

**Ronald Reagan: A Cold War Strategist or an Opportunist?
Framing in Reagan's Presidential Interviews Between 1981-1989.**

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Introduction

*The apparent riddle is that Reagan entered the White House to revive ‘the worst days of the Cold War and then brought about the most significant improvement in Soviet-American relations since the end of World War II’.*¹

Anatoly Dobrynin

Context

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has sparked a new relevance for analyzing the post-World War II years. The tense East-West relations of today are reminiscent of the strain in relations during the second half of the twentieth century, the growing Russian imperialism can be compared to the expansionism of the USSR and the question of nuclear power and weapons is again a heated topic. Lastly, rhetoric and framing by political leaders on both sides of the conflict plays a key role in understanding and thinking about it. Particularly this last aspect has inspired the topic of this thesis.

Post-1945 global history has largely been studied in the context of the Cold War and within the framework of the ideological opposition of two superpowers, the USA and the USSR. Consequently, developments in the second half of the twentieth century have largely been placed in the paradigm of geopolitics.² Such a conceptualization is not surprising; the competing ideologies of communism and capitalism, a differing understanding of modernism but also to the opposing exceptionalist claims of both nations led to an international effort to establish and enlarge their respective spheres of influences.³ However, by the 1990s, historians and other scholars started to recognize other global developments that took place during the Cold War years and researchers began to go beyond geopolitics and national narratives of the Cold War. Since then, works discussing the Cold War have also put focus on transnational connections and developments. Likewise, room is given to diverse social, economic, and

¹ Anatoly Dobrynin in John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (New York: WW Norton, 2008), 265.

² Akira Iriye, “Historicizing the Cold War,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Richard H. Immermand, Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

³ Naoko Shibusawa, “Ideology, Culture, and Cold War,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Richard H. Immermand, Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 41; also see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) for more on the global character of the Cold War and the involvement of the two superpowers in the emerging and newly emerged countries.

cultural developments. Especially, the Global South has been assigned more agency in the research.⁴

The Cold War era⁵ itself is traditionally divided into distinctive periods based on the state of relations between East and West. Scholar Vladimir O. Pechatnov has distinguished the Cold War periods as follows: the early years (1945-1953), competitive coexistence (mid-1950s until late 1960s), détente (1969-1976), late years (late 1970s until early 1980s) and the end of Cold War (late 1980s until 1991). The focus of this thesis is the period of the 1980s, which some scholars have also called the Second Cold War, due to the intensification of the superpower opposition.⁶ The reversal of détente⁷ in the late 1970s lies in a mixture of explanations. One of them is the growing Soviet involvement in strategic locations such as Nicaragua, but more importantly their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 which to many Americans confirmed the expansionist character of the Soviet Union. American people were also increasingly dissatisfied with the policy of détente and viewed it as American defeat in the Cold War confrontation.⁸

In this climate of worsening US-USSR relations, Ronald Reagan's election as President in 1980 only fueled the fire. Reagan's stance on foreign relations and the Cold War was located at the extreme right of the Republican party. Furthermore, many critics in the opposition considered him a 'warmonger' and a 'gunslinger'.⁹ Reagan's presidency brought a new era of military buildup and intense containment politics. The latter involved extensive American military involvement in different regional conflicts in support of political parties and/or leaders that favored the US in the Cold War confrontation. Most notable of these were the Middle East

⁴ A. Iriye, "Historicizing," 29. There are many examples of research that goes beyond the national narratives and geopolitics as well as works that give agency to the Global South. Find some of them here: Tim Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Robert Edelman, Christopher Young, *The Whole World Was Watching: Sport in the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 2019); Sarah Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Accords* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Richard Saull: "Locating the Global South in the Theorisation of the Cold War: Capitalist Development, Social Revolution and Geopolitical Conflict," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2005): 253-280.

⁵ Read more on the Cold War and its developments from the Russian perspective in Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2015). Also see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (Penguin Books, 2006).

⁶ Pechatnov has made this division based on United States' and Soviet Union's evolving perceptions of the nature and prospects of the conflict, the respective goals of both nations and their means to achieve these goals. Other authors have used varying periodizations, but for this paper, Pechatnov's division is fitting. Vladimir O. Pechatnov, "Soviet-American Relations Through the Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. R. H. Immermand, P. Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2013), 107; Fred Halliday, *The Making of a Second Cold War* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁷ Détente refers to the easing of hostilities between countries with strained relations.

⁸ V. O. Pechatnov, "Soviet-American Relations," 113, 115.

⁹ J. P. Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 199.

(Iran) and Central America (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, Grenada). These republics experienced first-hand the US' interest in combating the expansion of communism.¹⁰

Not surprisingly then, the first years of Reagan's presidency were defined by a confrontational stance towards the USSR. Within this period, different crises and events around the world worsened the tensions between the superpowers and negotiations for nuclear disarmament were failing. In 1980-1981 the Polish crisis¹¹ took place, which hardened the US stance towards USSR. In 1982, Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev died, and Yuri Andropov ascended to his position; in 1984 after Andropov's death, Konstantin Chernenko took the role. Not only were these three General Secretaries hardline communists, but they also died too fast to lead to any meaningful relationship-building with Reagan.¹²

1983 was an especially tense year. In March of that year, President Reagan made the 'Evil Empire' speech,¹³ condemning the Soviet system and announced his intention to embark upon research into a defense system that could make nuclear weapons obsolete. The system was called Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).¹⁴ Reagan stressed that this would be for defensive purposes only, but the USSR viewed SDI as a US effort to achieve first-strike capacity. In September, the Soviet air force shot down a scheduled commercial Korean Airlines flight from Seoul to New York claiming that it was a US spy plane.¹⁵ In November, NATO organized the

¹⁰ Containment politics was the geopolitical foreign policy of the US during the Cold War. The aim of it was to prevent the spread of communism. Containment was largely pursued by trying to extend the global sphere of influence of the US. Andrew E. Busch, "Ronald Reagan and the Defeat of the Soviet Empire," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 27 no. 3 (Summer 1997): 452-453; A. G. Hopkins, *American Empire: Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 713, 717.

