Brezhnev finally died on 10 November 1982 with détente in ruins, a crisis seething in Poland, and an interminable military commitment to sustain a regime almost universally loathed in Afghanistan. It appears that the first candidate for succession was none other than Konstantin Chernenko. Born on 24 September 1911, a former border guard who had made himself indispensable to Brezhnev as general factotum, Chernenko was a natural number two but a man entirely devoid of distinction. Since the early seventies, as an extrovert, he had made a reputation for himself as a skillful operator within the Party apparatus.⁶² Adamishin understood from others—true or not—that Andropov was finally chosen as Brezhnev's successor only at the second vote and due to the combined efforts of Ustinov, Gromyko, and the young Mikhail Gorbachev; true or not, the fact of the rumors alone indicated a certain unease at the selection.⁶³

Yet except for Gorbachev and Grigorii Romanov (born on 7 February 1923), these were old men, increasingly sclerotic, more in than out of hospital. Chernenko had liver and heart problems. Andropov was diabetic and by now had a gray, cadaver-like appearance. On 25 January 1982 Kirpichenko went to see him and found he could barely read.⁶⁴ Ustinov died not long thereafter, on 20 December 1984. Gromyko, at seventy-three and the key figure in any shift toward concessions to the West to forestall the arrival of US missiles in Europe, was more than due for retirement: "He gets very worked up especially when he tires and forgets what he has said," subordinates complained. Gromyko read few telegrams, rarely met ambassadors or heads of department, received "one-sided information," and his chief assistant briefed him in a biased manner; as a result of which the supporters of détente were stuck (*v zamazke*).⁶⁵

These aging leaders were nervously awaiting US deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles. Cruise was a particular danger because of its low visibility as Moscow still had "only limited effectiveness against low-altitude penetration."⁶⁶ The Pershing aroused special anxiety as a missile of enhanced accuracy with a counterforce capability and a range of up to 25,000 kilometers that could hit Moscow at great speed from West Germany. Against this, further developments had to be made in Moscow's ABM defenses to be completed only in 1987.⁶⁷

Addressing the leaders of the Warsaw Pact on 4 January 1983, Andropov set the "turbulent situation" and the "inflammation of international tension" against

the heady but illusory achievements of the previous decade. “The 1970s,” he said, “were a time of the further growth of the strength and the influence of the socialist community.” The attainment of “military-strategic parity” had given the bloc the possibility of dealing on equal terms with NATO. The “dynamic policy of détente” made for a transformation of international relations. Andropov celebrated “the critical losses suffered by imperialism in the furthest reaches of the so-called Third World,” not least because “up to now the prosperity of the West has depended on control over the resources of the Third World.” “The revolutionary changes in Angola, Nicaragua, and other countries—and these were conditioned by objective factors—meant for Washington, and not without reason, the acceptance of a defeat for American policy.”

Andropov saw the “Reagan phenomenon” and his policy essentially as a product of the recession, inflation, and mass unemployment. “And the bourgeoisie as a rule seeks one way out of such situations by means of foreign policy adventures.” So long as the Soviet bloc faced economic problems and domestic political complications of its own—Poland, in particular, was here assumed but not named—the “class enemy” would, Andropov warned, “create a political opposition in our countries, manipulate it, and destabilize the socialist system.” Beyond this Washington also presented a military challenge. It had set as its “goal” the destruction of the balance of power. It was embarking on an arms race for qualitative improvements that would enable them to go beyond deterrence to war-fighting.

Andropov acknowledged that “it is hard to say what is blackmail and what is really a readiness to take calamitous steps. At any event we cannot, however, allow the USA military superiority and we will not allow them this. One must nevertheless reckon that the escalation of the arms race may make the military-political situation unstable and unsettled.” It was “no exaggeration to say that we are faced with the greatest attempt by imperialism to put a brake on the process of social change in the world, to bring to a halt the progress of socialism and, at least in certain areas, press it into reverse.”⁶⁸ Reagan had certainly made an impact where it mattered.

THE US STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE

The threat posed came to be epitomized in the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Both Washington and Moscow had been experimenting with space-based weapons systems since the 1960s. Neither made substantial progress. Soviet work on antimissile defenses from outer space—the D-20 program—was by the mid-eighties still at the stage of research and laboratory experiment. It

remained squarely within the limitations imposed by the ABM treaty of 1972. But Moscow was working on an interceptor system—the S-550—which, if deployed, would contravene the treaty. The earliest expected target date for prototypes was the year 2000.⁶⁹ One promising area of focus had emerged: high-energy lasers. Much money had been expended attempting to develop systems that could both destroy communications satellites in space and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) at the crucial boost phase after launch. This program began in 1965–66. By 1976, however, and after a great deal of costly expenditure, Moscow finally drew the unavoidable conclusion that high-energy lasers were no good for blowing up warheads on missiles.⁷⁰

While the program was being pursued, scientific publication within the USSR reflected the slow state of progress, albeit obliquely in the form of pure science rather than engineering application. When the secret program was suddenly halted, publication naturally ceased. The unexpected disappearance of published papers inevitably aroused curiosity. A leading American scientist responsible for the H-bomb, anticommunist diehard Professor Edward Teller held joint appointments at the Hoover Institution (Stanford) and at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory (part of the University of California, Berkeley). As a young scientist working on the atomic bomb he remembered what had happened at the end of the 1930s. That this might be repeating itself was drawn to Teller's attention by scientist George Chapline: "In 1977, I. I. Sobel'man and several other leading Soviet physicists published papers on a long wavelength X-ray laser of a novel and promising type." But "publications on the topic stopped abruptly the following year." Teller saw this as significant and attributed "recent Soviet efforts to ban further nuclear tests" to the possibility "that they may know important details about the X-ray laser that they hope we shall never learn."⁷¹

Teller sought significant funding for programs he headed at Livermore. But a tendency to oversell his project did not help get it off the ground. At Christmas 1982 Teller alleged that an X-ray laser had reached the "engineering phase," and in 1984 he asserted that the laser could become a space-based weapon which might destroy incoming Soviet missiles. The trouble was that the scientist who first alerted Teller to these possibilities, Chapline, withdrew his support; and the scientist at Livermore heading the research, Roy Woodruff, believed none of the claims made by Teller to be true.⁷² Selling novel ideas in the face of skepticism thus required relentless persistence and tireless patience, characteristics Teller had in abundance.

Teller had recommended Dr George A. ("Jay") Keyworth for the post of Reagan's science adviser, and when Keyworth set up the White House Science Council he invited Teller to serve. Keyworth himself, however, was "rather

doubtful, not only of the usefulness, but even of the very existence of an X-ray laser.⁷³ As of mid-1982, however, strategic defense technologies had yet to be discussed by the Council. Reagan had, however, received a briefing on Russian activities in outer space at the NSC. He noted on 28 June that Moscow had unquestionably “moved to a military priority in space. We must not be left behind.”⁷⁴ Despite his skepticism, Keyworth agreed to hand Reagan a letter from Teller written on 23 July 1982, which Teller had been encouraged to write by right-wing columnist Bill Buckley.⁷⁵

Teller drew Reagan’s attention to developments in space weapons where there were “reasons to believe that the Soviet Union might be a few years ahead of us.” It was, Teller wrote, “only recently that our understanding has advanced to the level where we could appreciate the significance of previously puzzling Soviet emphasis on the aspects of science and technology pertinent to the development of these weapons. Because of their extraordinary potential,” he argued, “it seems likely that the Soviets would seek an early opportunity to employ such means to negate our offensive strategic capabilities, the more so as a ‘bloodless’ victory would be in prospect.” Teller had already brought this to the attention of “all relevant people” in the administration, but “action,” he wrote, “has yet to be taken which is commensurate with both the threat and the opportunity.” Hence his own appeal to the President “for a mandate to vigorously explore and exploit the technological opportunities in defensive applications of nuclear weaponry.” The stakes were high: “If the Soviets should be the first to develop and deploy these defensive nuclear weapons, the Free World is in the deepest trouble. However, if we act in this matter promptly and with the full vigor of which we are capable, we may end the Mutual Assured Destruction era and commence a period of assured survival on terms favorable to the Western Alliance.”⁷⁶

