

The Grand Strategy That Won the Cold War: Architecture of Triumph

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For anyone crediting and honoring Ronald Reagan as the President who defeated communism, this is a must-read book. The authors of the various chapters—several were members of President Reagan's National Security Council staff—single him out as the progenitor of the “grand strategy” that brought down the Soviet Union. The book begins as a record of the formative events shaping Reagan, the man, in terms of his views and perceptions of communism. In the second part, the reader discovers the broad sweep of the many discussions, meetings, and decisions that helped Reagan see the fruition of his strategy to win the Cold War.

Reagan intended to *defeat* communism; in essence, he went to war. This

distinction enconces him as nonpareil among Presidents in dealing with the threat. President Reagan's thinking was encapsulated in a simple, trenchant statement he made as governor of California: “We win and they lose.” His outlook was very basic, very fundamental, and, it must be added, very timely, as the earlier strategies to counter the Soviet Union fluctuated between détente and containment. Reagan said no to both.

The authors eloquently and effectively highlight those early events shaping Reagan's views. They return to his days with the Screen Actors Guild when Reagan, the actor, was deeply moved by *Witness*, the autobiography of one-time communist Whittaker Chambers. For Reagan, the book delineated the ends, ways, and means of communism, and basically set him on the conservative course he followed for the rest of his life. His 1964 speech delivered on behalf of Barry Goldwater's Presidential campaign, titled “A Time for Choosing,” stands out as another milestone of Reagan's views. Specifically, Reagan surmised the United States could not play defense all the time; it would lose. Eventually, he concluded the United States must eschew détente and take a strategic initiative to roll back—not just counter—the communist threat.

The documentation and primary sources in the book's second part are fascinating reading in themselves. Drawing on declassified National Security Decision Directives and talking points, some included as appendices, the authors show the 40th President as an able planner, very much involved during his first term's outset. While the documents capture only a short span of his Presidency's early years, Reagan's burst of energy is nevertheless evident; he shines as a crafter of a strategy that was indeed “grand.” It was never static, and it entailed, as evidenced in the documents, all sources of power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. Indeed, Reagan wanted them all working cohesively to fight the Cold War and to win it decisively. Reagan's great faith in U.S. technology is also evident in excerpts of his personal diary.

Those documents also assist the authors' attempts to correct the record about the fall of communism. Specifically, they assert the Soviet Union's demise did not “just happen,” to put it colloquially. Contrary to myth, President Reagan is far more than what some journalists described as a casual spectator, simply watching the Cold War events unfold toward an inevitable conclusion. The authors claim that Reagan was the instrument of change, unwavering from his endstate. Nor did Reagan alter his views in the face of the media swoon over Mikhail Gorbachev when that Soviet leader entered the international scene.

The intense focus on Reagan and his high-level measures is one of this book's shortcomings. The reader may notice a slight neglect of other factors affecting the demise of the Soviet Union. There is good coverage of the internal suffering from the malaise produced by communism; the Soviet people were indeed dissatisfied with “the great Lie.” Reagan took advantage of that dismal internal state of affairs, knowing it created fertile ground for the effects of Radio Free Europe (RFE), which Reagan's administration reenergized after it had languished in the 1970s.

Also, the absence of argument makes the book come across as fawning. The authors' individual chapters consistently reinforce each other, with no attempts made to counter or debate the other contributors' theses or points of view.

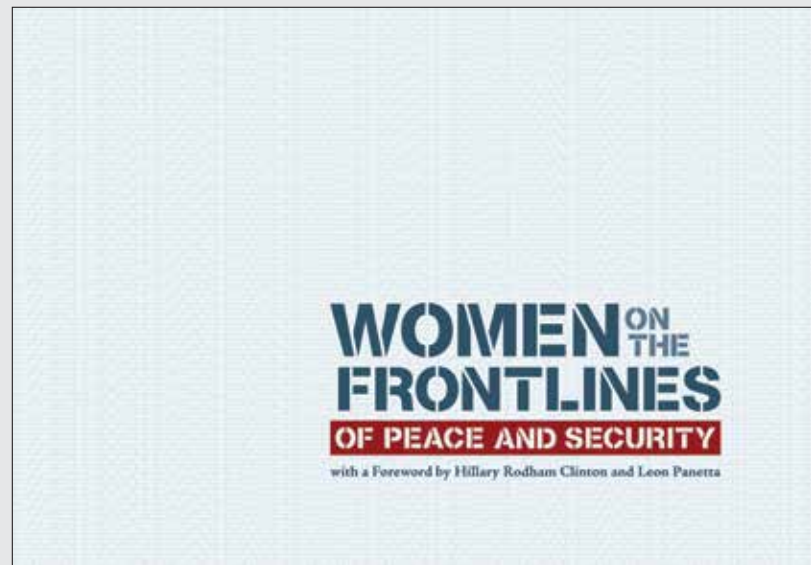
Furthermore, the book's focus on high-level strategic exchanges creates a dearth of coverage of operational exploits. The military build-up during Reagan's administration is not really addressed. There is no mention of the seminal Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Neither the Joint Chiefs of Staff nor the Chairman receive much attention. When they do appear, however, it is heartening to see them as cooperative actors for the most part.

President Reagan's methodical dissection of the entire Soviet problem is instructive, reflecting the system's approach, which is now a major part of joint publications. Also, the book's sections

dealing with the power of information lend themselves well to future joint operations. Current articles about information operations are replete with the need for fine-tuned narrative, key leader engagement, and considerations of the proper target audiences. This is bolstered by a very instructive reference to RFE by the dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who exhorted the medium's power but deplored its ineffective content in the 1970s.

Given the way the book demonstrates Reagan's steadfastness, future commanders in chief might be inclined to follow his example to address the threats facing the United States in much the same way. After all, one of the newer principles of war is "perseverance." Future Presidents will, in essence, have a grand strategy model should they need it. JFQ

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From NDU Press

Women on the Frontlines of Peace and Security

Foreword by Hillary Rodham Clinton and Leon Panetta

NDU Press, 2015 • 218 pp.

This book reflects President Barack Obama's commitment to advancing women's participation in preventing conflict and keeping peace. It is inspired by the countless women and girls on the frontlines who make a difference every day in their communities and societies by creating opportunities and building peace.

Around the globe, policymakers and activists are working to empower women as agents of peace and to help address the challenges they face as survivors of conflict. When women are involved in peace negotiations, they raise important issues that might be otherwise overlooked. When women are educated and enabled to participate in every aspect of their societies—from growing the economy to strengthening the security sector—communities are more stable and less prone to conflict.

Our understanding of the importance of women in building and keeping peace is informed by a wide range of experts, from diplomats to military officials and from human rights activists to development professionals. The goal of this book is to bring together these diverse voices. As leaders in every region of the world recognize, no country can reach its full potential without the participation of all its citizens. This book seeks to add to the chorus of voices working to ensure that women and girls take their rightful place in building a stronger, safer, more prosperous world.

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