¹¹ The Polish Crisis of 1980-1981 was an event in which Polish people challenged the rule of the Polish United Workers' Party and the country's alignment with the Soviet Union. It was closely related to the Solidarity trade union (established in 1980) mass movement. See, for example, Douglas J. MacEachin, *US Intelligence and the Confrontation in Poland, 1980-1981* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Vojtech Mastny, "The Soviet Non-Invasion of Poland in 1980-1981 and the End of the Cold War," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 1999): 189-211.

¹² J. P. Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 352-353; Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 265, 575-576, 592-593, 611.

¹³ Reagan delivered this speech on March 8, 1983, to the National Association of Evangelicals. In that speech he made an explicit binary distinction between good and evil and morality and corruption. The name of the speech is inspired by a line in the speech where Reagan called the Soviet Union the 'evil empire' and 'the focus of evil in the modern world'. For a close investigation of the Evil Empire speech see Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "Reagan's Strategy for the Cold War and the Evil Empire Address," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 19 no. 3 (fall 2016): 427-464.

¹⁴ For the announcement of SDI see R. Reagan, *An American Life*, 574-575; for more in-depth research on SDI as a tool in Reagan's negotiations with the Soviets see Robbie J. den Daas, "The Strategic Defense Initiative and the End of the Cold War: Reagan's Bluff or a Genius Strategic Ploy?" BA thesis, (Radboud University, 2019).

¹⁵ For Korean Air Lines flight see James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War*, (Penguin Press, 2010), 42.

annual Able Archer exercise,¹⁶ which the Soviets thought was a real effort at starting an offensive by the US.

1984 can be seen as a year in which the tensions started to lessen again, and Reagan adopted a more conciliatory stance towards USSR. Things took a more definite turn for the better, however, when Mikhail Gorbachev took the position of General Secretary in 1985. He was a reform-minded, young politician that Reagan could cooperate with. Their first meeting occurred in Geneva the same year, followed by the summit at Reykjavik in 1986 and another one in Washington in 1987. The latter marked a great achievement in East-West relations: the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which Reagan had proposed already in 1981.¹⁷

Historiography

The role of Reagan in the ending of the Cold War is one of the most discussed topics among Cold War scholars. There are (conservative) scholars who argue that Ronald Reagan and the American strategies during the 1980s played a key role in ending the Cold War (e.g., Peter Schweizer and J. L. Gaddis), while others state that Reagan was only at the right place at the right time and/or his actions had no major consequences on the collapse of the USSR (e.g., Frances Fitzgerald). Some also argue that Gorbachev was the key figure instead of Reagan and that the Soviet General Secretary's misguided efforts to reform collectivism caused the collapse of the USSR (e.g., Robert McMahon, V. M. Zubok).¹⁸

More moderate scholars attribute the ending of the Cold War to both leaders, stating that the combination of the two reform-minded and ambitious statesmen was the needed formula to end the Cold War (e.g., Archie Brown, Jack Matlock, John Patrick Diggins).¹⁹ The latter is an increasingly popular stance to take. These arguments all fall into the realm of history of the 'great men' (top-down) but differ in the specifics. The conservatives depict Reagan (or Gorbachev) as a leader whose actions shaped the course of history, while more

¹⁶ Able Archer was an annual NATO exercise in Europe. Similarly, to previous years, Able Archer in 1983 was intended as a simulation of conflict escalation and as before, it was going to culminate in the US military attaining a simulated defense readiness condition (DEFCON) 1 coordinated nuclear attack. See J. Mann, *The Rebellion*, 42.

¹⁷ R. Reagan, *An American Life*, 293-294, 623 and Raymond L. Garthoff, "Gorbachev: Back to Détente – and Beyond," in *Soviet Leaders*, 74-94.

¹⁸ Nicholas Guyatt, "The End of Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. R. H. Immerman, P. Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2013), 606; Michael F. Hopkins, "Continuing Debate and New Approaches in Cold War History," *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 4 (December 2007): 921-922.

¹⁹ Archie Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Archie Brown, "Perestroika and the End of the Cold War," *Cold War History* 7 no. 1 (2007): 2; J. P. Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*.

moderate/critical authors admit that Reagan was a president who happened to rule at a time where circumstances allowed for the foreign policy to move in the direction that it did.²⁰

A different school of thought believes that economic, political and/or social forces were the key reason for the collapse of the USSR. While they do not deny the importance of key individuals, these scholars look for more systemic and structural explanations for the historic event (e.g., Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth).²¹ One of the more famous arguments in this category is the ‘imperial overstretch’ theory, which states that if a country devotes more than ten percent of its GNP to military expenditure for a long time, the growth of the nation will stop.²²