That autumn Teller asked Keyworth to create a study group on strategic defense. It duly reported in January 1983, arguing for the development of these technologies. At this point a chance encounter with Admiral James Watkins, Chief of Naval Operations, enabled Teller to expatiate on the subject of the laser; and although Watkins did not like its nuclear character, he supported the general idea and drew the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the same direction. They were particularly preoccupied with the vulnerability of silo-based missiles to preemptive attack from the new Soviet SS-18; the substitute mobile US ICBM system (MX) appeared to be going nowhere, now that the Joint Chiefs refused to accept a system of basing them closely together so that incoming missiles would collide with one another while homing in on densely packed targets. This would leave some US ICBMs untouched.⁷⁷

On 11 February Reagan heard from the Joint Chiefs that strategic missile defense was a feasible alternative. Shultz was skeptical but “had absolutely no idea that the views he was expressing had any near-term, operational significance.”⁷⁸ What occurred just over a month later therefore came as an unpleasant surprise. Reagan invited Teller to dine on 20 March 1983. Three days later the President delivered a speech announcing SDI.⁷⁹ This came as a severe shock to Moscow. It threatened to annihilate the balance of terror between the Superpowers, leaving the Russians vulnerable to an American first strike. If Moscow instead countered SDI, then it could be drawn into ever greater expenditure with an economy running out of steam. All Soviet proposals on nuclear arms control thereafter focused above all on removal of SDI as the ultimate if not the immediate goal.

Cut out of the decisions made, as a pragmatist Shultz nevertheless made the most of what SDI offered alongside the buildup in US capabilities worldwide and the deployment of Cruise and Pershing II in Europe.⁸⁰ “Of course,” General Starodubov recalls, “far from everyone in the Soviet Union, including the top leadership in the country, took the information put out by Washington in relation to SDI at face value. Serious researchers understood that many of the American plans promulgated had a speculative, imaginary character. But this did not mean that the SDI program represented no danger. A wide-ranging antiballistic missile defense could be created even without putting into effect exotic programs.”⁸¹ Ogarkov inevitably took SDI seriously. In March 1983 he gave an off-the-record interview to Gelb, now *New York Times* correspondent. “Numbers of troops and weapons means little, he said. We cannot equal the quality of U.S. arms for a generation or two. Modern military power is based upon technology, and technology is based upon computers.” In Moscow, unlike Washington, “we don’t even have computers in every office of the Defense Ministry.” Ogarkov went on to insist: “We will never be able to catch up with 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.”⁸²

Britain’s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was horrified. The idea that the United States would throw up a defense system to protect the subcontinent—fortress America—and leave Europe exposed to Soviet missiles did not exactly fit with NATO solidarity. She had assumed power on 4 May 1979 as détente slithered into oblivion. Reagan’s accession in 1981 met her best hopes. But his invasion of Grenada, a former British possession, without securing her prior consent in October 1983 had, as he hurriedly acknowledged by phone, caused her acute embarrassment.⁸³ Offsetting this, Reagan’s steadfast implementation

of the dual-track decision by deploying Cruise and Pershing in Europe was heartening. The next shock, however, was also not foreseen: the unexpected proposal for an SDI.

Thatcher met Reagan at Camp David on 22 December 1984. Congratulating him on a second term with such overwhelming popular endorsement, she briefed him on Mikhail Gorbachev's recent visit to London, which had made such an impression. He was "unusual . . . much less constrained, more charming, open to discussion and debate, and did not stick to prepared notes." As a woman, of course, she had not overlooked the possibility that more charming could also mean more dangerous. But she was taken with his tolerance of criticism in contrast to Gromyko. "He also avoided the usual Soviet reaction of citing lengthy position[s] of principle." Then she subjected SDI to heavy skepticism, buttressed by scientific training, at a session including Shultz and National Security Adviser "Bud" McFarlane.

Thatcher "backed the U.S. research program." But "she understood that we will not know for some time if a strategic defense system is truly feasible. If we reached a stage where production looked possible we would have some serious and difficult decisions to take. There are the ABM and outer space treaties. Future technological developments and possible countering strategies must also be considered. She recalled, for example, that with the advent of heat seeking missiles the general view had been that there was no defense against them, but this proved erroneous. Avoidance devices were developed. It was her impression from talking to Gorbachev that the Soviets were following the same line of reasoning. They clearly fear U.S. technological prowess. However, Gorbachev suggested that the Soviets would either develop their own strategic defense system [which the Reagan administration always claimed they already possessed]⁸⁴ or add additional offensive systems." There were, she observed, "all sorts of decoys, jamming systems and technological developments such as making the missile boost phase even shorter. All these advances," she warned, "make crisis management more and more difficult." She also voiced skepticism that the program was feasible on the grounds that if it were only 95 per cent successful, over 60 million would still die from what got through.

Unlike Reagan, Thatcher approved of the balance of terror which Reagan had condemned as "this horrible threat." "Nuclear weapons," she argued, "have served not only to prevent a nuclear war, but they have also given us forty years of unprecedented peace in Europe. It would be unwise, she continued, to abandon a deterrence system that has prevented both nuclear and conventional war. Moreover, if we ever reach the stage of abolishing all nuclear weapons, this would make conventional, biological, or chemical war more likely." As the dis-

cussion proceeded, it became increasingly apparent that what most disturbed Thatcher was the horrifying prospect that the threat of US superiority was destabilizing and yet the SDI system would actually prove all too imperfect as a defense. "Saying SDI as she understood it seemed to suggest inherent U.S. superiority, Mrs. Thatcher added that she was not convinced of the need to deploy such a system, particularly if it could eventually be knocked out by other technological advances."⁸⁵

SDI threatened to reopen the very rift that Carter had inadvertently created. The alliance was persuaded to approve SDI, former Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe recalls, only "in order to bring constant economic and technological pressure to bear on the USSR."⁸⁶ Howe recalls: "when Margaret Thatcher visited Washington she insistently demanded that the USA remain loyal to the idea and practice of nuclear containment. Otherwise, the reliability of Europe's defense would have been undermined."⁸⁷ A battle thus began in Washington and between Washington and its allies between those who believed SDI worthwhile and practicable for its own sake and those who saw it as a means of breaking the back of the Russian economy or as a bargaining chip through which a rebalancing of power could be obtained.

THE CHERNENKO-GORBACHEV TRANSITION

The arrival of US Cruise and Pershing II missiles imminent by the end of the year, on 4 August 1983 Andropov told the Politburo: "Without wasting time, we must bring into action all the levers of possible influence upon the governments and parliaments of the NATO countries in order to create maximum obstruction against the deployment of American missiles in Europe." Whereupon the eager Gorbachev chimed in with a chorus on the "need to rebuff" Washington.⁸⁸

A nasty incident that occurred on 31 August demonstrated the high cost in human life of the international tension mounting since the late seventies. That day a South Korean airliner was shot down by a nervous Soviet fighter-interceptor pilot when it flew directly over Kamchatka and Sakhalin, way off the course, its lights off, and unresponsive to the warning shots fired at it by the Russians. Air defense mistook the Boeing for a military aircraft of similar design used for high altitude electronic reconnaissance. This point was stressed by Ustinov. In that theater twelve such overflights had recently occurred. The pilot was thus under enormous pressure to put an end to the new intrusion. When disaster struck and Moscow was pilloried at the UN with the unwarranted accusation that a civil aircraft had deliberately been shot down, the Politburo convened

with Chernenko in the chair to assess the political damage after Ogarkov, Kornienko, and Kryuchkov had assembled all relevant information.

The entire leadership rallied round, including Gorbachev, who was convinced that the Soviet response was “legal” — which entirely missed the point. He went on to advocate the adoption of “an offensive posture.” Ogarkov, given to conspiracy as an explanation, suggested: “It is quite possible that this was a pre-planned provocation insofar as American intelligence on each occasion tried to determine where our air defense forces are arrayed and how they operate.” Kornienko predictably took the same line.⁸⁹

The last session of the Politburo chaired by Andropov was on 1 September 1983. Since the summer he had been on haemodialysis at the central clinical hospital.⁹⁰ He seemed exhausted and lifeless. That day he flew south to the Crimea and never reappeared.⁹¹ He died at 4:50 p.m. on 9 February from kidney failure. This changed nothing of substance, however. In domestic affairs the impulse for change had been faint but audible; yet the corruption of Soviet society continued apace even while economic growth momentarily rose by a fraction. In foreign policy, he had anyway worked carefully within the established framework long fixed with Ustinov and Gromyko. His successor left foreign policy entirely to Gromyko.

Adamishin noted that the differences between Andropov and Chernenko effectively made no difference in practice. “Yuva liked one arguing with him, suggesting alternative decisions, even saying things that were scarcely patriotic. . . . But no practical consequences resulted.” Whereas Chernenko was very different: “He completely depended upon position papers; he had no need of alternatives; and in matters of foreign policy he listened only to Andrei Andreevich [Gromyko].”⁹² Meeting Gromyko in September 1983 and again in January 1984 Howe found him “absolutely uncompromising” on the issue of human rights. “And he didn’t believe in the West’s interest in arms limitation and peaceful coexistence. The position of the USSR at the time was hostile and defensive. It continued while Gromyko held the post of foreign minister.”⁹³ Any change awaited the succession to Chernenko, whose failing health ensured the interval would be mercifully brief.

Under Chernenko Politburo meetings slowed down. He had been elected as a safe if shaky pair of hands. Vigorous Gorbachev became Second Secretary in charge of the Party secretariat, also taking control over the Politburo’s political committee, while retaining the agricultural portfolio.⁹⁴ Foreign policy was paralyzed. When the Politburo met on 10 February 1984 to set the arrangements for Andropov’s funeral, “the anti-war movement” that had “attained great reach” within Western Europe sustained high hopes. Members congratulated them-

selves on “the firm and unchanging” line held against the capitalist world.⁹⁵ Reagan thus had good grounds for holding back.

The SDI threatened the USSR in a number of ways. Above all it would require an enormous effort to raise the arms race to new technological levels, a further waste of scarce capital resources at a time when Moscow needed to divert military expenditure toward domestic investment. Washington was well aware of this; indeed, it was built into the advice the administration received from Rowen. Soviet labor productivity declined at an even faster rate in the last half of the seventies. Raw materials shortages, including fuel, transportation bottlenecks (rail), excess military expenditure, poor working incentives, financial conservatism in foreign trade (avoidance of debts to the West), and poor harvests all contributed to the problem.⁹⁶

The SDI had a two-edged effect. It impressed upon hawks the need to accelerate further development of offensive missile capabilities to outflank antimissile defense. It thus buttressed rearmament. For the doves, on the other hand, it underlined the importance of negotiating concessions to forestall the realization of Reagan’s dream.⁹⁷ Gorbachev found himself somewhere in between, though rarely equidistant between the two competing lobbies. He was strongly opposed to surrendering under pressure from SDI, which had in 1984 turned into an organization (the SDIO) under Lieutenant General James Abrahamson. It was in reaction to this that on 29 June Moscow under Chernenko proposed talks on prohibiting the militarization of outer space, with a moratorium on testing and deploying such weapons once negotiations began. Anxiety was thus hard to hide. “Considering the urgency and importance of the question, the Soviet government expects a speedy and positive response from the government of the USA,” Moscow announced, revealing a nervous hand.⁹⁸

Shultz and the allies had become impatient to start negotiating. Reagan appeared still in the hands of the diehards. Nevertheless a gut feeling began to emerge that he would “like to talk to him [Chernenko] about our problems man to man & see if I could convince him there would be a material benefit to the Soviets if they’d join the family of nations etc.” On the other hand, Reagan did not “want to appear anxious which would tempt them to play games & possibly snub us.”⁹⁹ The gut feeling was reinforced by Suzanne Massie, biographer of the last Tsar, when she lunched with Reagan on 1 March after her visit to Russia.¹⁰⁰ Reagan also now shared the view of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who visited him on 5 March, that “the Soviets are motivated, at least in part by insecurity & a suspicion that we & our allies mean them harm.” Kohl also thought Reagan should meet Chernenko.¹⁰¹ Yet, paradoxically, on 6 March 1984 Reagan addressed the National Association of Evangelicals in Columbus, Ohio, bluntly

stigmatizing the USSR as an “evil empire.” Switching positions was a decision difficult for him to take.

This speech had not, of course, been cleared with the State Department. Shultz immediately insisted on a meeting. Two days later he found himself surrounded by faces some of which he did not even recognize, including academics specializing on Russia but not practitioners of equivalent expertise. “It is time to probe and test,” Shultz insisted. In opposition stood National Security Adviser William Clark, whose outlook was accurately summed up by Shultz as that of dealing with the Russians only after they had changed. A further meeting on 11 March finally induced the President to agree that State move on Moscow. Shultz produced a memorandum, “Next Steps in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” four days later.¹⁰²

Shultz was thus ready for Chernenko’s offer at the end of June. The US reply was cautiously ambiguous as to future negotiations. Both sides should “discuss and determine mutually acceptable approaches to talks on arms limitations in the areas that cause concern to each side.” This threw Moscow into turmoil. Not until September did it agree to talks. Chernenko announced that an agreement banning space weapons “would not only prevent an arms race in outer space but, no less importantly, would facilitate the resolution of the questions of limiting and reducing other strategic weapons. I would particularly underline this.”¹⁰³

The unwritten Soviet agenda was that were Washington to drop SDI, Moscow would cut theater nuclear forces. Yet further attempts to draw Moscow out on this point met with silence and the press appeared reluctant even to endorse Chernenko’s statement. The announcement on 6 September that Ogarkov had been removed from his post at a time when Ustinov was gravely ill suggested that the Kremlin faced insubordination from the military.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Reagan’s offer at the UN on 24 September of extending the arms control process met with an unyielding response from Gromyko three days later that effectively reneged on Chernenko’s original proposal. The United States, he insisted, had to remove “the obstacles which they created” before talks on strategic and theater nuclear weapons could take place.¹⁰⁵ Change was in the wind, nevertheless, with Gorbachev the heir presumptive.

Like many statesmen of note, Gorbachev was something of a mystery. Born 2 March 1931 at the height of the forced collectivization of agriculture, he emerged rapidly from humble origins on a collective farm to become deputy secretary of the student Party organization at Moscow University under Stalin. His background and manner never suggested a man about to overthrow the established order that had done so much to advance him from the back of be-

yond. In the latter stages Gorbachev emerged due above all to patronage from Andropov, the ascetic diehard who increasingly saw himself as a true follower of Lenin. When Gorbachev's wife Raisa was visiting Pamela Harriman, grande dame of Washington, DC, and Churchill's former daughter-in-law, she was shown to the bathroom and passed at the bedside a photo of Averell Harriman with Andropov: "We owe everything to him [Andropov]," she said.¹⁰⁶

Better educated than his predecessors, naturally intelligent, and of considerable charm, Gorbachev represented the kind of instinctive politician more often seen in the American Deep South. He reached out in a populist manner. When alert, he showed an uncanny ability to detect his interlocutor's feelings even without an interpreter. Gorbachev was not embarrassingly informal like Carter, but he certainly was "*kontaktny*."¹⁰⁷ Ambitious, he made full use of his bailiwick in Stavropol, the northern Caucasus, to develop a tourist area favored by the leadership in order to obtain direct access to Brezhnev, but in particular to Andropov, about whom he had heard so much.¹⁰⁸

Once a suitable hotel complex had been built, Andropov—a native of the region—appeared more regularly in Kislovodsk to take the waters. But, a man of few words and significant understatement, Andropov gave little away when questioned for an impression of the young Gorbachev: "unusual" and "nice" were all he had to say initially.¹⁰⁹ He was, however, more forthcoming to his son Igor, who recalls a comment around 1977 to the effect that Gorbachev could develop into "an outstanding worker, an outstanding leader . . . if, of course, nothing happens."¹¹⁰ Andropov later indicated that Gorbachev stood above the rest, of whom he held a low opinion—gossips, careerists, and rogues. He pondered aloud as to how Gorbachev might be brought to Moscow.¹¹¹ Indeed, he seriously considered making Gorbachev deputy chairman of the KGB in charge of personnel.¹¹² But he was pipped at the post. With the sudden death of Brezhnev loyalist Fyodor Kulakov, on 27 November 1978 Gorbachev was charged with the transformation of agriculture, which had always drawn the short straw in Soviet economic priorities.¹¹³ He had evidently impressed others as much as Andropov: Brezhnev reportedly commented that he was "a worthy Party leader."¹¹⁴ Gorbachev was thus picked up by the Kremlin to breathe some life into a moribund portfolio and an increasingly geriatric Politburo.