Scholars have proposed several ideas about Reagan’s goals when it came to the Cold War opposition with the Soviet Union. American historian John Patrick Diggins argues that Reagan’s goal was the elimination of nuclear weapons, not the defeat of the Soviet Union. In Diggins’ opinion, Reagan was ready to coexist with the Soviet Union if the Kremlin was ready to negotiate on some key topics like nuclear weapons, human rights, and international expansion. British political scientist Archie Brown has a similar opinion. He highlights Reagan’s interest in ‘building a constructive relationship’ with the Soviets, while expressing his intolerance towards their ‘hostile international activities’.²³ On the other hand, conservative thinkers such as American military historian John Lewis Gaddis and politician and international relations professor Kiron K. Skinner, believe that Reagan was aiming at winning the Cold War and that he was able to do so.²⁴

In particular, Reagan’s anti-communist rhetoric has gained much attention among historians, political scientists, media and communication specialists among others. This scholarly debate concerns itself with Reagan’s strategy for Cold War foreign policy. Scholars have successfully shown that the shift from ‘confrontational’ rhetoric to ‘conciliatory’ took place due to Reagan’s thought-out plan by exploring his famous speeches (“Evil Empire” in

²⁰ Sarah C. Maza, *Thinking About History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017): 10-11.

²¹ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “Clarifying the End of Cold War Debate,” *Cold War History* 7, no. 3 (2007): 447-454.

²² Interestingly, this term was first used by Paul Kennedy in 1989, who argued that the USA would be the one who fell, as they were consistently the ones with the highest percentage of military expenditure. It was the Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad who used the theory in the context of the USSR collapsing in 2012. See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500-2000* (Vintage, 1989) and Geir Lundestad, *The Rise and Decline of the American “Empire”: Power and Its Limits in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 132-133.

²³ J. P. Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 404; A. Brown, *The Human Factor*, 146.

²⁴ N. Guyatt, “The End of the Cold War,” 606; Kiron K. Skinner, *The Strategy of Campaigning: Lessons from Ronald Reagan and Boris Yeltsin*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 126.

1983, “Ivan and Anya” in 1984 “Brandenburg Gate” in 1987, etc.) and his actions and words did correlate, even if it did not seem so at the time.²⁵ While everyone agrees that Reagan’s administration went through a development from ‘confrontational’ to a ‘conciliatory’ stance regarding the USSR, the reasons behind this are explained through different lenses.²⁶

There are scholars who argue that Reagan had no clear plan in mind when taking office. Those works are often formulated by his (conservative) critics (e.g., Beth A. Fischer). Authors who have taken the ‘no clear strategy’ stance believe that the shift in Reagan’s rhetoric and approach to the Cold War between his first and second term in office was due to Reagan reacting to the situation and developments in the USSR. This view was developed at a time when academics did not have access to some crucial sources, which became available only later and show that Reagan had plans to negotiate with the Kremlin from the early stages of his administration.²⁷

Another group of authors argue that Reagan had a clear strategy to deal with the Cold War, as well as the nuclear threat, in Reagan’s advisor Martin Anderson’s words a ‘grand strategy.’ Academics like Robert C. Rowland, John M. Jones, Tore T. Petersen, Barbara Farnham and John Patrick Diggins explain that the shift in rhetoric and approach was related to that.²⁸ This strategy lies in 1) frankly calling the USSR what they are (realistic point of view which Reagan referred to as realism), 2) peace through strength, which meant building up American military capabilities to negotiate with the Soviets successfully, and 3) protecting liberal democratic values.²⁹

A debate that is connected to the above-mentioned one revolves around Reagan’s leadership style and personal character. Critics like Jane Mayer and Doyle McManus depict him as someone who was a puppet to his advisors. They represent Reagan as uninterested in the serious matters of the presidency and ineffective due to scandals like the Iran-Contra affair.³⁰ These assessments, however, are from works published before Reagan had left office

²⁵ R. C. Rowland, J. M. Jones, “Reagan’s Strategy;” Robert C. Rowland, John M. Jones, “Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate: Moral Clarity Tempered by Pragmatism,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 21-50; J. Mann, *The Rebellion*, 342.

²⁶ J. P. Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 354.

²⁷ Robert Samuel, “Conservative Intellectuals and the Reagan-Gorbachev Summits,” *Cold War History* 12, no. 1 (2012): 139.

²⁸ R. C. Rowland and J. M. Jones, “Reagan’s Strategy,” 429; See also R. C. Rowland and J. M. Jones, “Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate;” Tore. T. Petersen, “Ronald Reagan: Leadership Style and Foreign Policy,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* no. 8 (2004): 136-166; Barbara Farnham, “Reagan and the Gorbachev Revolution: Perceiving the End of Threat,” *Political Science Quarterly* 116, no. 2 (summer 2001): 225-252.

²⁹ R. C. Rowland and J. M. Jones, “Reagan’s Strategy,” 431-434.