In the West many dreamed that someone such as Gorbachev would appear. This was, after all, despite everything a system capable of spawning Dubček, author of the Prague Spring. Thatcher, in particular, took the view that "great men" determined the affairs of the world. Whereas many Americans believed (nurtured by the wrong kind of political science) that the USSR was essentially a mighty machine of which the General Secretary was merely the most

important cog, Thatcher was waiting for the right man to come along and end the Soviet system. At that stage, however, no one had any idea whom this might be. Downing Street thus set about inviting two or three possibilities to Britain.¹¹⁵ The Foreign Secretary described it: "In the autumn of 1983 we came to the conclusion that the main thing was to begin a dialogue with the Soviet leadership. We faced the task to determine who would head the USSR in the near future, inasmuch as the life of Andropov was coming to an end, and Chernenko could be an interim figurehead."¹¹⁶

At around this time a John the Baptist emerged to herald the arrival of the secular Savior. Fyodor Burlatsky was the leading Soviet political sociologist, formerly part of the Andropov team. He toured various universities in Britain and the United States in 1984 telling those Sovietologists willing to listen that a new leader was on the way who would transform the Soviet Union and East-West relations.¹¹⁷ In government note was taken because Gordievsky, who had been spying for MI6 since the early seventies, privately echoed Burlatsky's opinion. Moreover, others knew better than any that Gorbachev had reformist instincts. When Zdeněk Mlynář, an old friend from Moscow university days, visited Stavropol in June 1967, Gorbachev was still under the illusion that Brezhnev would prove a transitional figure, because reform was essential.¹¹⁸

Thatcher nevertheless had to find out for herself. When it turned out that of those invited only Gorbachev could come, she determined this was an opportunity to be seized. Once in Britain Gorbachev did not, of course, contradict Politburo policy. No one would seriously have expected him to do so. Yet his entire approach to dealing with the USSR's staunch adversary in person was refreshingly different: he argued endlessly and to all appearances enjoyed doing so. It was for this reason that at the end of the visit, when interviewed for television on 17 December 1984, Thatcher cautiously but controversially expressed her optimism in a phrase that was to echo into the future: "I like Mr. Gorbachev. We can do business together."¹¹⁹

In Washington, DC, however, most believed she had lost her judgment.¹²⁰ Nevertheless Thatcher's endorsement was significant to Gorbachev for the longer term. Senior British diplomats openly joked that "she created him." It would, though, be more true to say that Thatcher gave his reputation more than a nudge in the right direction. Rosalind Ridgeway, who headed the European section at State, recalls "the importance on the U.S. side" of "the external validation of Gorbachev by Mrs. Thatcher. It was very much a part of what made it possible for those who wanted to work the relationship in a positive way to go forward."¹²¹ Gorbachev had inadvertently gained access to the world stage and made full use of it, thereby outdistancing his peers by a wide margin. The

relationship between Gorbachev and Thatcher thus became something like that of player and coach. A certain bond began to form between them which Thatcher's friend and adviser on anti-Soviet affairs, Robert Conquest, found very frustrating. The problem was, of course, that coach and player belonged to opposing teams.

As Chernenko moved into hospital, word had it, however, that the succession was between Gromyko and Gorbachev. In late January 1985 signs emerged that both sides were prepared to go "*va banque*," and that if Gorbachev pressed his case at the Politburo, "they will not let him through." The decision would then have to go to a Central Committee plenum.¹²² This would have been embarrassing for all. In the event Gromyko, statesman rather than Party man, realized he could not count on support beyond Moscow. In charge of the Central Committee's all-powerful general department, Yegor Ligachev had been slowly but surely amassing appointments with a view to the succession, so that the hinterland of regional Party secretaries from the provinces were to a greater extent Gorbachev men. Convinced of the need to take second best, Gromyko thus sent word through his son, the Africanist Anatoly, via Yevgeny Primakov, a mutual friend, to Alexander Yakovlev. Yakovlev had befriended Gorbachev during the latter's visit to Canada in 1983, another brief foreign visit that reinforced his sense of Russian backwardness. Yakovlev now headed the Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow.¹²³

The deal offered was that Gromyko propose Gorbachev as General Secretary and, on assuming office, Gorbachev would then give him the honorific post of President.¹²⁴ Chernenko died at 7:20 p.m. on 10 March, ultimately of heart failure following emphysema, chronic hepatitis, and cirrhosis. The Politburo met the following day and Gromyko duly spoke in support of Gorbachev as his replacement, pointing out that Brezhnev had consulted him about bringing Gorbachev to Moscow and in so doing referred to his "indomitable, creative energy."¹²⁵

GORBACHEV IN POWER

However, Gromyko also thought he could then elevate his like-minded deputy at the Minindel, Kornienko, into the post of Foreign Minister so that he, Gromyko, could continue to run matters at one remove.¹²⁶ He won the presidency, but it became immediately apparent that Gorbachev was not about to let foreign policy stultify. On 15 March Gorbachev recounted his meetings with foreign leaders in Moscow for Chernenko's funeral: "We told the NATO Powers candidly that the Americans evidently wish to drag out the negotiations in

Geneva indefinitely, thereby lessening the degree of alarm among the nations of the world; sowing disunity in the peace movement. Of course, we cannot allow this. Therefore the focus on Europe in our diplomatic, political, and other activities is extremely important to us. Here we have to be considerably more resolute and flexible.”¹²⁷ Given this overriding need, Americanist Gromyko had to go. The subsequent plenum of the Central Committee on 23 April emphasized the importance of activating foreign policy.¹²⁸ On 30 June Gorbachev telephoned a friend of like mind, Georgian Party Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze, a former Interior Minister, intelligent and open-minded but with absolutely no specialist knowledge of or experience in foreign affairs, to offer the Foreign Ministry. On the following day when this was announced to the Politburo, Gromyko returned to the ministry in fury; Kornienko was stunned.¹²⁹ The appointment of Shevardnadze went through on 16 July.

Shevardnadze was pragmatic. But his instincts were for change. The man closest to Gorbachev and with the greatest impact upon him was another enigma: this was the tiny, squat figure of Yakovlev, with the large tufts of dark hair on both sides of the bald cone of a head—he chaired meetings on a raised seat—but a man to be taken extremely seriously. Also of peasant stock, his mother entirely illiterate, his father barely literate, Yakovlev was born on 2 December 1923 in the village of Korolevo near Yaroslavl. Older than Gorbachev, a war veteran chosen for the higher Party school, Yakovlev was swiftly advanced to the Central Committee apparatus in Moscow at barely thirty years of age, where he witnessed the extraordinary proceedings of the Twentieth Party Congress from the balcony. Never an orthodox thinker, he reacted with ambivalence, being a young war veteran, yet at the same time part of a generation looking forward to a better life even under Soviet conditions.

One of three in the first cultural exchange with the United States, Yakovlev studied at Columbia University, where, in the more homely teaching library at the St. John’s hostel nearby, he educated himself into a new understanding of the world. He was impressed. “There were not even such books in the special collection” of the Lenin Library, he noted.¹³⁰ He also attended Alex Dallin’s classes on the Soviet Union and world communism alongside Serewyn Bialer.¹³¹ During that period he spent a month traveling across the country, every three to four days with a different family. He never liked the West—indeed, at times he could sound viscerally xenophobic¹³²—but he was sure the USSR lagged behind for lack of democracy. Yakovlev believed Stalin a Russian fascist. And his reaction to the destruction of the Prague Spring had to be kept to himself not least because of its cold ferocity: “After Budapest and Prague I

understood that the notion of a [Soviet] commonwealth is a chimera and had not the slightest future.”¹³³

It was certainly true that the problem Moscow faced from Washington was far greater than anything elsewhere. And, given Reagan’s strategy of economic pressure, the need to outflank him seemed self-evident—at least to the reformist camp. The interconnection between foreign and domestic policies was crucial, Yakovlev insisted: “A rational foreign policy that has been thought through will allow us to save substantial sums that will, for instance, reduce the cost of maintaining our defense capability.”¹³⁴

Initially, though, and on the usual bad advice, Gorbachev played with the idea of setting Western Europe at odds with the United States—the customary wedge-driving that had never led to anything productive in the past. Yakovlev followed this line in a memorandum on 12 March. Here he warned Gorbachev of the American “*aspiration to confine our relations with the West to the Soviet-American framework* (the USA is watching its allies with concern).”¹³⁵ Drawing on this brief, Gorbachev was determined to amplify his range of action beyond Washington. “We told the NATO people to their faces that the Americans evidently want to drag out the talks at Geneva to infinity; by this means making the people more anxious, disrupting the movement in the defense of peace. We cannot, of course, allow this. Therefore,” Gorbachev concluded, “the European orientation of our diplomatic, political, and other activities is extremely important for us. Here we must be much more resolute and flexible.”¹³⁶ Anatoly Chernyaev, soon to become Gorbachev’s right-hand man in foreign policy, recalls that until 1986 “the prevailing tactic was ‘the indirect approach’ via pressure on Western Europe, by means of stimulating friction within the Atlantic alliance, through propaganda . . . that is in effect the traditional line though with novel aims—to attain *real* disarmament.”¹³⁷

At a conference of secretaries of the Central Committee held in his Kremlin office on 15 March, following Chernenko’s funeral, Gorbachev “noted that our conversation with the Prime Minister of England, Thatcher, had a somewhat different character” from those with other leaders. The US delegation led by Vice President George Bush and Shultz left a general impression of mediocrity. In contrast, “she spoke quite decisively in favour of expanding bilateral economic, scientific and cultural ties between our countries. Thatcher also stated that she was in favour of energising the dialogue aimed at establishing better trust between member states of the Warsaw Pact and members of NATO.” Gorbachev “told the NATO countries openly that the Americans, apparently, want to prolong the negotiations in Geneva indefinitely. . . . Of course, we cannot

allow this to happen. Therefore, the European orientation of our diplomatic, political and other actions is extremely important for us.”¹³⁸

It became rapidly apparent, however, that Europe was just a matter of tactics within a traditionally Americocentric strategy. Adamishin was a member of the ruling collegium and head of the first European department. He noted: “Once again they focus everything de facto on the USA . . . once again they undervalue Europe’s potential; they want to give nothing to it, throwing what little crumbs there are to the Americans. They quietly stuff them in their pockets and make no moves of their own, which just legitimises our hard-line stance.” The Minindel was dominated by Americanists under Kornienko. “The Military Industrial Committee and its representatives in the Foreign Ministry are strong and in contrast to the liberal doves behave insolently,” the embittered Adamishin wrote. Kornienko’s recent conversation with him underlined certain features of their approach: “They think (or give that impression) in purely military categories: how many of these against how many of those. The political pluses are not taken into account as a result of their intangibility.” Equally evident was “the burning desire to do nothing, for the legitimate question arises, why things weren’t done differently before and who will answer for that. The dead clasp the living.”¹³⁹

The close bonds between the military-industrial complex and senior Americanists were longstanding. The substitution of Shevardnadze for Gromyko therefore promised change. The announcement was made in early July along with news that Moscow had agreed to a summit in Geneva on 19–20 November 1985. Not everyone was pleased. Unable to contain his irritation, Dobrynin indiscreetly confided to Shultz: “Our foreign policy is going down the drain. They have named an agricultural type.”¹⁴⁰ And even Adamishin despaired at “new words in foreign policy and old deeds. The Military-Industrial Committee and its representatives in the Foreign Ministry are trying more than ever to engage those newly empowered in old behaviour and the old line. They also understand that if changes are made in politico-military questions, where the military would have to be whipped into line, then this will obviously not happen soon, not being among the top priorities.” Adamishin shared these thoughts with Shevardnadze, but he responded conventionally that “in security questions the final word is with the military,” “G.M. [Kornienko] knows about these questions; he has good contacts with the military” and so on.¹⁴¹ Adamishin was appalled. He never understood “why G.M. [Kornienko] adopts such an uncompromising position in favour, let us be blunt, of the military.”¹⁴² This habitual approach guided Soviet policy in the run-up to the first summit with Reagan, at Geneva. And it failed utterly. Disillusioned, Shevardnadze’s aide Sergei Tarasenko recalls, “In Geneva we were ashamed of our leader.”¹⁴³

“Geneva ended up a cul-de-sac,” Gorbachev came to conclude.¹⁴⁴ The summit was held at the Maison Fleur d’Eau, Geneva, on 19 November 1985. Gorbachev astounded Aleksandrov-Agentov with the amount of time devoted to preparing his negotiating position. They were up until four in the morning and at work again at seven.¹⁴⁵ When they met, it soon became clear to Reagan that SDI was the core issue. While he asserted that it was purely defensive, even with respect to space-based missiles, Gorbachev insisted it made sense only “if it is to defend against a *retaliatory* strike.”¹⁴⁶ Why would Washington want to introduce such a destabilizing system into the relationship? Gorbachev insisted he “could not ignore the importance of the problem.” And he had difficulty on occasion in keeping his temper when confronted with Reagan’s “banalities.” The tone became threatening at times when Gorbachev complained that “the U.S. had the impression that the USSR was weak and could be painted into a corner.”¹⁴⁷

Most of what occurred had been prefigured in preparatory talks between Shultz and Gorbachev. “We know what’s going on,” Gorbachev insisted. “We know why you’re doing this. You’re inspired by illusions. You think you’re ahead of us in information. You think you’re ahead of us in technology and that you can use these things to gain superiority over the Soviet Union. But this is an illusion. . . . First, you believe that the Soviet Union is less economically powerful and therefore it would be weakened by an arms race. Second, that you have the higher technology and therefore SDI would give you superiority over the Soviet Union in weapons. Third, that the Soviet Union is more interested in negotiations in Geneva than you are. Fourth, that the Soviet Union only thinks of damaging U.S. interests around the world. And fifth, that it would be wrong to trade with the Soviet Union because this would just raise its capability.”¹⁴⁸ And as to SDI, Gorbachev said no compromise was possible without some guarantee against the militarization of space. Without that, Moscow “will let you bankrupt yourselves. But also we will not reduce our offensive missiles. We will engage in a buildup that will break your shield.”¹⁴⁹

Much of this was bluff. “The Analysis of Work on the American SDI Program,” which was produced by the Central Committee’s Military-Industrial Sector in the late summer of 1989, warned that the Soviet Union was “*increasingly out of touch with the newest technologies*” in the face of the near-term American aim of “establishing the necessary scientific basis for the development and creation in essence of new means of armed struggle and security systems, including waging war in outer space.”¹⁵⁰ Gorbachev nevertheless stubbornly sided with the military in believing SDI could be countered. “It is possible to create a system for the destruction of their SDI systems. One can deploy nuclear explosions in

space for these purposes,” he told the Politburo.¹⁵¹ But at what cost? Gorbachev never made that clear. After further concluding that Soviet fears only encouraged the Americans to proceed with the program, Gorbachev emphasized that “we have to stop being afraid of SDI.”¹⁵² Moreover, when foreign policy adviser Chernyaev argued that he “personally never believed that we had an efficient response to SDI,” Gorbachev “dismissed it, saying, ‘You just don’t understand that subject.’”¹⁵³