³⁰ The Iran-Contra Affair was a political scandal during Reagan’s second term as President. Senior officials from Reagan’s administration sold arms to Iran (a country under an arms embargo) between 1981-1986 to be

and lack nuance in their analysis.³¹ Accounts from his administration workers and family like Secretary of State George Schultz and Nancy Reagan, to name a couple, also confirm Reagan's independence in thinking. While these individuals' closeness to the president colors their view of him, it is worth exploring this perspective through a critical lens, in combination with more impartial research. As journalist Lou Cannon has pointed out, most people, whether critical or not of Reagan, underestimated the complexity of him as a person and as a politician.³²

The common understanding is that Reagan left much of the work to his subordinates, as he found the bureaucratic paperwork dull. The newer perspective, however, shows that he did not hesitate to speak up and voice his disagreement about issues he deeply cared about, including speeches, interviews and most things related to the Cold War and US-USSR relations. Reagan often rubbed the 'hawks' of his administration wrong with his more conciliatory approach to the USSR in his later years of presidency. Regarding the policies towards the Soviet Union, Reagan tended to see important new developments after Gorbachev's appointment much more clearly and long-term than his conservative critics.³³

What all authors and scholars can agree on, is Reagan's mastering of performance and rhetorical skills. His career in Hollywood and radio, as well as his experience as governor of California, had prepared him well for the increasingly rhetorical and public role of the American presidency. James W. Ceaser et al. attribute this shift to a modern doctrine of the presidential leadership, the modern mass media, and the modern presidential campaign. The media as a facilitator was very important. According to British international studies professor David Mervin, American presidents increasingly needed to appear on and interact with media such as newspapers, radio, and TV broadcasts and that the importance of the TV in American

able to fund right-wing Contras in Nicaragua. The evidence on whether Reagan authorized this is disputed. According to Reagan himself, he knew nothing about it and when he found out, he immediately went to Congress and press, as well as called for an independent investigation and asked for an independent prosecutor to determine if any laws were broken. Reagan did admit that he supported the Contras' cause but would not have authorized an unlawful transfer of funds even if he had known about it. Reagan also stated that his administration continued work on both domestic and foreign policy programs even during the scandal. (R. Reagan, *An American Life*, 530-531, 532-533, 542.) For more see Alex Douville, "The Iran-Contra Affair," in Richard Weitz, ed., *Project on National Security Reform: Case Studies Working Group Report* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2012): 87-148 and Alexander G. Janssens, "Reagan's Iran-Contra Affair of 1985-1987: Its Place in US Foreign History According to Sylvan and Majeski," BA thesis, (Radboud University, 2019).

³¹ John W. Sloan, "Meeting the Leadership Challenges the Modern Presidency: The Political Skills and Leadership of Ronald Reagan," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 26, no. 3 (summer 1996): 795.

³² George P. Shultz, "Foreword," in Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, eds. *Reagan in His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America*, (Free Press, 2001): xi; Lou Cannon, "A Journalist's Perspective," in *Leadership in the Reagan Presidency, Part II*, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), 53.

³³ J. P. Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 218, 349; A. Brown, *The Human Factor*, 171; J. Mann, *The Rebellion*, xvi-xvii, 39, 151.

politics is mostly manifested in free media and not in paid political advertising. The importance of free media also meant that levels of criticism of the president were very defined. In a political system in which many people are inherently suspicious of the government and in which the media has freedom to be critical, the president needed to be a confident communicator. Reagan was a president with required skills. Not only was he a skillful speaker, but he also recognized the importance of the media and the relevance of the performative aspect of the presidency.³⁴

Research Question, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology

This thesis aims to add to the debate about Reagan's Cold War strategy. To that end, it takes the starting point that Reagan had at least a preliminary strategy for approaching the question of the Cold War and the newly worsening US-USSR relations when taking office in 1981. The dissertation aims to show, however, that this strategy developed and matured during Reagan's early years in office and fully formed by his second term. Specifically, the investigation aims to answer the following research question: what continuities and changes can be observed in Ronald Reagan's framing of US-Soviet relations and nuclear disarmament talks in Reagan's interviews between his first presidential term (1981-1984) and his second presidential term (1985-1989)?

Unlike previous research, which has focused on Reagan's rhetoric and concrete foreign policy decisions, this investigation focuses on Reagan's framing practices regarding the Soviet-US relations and nuclear disarmament negotiations. Reagan's presidential interviews gain detailed attention and are subjected to thorough content analysis to determine and explain the frames he used. By conducting a diachronic comparison of Reagan's first and second term in office, this thesis aims to showcase continuities and differences in framing between his two terms in office. These developments will also be used as evidence to argue that Reagan did indeed have a preliminary Cold War strategy when becoming President but that it matured during his first presidential term.

As mentioned, Reagan's presidential interviews are utilized. The transcripts for these interviews are accessed through the *American Presidency Project* website, a non-profit and non-partisan undertaking based in the University of California in Santa Barbara. It collects and makes virtually available hundreds of thousands of presidential documents. It is important to note that interviews are a very specific instance of conversation. They are an example of a

³⁴ James W. Ceaser, Glen E. Thurow, Jeffrey Tulis, Joseph M. Bassette, "The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 11, no. 2 (spring 1981): 161; David Mervin, *Ronald Reagan: The American Presidency*, (Routledge, 1990), 15-16, 84.

formal interaction where turn-taking in speaking is predetermined by the interview format, i.e., the interviewer asking questions and the interviewee answering them.³⁵ As such, interviews distort the power relation of the conversationalists. As sociologist Harvey Sacks put it: ‘As long as one is in the position of doing the questions, then in part they have control of the conversation.’³⁶ In other words, the interviewee is not at full liberty to dictate what the discussion is about and what is highlighted. That is done by the interviewer who picks the topics of discussion.³⁷

The interviews analyzed in this thesis, however, were all pre-planned either by the initiative of the journalists or by the White House staff and they were not conducted in a television studio; rather they were predominantly private meetings or calls with journalists in the White House rooms or occasionally in other locations. Some of them were recorded for later broadcast but no live audience was present during the interviews. As such, none of these interviews took the President by surprise and that probably lessened the power distortion explained above. Consequently, when it comes to framing, Reagan had the opportunity to prepare his answers to some extent. The influences of this on Reagan’s framing practices is discussed more thoroughly in the analysis.

An important term to understand regarding this question is framing.³⁸ According to political scientists Stanley Feldman, ‘frames focus attention on specific explanations for understanding issues [and] highlight connections between issues and particular considerations, increasing the likelihood that these considerations will be retrieved when thinking about an

³⁵ Steven E. Clayman, “Conversation Analysis in the News Interview,” in *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*, eds. Jack Sidnell and Tanya Stivers (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013): 630-631.

³⁶ Harvey Sacks in Kaoru Hayano, “Question Design in Conversation,” in *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*, eds. J. Sidnell and T. Stivers (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013) 396.

³⁷ This falls outside the scope for this research, but the specifics of the interview format can be researched using the method of conversation analysis (CA), which originates in sociology, but is also widely used in disciplines such as linguistics and communication sciences. It is an extensive qualitative method and covers a wide range of analysis from fundamental structures of conversation (e.g., turn design, preface) to key topics (e.g., gaze, question design, response design) and contexts (e.g., psychotherapy, medicine, news interviews). To specifically contribute to the type of investigation conducted in this thesis, elements relevant to the interview format would be most interesting, such as question and response design and turn taking, which so far have been analyzed in the context of TV interviews. For a good overview of CA see Jack Sidnell and Tanya Stivers eds., *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013).

³⁸ The definition of framing used in this paper should not be mistaken with what is known as media framing. According to media and public affairs expert R. M. Entman, the latter is defined as ‘selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.’ This definition also includes highlighting some aspects over others. However, it is different in that it is used by the media not the politician and can be about both, real and perceived aspects. R. M. Entman in Sam Calvert, “Framing the Soviet Athlete in the American Media,” *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 87.

issue'.³⁹ This definition draws attention to the ability of frames to highlight certain topics over others, but also their capability to prime the audience, i.e., make the audience utilize ideas highlighted by the frames when thinking about certain issues. Framing is very relevant in the domain of international relations (foreign policy) in general, as political leaders apply frames to influence other decision-makers in a desired direction.⁴⁰

As political scientists Mintz and Redd highlight, there are different ways politicians can utilize frames. They are as follows: purposeful, thematic vs evaluative, productive vs counterproductive, successful vs failed, framing vs counterframing, loss frames vs gain frames, interactive framing, framing by a third party, framing vs priming. In this thesis the categories of productive vs counterproductive and successful vs failed are omitted from analysis as they imply the reception of the frames Reagan used and reception analysis lies outside the scope of this research. Reagan's use of the remaining frames as outlined by Mintz and Redd is considered. These frames are identified and defined in the analysis section and placed in the political context of the 1980s.⁴¹

The thesis is divided into three analytical chapters. The first chapter considers the sub-question: how did Reagan frame the US-Soviet relations and nuclear disarmament negotiations during his first term (1981-1984)? The second chapter investigates the sub-question: how did Reagan frame the US-Soviet relations and nuclear disarmament negotiations during his second term (1985-1989)? Those first two chapters aim to showcase the types of frames Reagan applied during his respective presidential terms and how those frames connected to the contemporary socio-political context. The last chapter answers the sub-question(s): what developments can be observed and why in Reagan's framing practices between his two presidential terms? The goal of the last chapter is to explicitly compare Reagan's two presidential terms and present any developments in Reagan's framing. This chapter also provides an explanation for Reagan's Cold War strategy. The thesis will close with a conclusion containing the analytical findings and suggestions for future research.

³⁹ Stanley Feldman, "Answering Survey Questions: The Measurement and Meaning of Public Opinion," in *Political Judgement: Structure and Process*, eds. Milton Lodge Kathleen M. McGraw (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995): 267-268.

⁴⁰ Alex Mintz, Steven B. Redd, "Framing Effects in International Relations," *Synthese* 135, no. 2 (May 2003): 194.

⁴¹ A. Mintz, Steven B. Redd, "Framing," 194-200.

Chapter 1: Reagan's Framing Practices From 1981-1984

Realism

When Reagan took office in 1981, he was known for being a hardline anti-communist. While this was a stance that many applauded, it was also one that was criticized by Reagan's opposition and journalists for being too provocative and counterproductive to peace-efforts. In March 1981, in an interview for Walter Cronkite from CBS, Cronkite emphasized this criticism by referring to Reagan's earlier description of the Soviet leadership as 'liars and thieves,' and terming it 'name-calling'. In Cronkite's opinion, this type of rhetoric would only complicate relations and negotiations with the Soviet Union and make the Americans look 'childish'.⁴²

Reagan took the criticism lightly, stood by and justified his stance. His reasoning was that if the Americans did not admit the realities of the Soviet system, then they would be naïve. To negotiate with the Soviets, Americans needed to remember the truth about them. In other words, Reagan was already applying a purposeful frame to the Soviet-US relations and nuclear arms negotiations – he was emphasizing the realistic stance that he had taken when it came to the USSR and was aiming to make the American audience understand the way their country should be approaching the Soviet system. He kept to this strategy of realism throughout his first term and explained his harsh rhetoric (honesty about the USSR) through this frame.⁴³

The realistic angle was also seen in how Reagan framed the differences between the Soviet communist and US liberal democratic world in opposition to each other. The prior was always depicted as unable to provide necessities for its people, morally corrupt, lacking freedom and voting rights, as well as promoting the advancement of elites over regular people. On the other hand, Reagan claimed that the liberal democracy had been proven to prevail not only in America, but also elsewhere and it considered people's wants and needs.⁴⁴ This

⁴² Ronald Reagan, "Excerpts from an Interview With Walter Cronkite of CBS News," March 3, 1981, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247059>.