Akhromeyev and Kornienko had opposed cutting the SS-20, though they were finally overruled by Gorbachev. Prior to the summit, with Kornienko in New York accompanying Shevardnadze, fellow Americanist Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Komplektov smelled the whiff of conspiracy. He “attempted at the last minute to call [Colonel-General Nikolai] Chervov (‘what are you deciding in secret?’—this given the fact that beforehand *everything* was actually decided by our Americanists in secret), but the train has already departed.”¹⁵⁴ Moreover, at Geneva Kornienko typically almost sabotaged an agreed communiqué through a sleight of hand until his bluff was called at Shultz’s instruction.¹⁵⁵

Back in Moscow Gorbachev briefed the Politburo. He lambasted Reagan as “a product of the military-industrial complex, of its most right-wing, reactionary wing. The essence of his thought has not changed. But our pressure, our strength, and world public opinion are having their effect upon him. He was obliged to meet us. It was important to him because the USA is heading for elections. Our policy—broad, objective, constructive—has had a certain political and economic impact.” Of course, he acknowledged, no fundamental changes in relations had occurred; “nothing good could be expected.” Military confrontation would continue. His conclusion was that “Party organizations must hold firmly to the business of defense. Among the people doubts have arisen: is the United States fooling us? That is to say, we also need force, the reinforcement of defense. For us this is ‘the holy of holies.’”¹⁵⁶

GORBACHEV GRASPS THE ZERO OPTION

Yet it was only as a result of the failure at Geneva that Gorbachev insisted upon more radical change. It illustrates the fact that throughout negotiations with Washington from the time of Chernenko the abiding aim was to eliminate the SDI. First Deputy Chief of the General Staff from 1987 to 1989 was General Vladimir Lobov. When asked whether he did not realize that the Americans were bluffing with SDI, Lobov said: “I wish we did! . . . It is a good thing the U.S.’s allies refused to play along. In any event, as long as the possibility existed, we had to take some kind of countermeasures.”¹⁵⁷ Deputy Foreign Minister

and Americanist Alexander Bessmertnykh recalls the atmosphere in Moscow as having been “very tense for the first years of the Reagan administration especially because of the SDI program: it frightened us very much.”¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Tarasenko recalls that “we were afraid of SDI.” But did Moscow have no answer to it? Not so, according to Tarasenko: “We had no such answer!” At the Minindel “the idea was not taken seriously. . . . But Gorbachev didn’t read this criticism. The generals kept feeding him all this information about the threat of SDI.”¹⁵⁹

Anxious for progress, in January 1986 Gorbachev was persuaded to move toward the zero option on theater nuclear forces—abandonment of both the SS-20 and the new US weapons in Europe—that Reagan had advocated back in 1981. This proposal was prepared by Akhromeyev and was hammered together by head of its Treaty and Legal Department Nikolai Chervov and first deputy Viktor Starodubov. Gorbachev was briefed on it in the Crimea before finalization by Chervov.¹⁶⁰ The general message Gorbachev was trying to convey was, as Chernyaev put it, “*there will be no war.*”¹⁶¹

Had Akhromeyev not preempted, the military would have found Gorbachev increasingly unsympathetic. Adamishin noted that the military had already “begun to bristle. They are already beginning to feel under pressure from various sides . . . the Military-Industrial Committee is a state within a state, around 40 percent of productive capacity; no one knows what they are up to. . . . Everything has been fenced off with signs: ‘the interests of security,’ ‘secrets,’ and so on.”¹⁶² The movement toward serious change now gained momentum. Crucially, in February, realizing that he was no longer really well regarded, Alexandrov-Agentov stepped down and gave way to Chernyaev, Yakovlev’s favorite for the post. Meanwhile in May Gorbachev came to Smolenskaya for the first time to address Shevardnadze’s team. No record was ever released of what was said; however, Tarasenko recalls in particular Gorbachev’s biting criticism of the “American abscess” that had developed at the Minindel. He wanted greater attention to Europe and the Third World.¹⁶³

At the urging of Chernyaev, Gorbachev realized the need to force implementation of policy into line with the spirit and substance of his own statements. Doubtless the nuclear explosion at Chernobyl on 26 April alerted him to how little had changed in the Soviet Union and to the costs of failure. His outburst at the Politburo in the spring reveals the depth of frustration and irritation at the glaring gap “between our policy statements and the stance taken in negotiations. . . . Where is it that policy decisions get eroded and why? . . . Most likely it is inertia. But if it is resistance, then we cannot work with such comrades.”¹⁶⁴ “Our Foreign Ministry has given up,” Gorbachev told Honecker, “and doesn’t

believe in progress.”¹⁶⁵ Thus in late April Kornienko was removed to the International Department as deputy head now under Dobrynin.

Gorbachev was more than ever convinced from “our sources” that the Americans “wish to allow negotiations to run up a one-way street. We have removed the one-way street,” he claimed. “The NATO states are now well aware of this and have begun to exert pressure.”¹⁶⁶ Writing to Reagan on 15 September, Gorbachev lamented the sorry fact that “in almost a year since Geneva there has been no movement” on the key issues. Rather than wait until he visited the United States, Gorbachev suggested that “we have a quick one-to-one meeting, let us say in Iceland or in London, may be just for one day, to engage in a strictly confidential, private, and frank discussion (possibly with only our foreign ministers present).”¹⁶⁷ Reagan rejected London as an option and insisted on the prior release of political prisoners. Dobrynin argued that only the Americans would benefit from a summit. But Gorbachev was insistent.¹⁶⁸ In Soviet tradition, Dobrynin was then tasked with heading a working group to prepare for the meeting. Gorbachev told him that “what we need is a breakthrough and not the usual shoddy goods under the slogan ‘all or nothing.’”¹⁶⁹

Washington was divided. Shultz pressed for “substantive progress” on arms control and human rights. “The American people are all for it,” he encouraged Reagan.¹⁷⁰ The summit was thus scheduled for 11–12 October 1986 at Höfði House in Reykjavik overlooking Faxflói Bay. Reagan saw the meeting as no more than a means of accelerating progress in resolving differences. “I do not anticipate signing any agreements,” he made clear on 7 October.¹⁷¹ Reagan thus arrived unprepared. Reformists complained that Gorbachev was “still not acting very decisively.”¹⁷² There was good reason for this. Although Gorbachev sought “to draw Reagan into discussing substance,” he also believed that “in general nothing can, in truth, be done with this administration.” Thus the idea was “to knock Reagan off balance,” to find out “what the real substance is; in what respect the USA is bluffing; what can be obtained; what can now be got from them.” And if the summit collapsed, “then we can say: this is how far we were willing to go!”¹⁷³ Indeed, Gorbachev expected a “difficult” meeting and could “not exclude the possibility of a failure.” Reagan was “holding a meeting for the sake of a meeting.” But Gorbachev was counting at the very least on a publicity coup: “We will aid those forces that are represented by Genscher, for example.”¹⁷⁴ In one sense he was decisive in being determined to outflank Reagan. He thus surprised the Americans with a radical package including a stunning 50 percent cut in strategic weapons—which Reagan had previously demanded—and complete elimination of all theater nuclear weapons in Europe excepting those of Britain and France (Reagan’s zero option).

The offer caught Reagan off guard. Momentary panic ensued because NATO had not been consulted. Both Kohl and Thatcher would be alarmed, as, indeed, they were when they heard that Reagan succumbed to Gorbachev's siren call as a long-term aim to abolish nuclear weapons entirely. Then came the coup de grâce; Gorbachev insisted that the Americans renounce SDI in terms of development beyond the laboratory. But to Reagan "Gorbachev was asking him to give up the thing he'd promised not to give up."¹⁷⁵ After sustained argument, Reagan walked out of the meeting in fury. But it was clear to Shultz, at least, that SDI had given the USA the leverage that brought Moscow to the table. "If he had given in on SDI, all other progress we had achieved with the Soviets would have been problematic," he recalls.¹⁷⁶

Gorbachev was still working very much within old structures beholden to the military-industrial sector and to a standard repertoire. Only the performance varied. As Starodubov noted: "Gorbachev for quite some time avoided entering into open conflict with the military."¹⁷⁷ From the General Staff Danilevich, too, remarked that from 1985 through 1986 Gorbachev "was still swimming with the stream."¹⁷⁸ That was why senior diplomats, who hoped for substantial change, were so depressed. Even Yakovlev was contemptuous of the whole process: each side was trying to deceive the other and part of the Soviet team of experts was trying to deceive its own side. At one time, Yakovlev recalls, Lev Zaikov—installed by Gorbachev as Party overseer of the defense industry—telephoned and asked how many delivery vehicles they had. Yakovlev replied, 39,000. No, said Zaikov, 43,000. But our briefing papers say 39,000, retorted Yakovlev. Zaikov had forced out of a senior figure at the Ministry of Defense the true figure. "In this way they deceived us about other types of weapons as well," Yakovlev recollected. On his view a fantastic 70 percent of Soviet industry was engaged in military production.¹⁷⁹

Reykjavik was a failure. Indeed, it was followed shortly after by Reagan's abrogation of SALT II. It was misconceived to believe that any progress could be made by the approach taken in Iceland. It did, however, prove a turning point in one respect. Tarasenko—not unimpressed by what he deftly called Reagan's "judicious idealism"¹⁸⁰—reflected years later that "after Reykjavik we grew up."¹⁸¹ This was not immediately apparent, however. Indeed, Gorbachev returned ever more determined to outmaneuver Reagan. "I would in no respect call Reykjavik a failure," Gorbachev insisted. To the extent that it was "a setback," Gorbachev put it down to two misconceptions held by "certain circles in the West": "First, that the Russians fear SDI and will therefore make any concessions. And, second, that we are interested in disarmament more than the United States." At Reykjavik, Gorbachev said, they "very soon felt that

they expect me to show 'my cards' in full. At the same time the President arrived without a specific program, merely to pick up the fruit and put it in his basket."¹⁸² "The US administration is shedding its outer camouflage in favor of the military-industrial complex." Condemnation of the USSR for breaching SALT II was "a provocation, a means of legitimizing 'positions of strength.'" Gorbachev believed that "against the background of Reykjavik the true essence of Reagan's policy becomes all the more evident." But he was not about to give up: "Now what is expected of us is not only words but also deeds in response to this display."¹⁸³

Summing up, Gorbachev insisted that "Reykjavik is a new beginning for our all-out peace offensive. We need to develop new approaches to our military doctrine, including the structure of our armed forces and defense industry, and possible retaliation to SDI."¹⁸⁴ Yet it was evidently a contentious meeting. Both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze had to emphasize to the remainder of the Politburo that they had conceded nothing vital. Shevardnadze insisted that, though Moscow had to fight its corner, contact with Washington should not be broken. There had been no concessions, he argued, disingenuously; at least, nothing essential—"These were diplomatic concessions."¹⁸⁵

"The only thing I don't understand," wrote the ever-despairing Adamishin managing European affairs, "is why intermediate-range weapons are tied into the SDI; why this wasn't decided on the spot—Shevardnadze could have been called to the meeting; a break in the proceedings could have been called." And where had this package come from? The Military-Industrial Committee?¹⁸⁶ Yet it was Gorbachev's own idea to forge this linkage: "in a very authoritarian manner, no one objected, although earlier Shevà had tried, entirely accurately, to point out that it was not worth it." But no one backed him.¹⁸⁷ Gorbachev's thinking was that "With the help of the package, we will pull Europe to our side against the SDI through the issue of theater nuclear weapons, and tie up the Americans through [proposals on] strategic weapons."¹⁸⁸ Furthermore Gorbachev still felt the need to carry the Politburo with him. And both his number two Ligachev and Gromyko, now President, insisted that INF—especially the fate of the SS-20—not be decoupled from SDI.¹⁸⁹ The old guard had prevailed.¹⁹⁰ The Foreign Minister remained isolated outside his own department.

After Gorbachev's return, on 14 October 1986 the Politburo took a dual-tracked decision that had him straddling two very different policies in the military-industrial sector. The resolution instructed the Ministry of Defense to bring forward proposals on the structure of strategic nuclear forces to anticipate an agreement with Washington on reductions. But it simultaneously provided for the acceleration of work on retaliatory measures against a multilayered an-

timissile defense system, above all in outer space. Then in mid-December an “evaluation of the politico-military situation” suggested that now the focus had to be upon Europe, “where the task awaits of renewing détente.” The corollary was that Washington had lost influence. Reagan suffered defeat at the November congressional elections; the Iran-Contra scandal had damaged the reputation of the administration; the national debt was rising; no achievements had been attained in foreign policy; and Reagan was under attack for failing to consult his allies at Reykjavik and for acting “impulsively and having made a mess of things.” The conclusion drawn was that the shift to the Right was over. Thus Reagan needed agreement on nuclear disarmament. “What was SDI after all—the American have yet to understand it themselves.” SDI was “a façade,” it was “a convenient flag,” it was “a big American stomach for processing ‘grey matter’ for internal and external digestion.”¹⁹¹

It took sustained US pressure to prompt Soviet concessions of substance. A negative assessment of the prospects of a deal on strategic arms reductions produced in January 1987 was purloined by Moscow soon thereafter. From this the only ray of hope for Gorbachev appeared to be removal of theater nuclear weapons from the package of proposals offered.¹⁹² Evidently as a result of this reassessment Moscow launched an initiative on 28 February in order to set disarmament in motion by concluding a treaty to dispose of theater nuclear forces.¹⁹³ This was not easily done without losing face. Writing to Vitaly Kataev at the Party’s Military-Industrial Sector on 16 March, Akhromeyev emphasized the asymmetries at work: “It has to be borne in mind that their creation and development in the Soviet Union and the USA in the postwar period proceeded differently. In the USSR they were developed in the light of their being cheaper relative to contemporary fighter planes, and we moved ahead of the Americans in their construction.” Whereas the Americans focused on tactical aviation.¹⁹⁴ This could prove a recipe for failure to reach agreement, because it would once again raise the thorny issue of FBS that had been deliberately excluded from the talks hitherto.

A major incentive, however, to ensure agreement lay in the fact that “the SS-20s [RSD-10] were a nightmare for Europe, and the Pershing IIs were, of course, a nightmare for us.”¹⁹⁵ Moreover, even Gromyko now acknowledged that SS-20 deployment had been a grave error.¹⁹⁶ Chernyaev’s argument that Washington would concede on other matters of greater importance, such as SDI, only if Western Europe was drawn toward Moscow and world opinion made itself felt in Washington must have made the prospect of dumping the original all-inclusive package easier to accept; though not without a great deal of reluctance.¹⁹⁷

THE FALLOUT FROM THE INF TREATY

Tensions within Moscow were hard to contain, however. The leadership were inaugurating a new five-year plan. The problem as stated by Gorbachev was that “we have to combine both ‘guns and butter.’ It is hard, very hard. . . . If we retreat, if we get swayed, the outcome will be the same as with the reform of 1956.” It was deeply depressing. “We just think we govern. We’re just imagining it.”¹⁹⁸ The “guns” drew increasing criticism. Adamishin noted that those “on the left” believed it was “necessary to be more decisive with the military,” but that Gorbachev “remains cautious.”¹⁹⁹ In May Defense Minister Sokolov gloomily concluded that Washington would breach the ABM treaty and develop the SDI to the point of no return. Thus agreement on strategic arms reductions in the immediate future had “little prospect.” The Ministry argued that restructuring proposals for negotiation was not a good idea. Instead they should move ahead with retaliatory measures against multilayered antimissile defense and creation of “an antisatellite capability for the destruction of the components of the outer space layer of the USA’s antimissile defense.”²⁰⁰ This would certainly accelerate the arms race still further. Shevardnadze thus pressed ahead on theater nuclear weapons with no great prospect of success. It made him ever more critical of the military as a result. At a meeting of the Defense Council military doctrine came under discussion. Akhromeyev described the scenario if war broke out with twenty-three potential adversaries. Danilevich describes what happened. “His attitude enraged Shevardnadze, who said: ‘Is this the basis for our defense strategy? You want to fight practically the entire world!’”²⁰¹