⁴³ Ibid.; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With the President," December 23, 1981, by Andrew J. Glass of Cox Newspapers, Benjamin Shore of Copley News Service, Ann Devroy of Gannett News Service, Robert E. Thompson of Hearst Newspapers, Saul Friedman of Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Loye W. Miller, Jr. of Newhouse News Service, Ted Knap of Scripps-Howard News Service, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/246390>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Representatives of NHK Television in Tokyo, Japan," November 11, 1983, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262236>.

⁴⁴ R. Reagan, "Excerpts," March 3, 1981; R. Reagan, "Interview," December 23, 1981; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Reporters From the Los Angeles Times," January 20, 1982, by Jack Nelson, Richard T. Cooper, George Skelton, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245848>.

intensified framing of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ tied into Reagan’s goals of stopping the spread of communism by containment politics.

Indeed, in the early years of his first term of presidency, Reagan had outlined strict terms for going to the negotiation table with the Soviets. One of those conditions was the willingness of the Soviets to show through concrete actions their moderation and compliance to curb the USSR’s imperialism and aggression. The other was the requirement of some proof from the Soviets that they were open to discuss nuclear reduction with the US. Critics pointed out that Reagan’s rhetoric might be the reason for a lack of success in getting the Soviets to follow these set terms. In an interview on January 20, 1982, Reagan conceded that the events in Poland and Afghanistan, for example, could have been seen through the lens of the Soviets being defensive and creating a buffer zone but he more readily reverted to the story of their Marxist-Leninist desire for world communism, e.g., Soviets are expansionist and imperialistic.⁴⁵

Peace From Strength

Reagan also highlighted the unilateral disarming of the US in the 1970s⁴⁶ and the military superiority that the USSR had gained through that. In the new President’s opinion, this was not a useful spot to negotiate from – he wanted to negotiate from a position of strength and that meant building up American military arsenal. In his own words: ‘What do you have to negotiate with [if the opposition is stronger than you]? [...] you have nothing to trade.’ Reagan also believed that the clearly worsening economy of the USSR – brought on by their faulty communist system and extensive armament spending – was a factor that would aid the US in the negotiations in the long run, especially if they kept strengthening their military power.⁴⁷

By employing an evaluative frame when discussing this topic, Reagan made sure the public considered the US inferiority as a loss-scenario. In other words, US military weakness comparatively to the USSR’s military strength would only lead to further expansion of communism and to an escalation of the nuclear arsenal and consequently, to a threat of real

⁴⁵ R. Reagan, “Excerpts,” March 3, 1981.

⁴⁶ By using the phrase ‘unilateral disarming’, Reagan was exaggerating. The reality was at best unilateral reduction of nuclear weapons by the US. The country still had nuclear weapons, and none were eliminated fully. Reagan’s extreme reference to complete disarming can be explained as a framing tactic; Reagan aimed to portray the dire need for the US to militarily catch up to the USSR in more urgent terms.

⁴⁷ R. Reagan, “Excerpts,” March 3, 1981; Ronald Reagan, “Interview in New York City With Members of the Editorial Board of the New York Post,” March 23, 1982, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245930>; Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Representatives of Western European Publications,” May 21, 1982, by Marc Ullman of Paris Match, Nicholas Ashford of London Times, Thomas Kielinger of Die Welt, Marino de Medici of Il Tempo, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/246082>.

conflict (World War and/or nuclear war). Framing the military situation in such a way, Reagan could rally more support to his harsh rhetoric and military build-up. According to Mintz and Redd, a loss-frame increases the audiences' risk-acceptant behavior, because the loss scenarios is worse than the risk that needs to be taken to tackle the central problem. In this case, the risk was an escalation of the Cold War tensions between the US and USSR, while the problem needing solving was the nuclear weapon arsenal and Cold War opposition as such.⁴⁸

The evaluative framing in combination with a thematic framing technique was also one which Reagan used to gain support for increasing the US defense budget with the goal of building up military strength; Reagan highlighted the loss-scenario while also connecting economic issues in the thematic frame of (national) security. The President always presented this need for a bigger defense budget in a structurally sound frame; the previous administration had starved the military leading to a window of vulnerability as the USSR kept building their military and nuclear arsenal; contemporarily, the percentage of gross national product geared towards defense spending in America was low; the buildup was necessary to show the Soviet leadership that America was again willing to defend itself. The President also tended to explain that defense spending should not just be about money, but about understanding what is needed for the successful defense of America and if reducing the budget would result in a critical defense component being removed due to a lack of funding. Reagan also always emphasized his willingness to sit down and negotiate arms reduction that could not only make the world safer but also decrease the defense budget by default.⁴⁹

Negotiations

As noted, this strong rhetoric against the Soviets and the military build-up was not done because Reagan wanted to revive the conflict. According to the newly elected President, his goal was to negotiate an arms reduction. However, critics referred to Reagan's harsh stance, military buildup, and strict conditions for a summit as a cause for the negotiations being on standstill during his first years in office, even though the President kept claiming that he was

⁴⁸ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Joseph Rice of the Cleveland Plain Dealer," November 30, 1981, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247480>; A. Mintz, S. B. Redd, "Framing Effects," 195.

⁴⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Skip Weber of the Iowa Daily Press Association in Des Moines," February 9 1982, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245826>; Ronald Reagan, Interview With USA Today," April 26, 1983, by John C. Quinn of Gannett Newspapers, Ann Devroy and Don Campbell of Gannett News Service, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262847>.

open for negotiations. The critics' argument had some merit, as Reagan had no summit meetings during his first term as President. His original proposals about nuclear reduction were also in extremes, i.e., his proposal of zero-zero in INF talks, instead of a more moderate proposal to start with. Some interviewers like Jerry Boyd from *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, were frankly expressing their critical opinion: '[...] the thing to do is just to call for a summit meeting [...] without any kind of conditions. Is that out of the question?'⁵⁰

In response to such implicit accusations of Reagan's lack of working towards peace, the President tended to bring up his efforts at planning meetings, as well as blaming the Soviets. According to Reagan's own framing of the issue, the lack of success in negotiating arms reduction and tensions in US-USSR relations in general was fully due to the imperialistic and aggressive stance of the USSR. Reagan also responded to the Soviet counter framing by contradicting the Soviet propaganda in which the Soviets are seen as peace-loving and the US proposals being unreasonable and unacceptable. Reagan additionally explained that having a summit should involve an agenda and not be a simple meet-and-greet.⁵¹

However, in March of 1983 Reagan held the 'Evil Empire' speech, which seemed to go fully against the President's claims for wanting peace and negotiations. This speech for many people rather signaled that war was the only conclusion to the Cold War and any meaningful relationship between the two superpowers was hindered by the vastly different character of the two. Reagan, nevertheless, remained consistent with his framing. Painting the US as good and the USSR as evil was not a call for war but being realistic. Reagan firmly assured that he did not subscribe to the 'war is inevitable' idea. According to Reagan, the military buildup of America and the critical rhetoric about Soviets was only a step towards eventual peace and nuclear weapons elimination and he kept to his words during his entire first term as President.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Jerry Boyd of the St. Loui Post Dispatch on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues," February 1, 1983, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261505>.

⁵¹ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Western European Television Correspondents on the President's Trip to Europe," June 1, 1982, by Gerard Saint-Paul of French Television 1, Sergie Telmon of Italian Television-RAL, Martin Bell of BBC television, Hans-Dieter Kronzucker of German Television-ZDF, online by Gerhard Peters and John T Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245125>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Marvin Stone and Joseph Fromm of US News and World Report," December 15, 1983, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project; <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262248>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With American and Foreign Journalists at the Williamsburg Economic Summit Conference in Virginia," May 31, 1983, by Lou Cannon of the Washington Post, Saul Friedman of Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Jerry Watson of the Chicago Sun-Times, John Hall of the Media General News Service, Dean Reynolds of CNN, Robert Sole of Le Monde, Mauro Lucentini of Il Giornale, Carola Kaps of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262537>; R. Reagan, "Interview," February 1, 1983.

⁵² Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Henry Brandon of the London Sunday Times and News Service on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues," March 18, 1983, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The

Despite the increasing pressure from home and abroad to act and move the negotiations along, Reagan still stuck to the zero-zero proposal for the INF treaty. According to his framing, this was because the administration had announced a goal of total elimination of the intermediate weapons. The President did, however, state that Americans were ‘ready to negotiate in good faith any reasonable proposal or suggestion’, alluding to the fact that there might be a possibility for an in-between step. Still, Reagan indirectly blamed the Soviets for the lack of progress on these talks.⁵³

The Soviets did, however, come up with some (counter)proposals about nuclear weapons. In the spring of 1982, General Secretary Brezhnev proposed a ‘unilateral moratorium’ and in the spring of 1983 his successor Andropov offered to cut back on nuclear weapons. However, at best Reagan took these proposals with a grain of salt and at worst he considered them unnegotiable. Reagan deemed Brezhnev’s proposal as a ‘political game’ but received Andropov’s proposal with more positivity. Even so, Reagan was not fully convinced at Soviet sincerity and admitted that Andropov’s offer could be a propaganda ploy. This back-and-forth exemplifies that while some sort of efforts at negotiating were undertaken by both sides, the sour relations between the superpowers were not improved enough to be able to take any meaningful steps towards real betterment of US-USSR relations nor a nuclear reduction agreement.⁵⁴

In May 1983, just prior to the upcoming G7 summit meeting, Reagan stated in an interview that the US had proposed an interim solution for the reduction of weapons within the limits of the INF treaty. This move was likely undertaken as the pressure for a real result was increasingly expected among the audience in Europe as the ongoing discussions with the Soviet Union were leading nowhere. It was clear, however, that Reagan still stuck to his peace from strength frame, stating that in his opinion ‘the [INF] negotiations will not get down to brass tacks until [the Soviets] see that [the US and allies in Europe] are going forward with the scheduled deployment of [Pershing II Missiles]’. Nevertheless, in June, Reagan announced that

American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262023>; R. Reagan, “Interview” November 30, 1981; R. Reagan, “Interview,” May 21, 1982; Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Garry Clifford and Patricia Ryan of People Magazine, December 6, 1983, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262244>.

⁵³ R. Reagan, “Interview,” March 18, 1983.