A bolt from the blue then miraculously came to the aid of the beleaguered Shevardnadze and seriously undercut Gorbachev’s confidence in the advice from the armed forces that had hitherto paralyzed his policy on disarmament. Relations were already strained between civil and military. Ogarkov, in retirement, was said to be “very upset.” But “to him,” Gorbachev snapped, “it is just the more the better.” The Reykjavik summit had increased such “hissing” among the ranks. “It is the generals who are trying to scare us,” he warned Politburo members on 1 December 1986, “they are afraid that they would have nothing to do. There is enough work left for four or five generations of generals.”²⁰² Then, on 28 May 1987 Matthias Rust, a young West German with an unrestrained sense of adventure fortuitously flew a tiny Cessna plane across the Finnish frontier toward Moscow, where he circled the Kremlin before landing just off Red Square.

Nothing epitomized the underlying structural defects in the air defense system more than this embarrassing incident. The news broke while the allied

communist leaders gathered in Warsaw on 29 May. Gorbachev could not conceal his amazement and fury. "It is even worse than Chernobyl," he exploded. "It is an absolute disgrace."²⁰³ At the Politburo on the following morning Gorbachev did not mince words. "The Ministry of Defense has shown scandalous impotence." The leadership had to work out how to explain it all to the Party and public. Deputy Minister Marshal Pyotr' Lushev lamely argued by way of excuse that this was an atypical situation. "And how will we act in combat conditions when atypical situations arise?" Gorbachev interjected. Moreover, this was not the only instance of this kind. One such aircraft had been hijacked to Turkey only a decade before.²⁰⁴ After merely a fifteen-minute break, Sokolov was summarily dismissed and replaced by a mediocrity with a background in personnel, Dmitrii Yazov.²⁰⁵ Not only would he take a considerable period of time to understand what was going on, but his limited background ill-fitted him to his new role.

The incident provided an opportunity for establishing political control over the military. "For a long time," Nikolai Ryzhkov said, "the army was a kind of forbidden zone for inspecting what was going on in it. As a result of this a certain corrosion has taken place." Both Syria and Libya had complained at the poor quality of the air defense they had received. With more than one grievance to sustain him given military resistance to his disarmament proposals, Shevardnadze lunged without restraint. "I must say plainly that what we have done in the country for reconstruction did not have any fundamental impact on our army. But with respect to the army, it always had a certain autonomy which was argued on the basis of its special conditions. This served as a barrier for information about its circumstances. I think we must have complete information about the state of affairs in the army."²⁰⁶

"In the army," Shevardnadze continued, "we have beatings and even pillaging, plunder and other instances of law-breaking among our forces in Afghanistan, in Mongolia and Hungary. I fear that there is insufficient discipline in the army; instances of drug addiction have been observed. The people know this." The army was being "devalued." "We have been fighting for eight years in Afghanistan. And what has changed in this term? Why do 100,000 of our forces in this country show their impotence?" He concluded by calling for resignations. The meeting closed with Sokolov's resignation.²⁰⁷

Then on 6 August the Politburo resolved to declassify the defense budget over the course of the next two to three years.²⁰⁸ The military were now visibly in disarray. The path was thus open for fundamental change in the disarmament negotiations. Chernyaev recalls that "it took a long time to convince them [the military] of the need to take the SS-20s out of Europe."²⁰⁹ By late November,

however, Shevardnadze had drawn Akhromeyev into his web. As negotiations proceeded it was, noted Adamishin, “pathetic to see how he [Akhromeyev] met his end; in certain situations he visibly suffered.”²¹⁰ Finally, on 7 December 1987 Gorbachev arrived in Washington to sign the resultant treaty eliminating intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles on the following day.

The reasons behind the INF treaty were outlined by the Politburo committee responsible (Zaikov, Chebrikov, Shevardnadze, Yazov, Dobrynin, and Maslyukov): “to take the first step along the road to the genuine liquidation of nuclear arsenals . . . to remove from Europe the American Pershing II missiles (particularly dangerous to us because of their small flight time and high degree of accuracy) and ground-launched Cruise missiles; to exert serious pressure on European and world public opinion, demonstrating the initial results of our new approach on the world stage.”²¹¹ Similarly, Major-General Yuri Lebedev, deputy head of the General Staff Treaty and Legal Directorate argued that “the problem of eliminating medium-range missiles and operational-tactical missiles has, one might say, become the key to resolving other major problems in limiting the nuclear arms race, in disarmament, including such problems as forestalling an arms race in outer space.”²¹²

However, a Party meeting of the department on 29 December attacked the “mistakes that were permitted in the preparation of the treaty on intermediate-range forces, when we defended our positions with inadequate firmness and gave way to the Americans.” In the written version of the criticism given by Subbotin, the words “gave way” were substituted for the words “gave in.” Criticism was hedged around with agreement in principle and focused on preparation that linked to relations between members of the department and corresponding members of the Minindel. And criticism focused on the state of those relations not just in respect of the INF treaty. One officer, Tatarnikov, “said that for certain employees of the Foreign Ministry perestroika is a matter of surrendering positions to our adversaries.” Others argued that the selection of the military element in the delegation was “done frequently on the principle of who was ‘acceptable’ and who ‘unacceptable.’” The sentiment was expressed “that senior figures in the legal and treaty department [sic] of the General Staff directorate, who firmly hold to instructions given from the center and demand, if necessary, the right to communicate their particular point of view to the leadership, meet with a disapproving attitude on the part of Foreign Ministry employees. And vice versa.”²¹³

In response the corresponding Politburo committee, made up mainly from the Military-Industrial Sector, agreed that on occasion at Geneva some behavior could be explained by the “attempts of our diplomats to maneuver on their

own account especially at high level meetings to avoid taking with them 'uncongenial' specialists whose opinion might complicate discussions." But the committee would not countenance criticism that diplomats had been making concessions to the adversary "even on those questions that are the prerogative of the military section of the delegation," but it did agree that diplomats had a tendency "to aim solely at reaching results instantaneously as a result of which they frequently surrender positions on questions of principle." This was most evident in the negotiations on conventional armaments at Vienna. The committee also agreed that the Foreign Ministry tended to try to vet potential delegates from other ministries for their degree of sympathy with the diplomatic viewpoint.²¹⁴

Thus the talks following on from the INF treaty were drawn back under the control of the military-industrial complex, and further progress on disarmament was held up. One attempt to break the logjam was made in instructions for negotiations with Shultz for the meeting on 20–23 March 1988. The guiding principle was to sustain the position that a 50 percent cut in offensive nuclear weapons was feasible if Washington agreed not to depart from the ABM treaty for nine or ten years: once again to block SDI. And the shadow of disputes over the INF treaty was visible in the concern expressed not to concede any unilateral advantage in respect of cuts in conventional defense, but to untangle everything else and treat individual issues in dispute between Moscow and Washington on their merits and in isolation. In particular, Moscow had in mind to explore "the possibilities of Soviet-American joint action in the regulation of existing conflicts and not allowing new ones."²¹⁵ The thorny issue of conventional weapons had therefore still to be grasped and there was every sign that this was an area in which Gorbachev was loath to make concessions, for that would carry serious implications for the entire Soviet cordon sanitaire in Eastern/Central Europe, where the issue of fundamental change had been evaded for far too long. And despite occasional outbursts to the contrary, one should not underestimate his deference toward military requirements. Even when the Soviet economy was on the verge of collapse, on 18 April 1991 Gorbachev signed presidential decree 1812 on "Urgent Measures to Improve the Country's Mobilization Readiness," compensating industry for the costs of maintaining the capacity for mobilization.²¹⁶