⁵⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Interview in Oklahoma City With Reporters From the Daily Oklahoma,” March 16, 1982, by Edward Gaylord, Allan Cromely, Jim Standard, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245726>.

the US would have a more flexible stance in the INF negotiations in Geneva. This was received positively by the journalists as a step in the right direction.⁵⁵

Deterrence

The spring of 1983 was also the moment when Reagan started to increasingly highlight the need for a deterrent weapon to convince the critics that he did indeed want peace. This was also done because of the official announcement of SDI in the same year. The President positioned the rhetoric of deterrence in the same evaluative framework of peace from strength like he had done for the previous military buildup in general. The idea was that deterrence would make the Soviets think twice before taking any drastic steps towards starting a nuclear war. This idea of deterrence started to appear in Reagan's framing already in earlier interviews. In an interview to foreign journalists on June 1, 1982, Reagan alluded to a 'deterrent toward war of any kind.' Similarly, when discussing the plans to produce the MX Missile⁵⁶ in December of the same year, Reagan highlighted that the goal was for MX 'to never be used [as the administration] is trying to create a deterrent that will prevent there ever being a need for them or a war.'⁵⁷

Despite these minor changes in Reagan administration's approach to the US-Soviet relations and nuclear arms reduction talks, by the end of 1983 nothing had been accomplished and the Soviets had walked out of the INF negotiations. This led to journalists questioning Reagan's foreign policies. The President used this criticism to counterframe his lack of success in more positive terms. He referenced the increased deterrent capabilities of the US and its European allies and ensured that this would bring the Soviets back to the table soon. In other words, he had been successful at closing the 'window of vulnerability' and peace from strength was still a real possibility. Additionally, Reagan called attention to the fact that since World War II, there had been nineteen attempts at arms reduction negotiations, and he had been the only one to get the Soviets to at least offer reductions. The President also framed the previous

⁵⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Foreign Television Journalists," May 26, 1983, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262426>; R. Reagan, "Interview," May 31, 1983; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Stan Turner of KSTP-TV in Minneapolis, Minnesota," June 9, 1983, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262757>.

⁵⁶ The MX Missile, 'Missile Experimental' or Peacekeeper was an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of carrying multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs). They were already pursued in the 1970s, but only deployed during Reagan's presidency. For a contemporary view on the MX see Dennis Phillips, "America's MX Missile Muddle," *The Australian Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (Summer 1981): 447-454.

⁵⁷ R. Reagan, "Interview," May 26, 1983, Ronald Reagan, "Remarks in an Interview With Independent Radio Network Correspondents on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues," December 18, 1982, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/244880>.

agreements of SALT I and II as failures,⁵⁸ as they merely set a ceiling for the number of nuclear weapons and SALT II was not even ratified.⁵⁹

In the election year of 1984, Reagan was attempting to frame his foreign policy in an appealing manner for voters. Reagan was clear that his administration had only started with bettering international relations, armaments talks and nuclear reduction and elimination negotiations and all of this remained to be done. While this could have been considered as a goal for his next term as President, it also implicitly showed that he was aware of his lack of success in all these aspects during his first term. Reagan was, nevertheless, keeping to his previous frames and carrying on his ideas of realism, peace from strength, deterrence, and nuclear reduction/elimination.⁶⁰

Another complication for negotiations during the mid-1980s was the newly elected General Secretary Chernenko. He was still settling into his new role, while Reagan was busy starting the reelection campaign. Neither were fully ready to dive deep into discussions. Reagan still maintained that his administration was waiting at the negotiating table, but that a summit meeting needed a more solid agenda to take place. In the meanwhile, Reagan also framed his choice not to make any further concessions in the standstill talks as a good negotiating tactic – he did not want to reward Soviets for walking away from the negotiations and did not want to enter a cycle of negotiating with themselves.⁶¹

By November 1984 it was clear that Reagan would remain President, and his administration had the responsibility to continue the foreign policy front. The Soviets, too,

⁵⁸ Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) were two rounds of bilateral discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union in which the two nations negotiated arms control. SALT I (beginning in 1969), containing an Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and an interim agreement between the US and USSR, was signed in 1972. SALT II was agreed upon in 1979, but the US Senate did not ratify this treaty because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Supreme Soviet also left it in the air. SALT II expired in the end of 1985 and was never renewed.

⁵⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Reporters on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues," December 23, 1983, by Helen Thomas of United Press International, James B. Gerstenzang of Associated Press, Pierre Rousselin of Agence France-Presse, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262302>.

⁶⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Lou Cannon, David Hoffman, and Juan Williams of the Washington Post on Foreign and Domestic Issues," January 16, 1984, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261637>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Robert L. Bartley and Albert R. Hunt of the Wall Street Journal on Foreign and Domestic Issues," February 2, 1984, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260412>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Steven R. Weisman and Francis X. Clines of the New York Times on Foreign and Domestic Issues," March 28, 1984, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261093>.

⁶¹ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With the Knight-Ridder News Service on Foreign and Domestic Issues," February 13, 1984, online by Gerhard Peters, John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261456>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Television Correspondents Representing Nations Attending the London Economic Summit," May 31, 1984, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261489>.

were more open to try and restart the negotiations, as they saw that Reagan was to stay for another four-year term. Importantly, the high tensions of the turbulent 1983 had died down a bit and constructive communication was again possible. Both superpowers were perceived as being in a rush to take to the negotiating table and continue where they had left off. Reagan was eager to prove that his peace from strength initiative of the first presidential term had worked and framed this new enthusiasm from both sides as a victory for his policies.⁶²

Chapter 2: Reagan's Framing Practices From 1985-1989

Negotiations

The beginning of Reagan's second term as President changed nothing in the US-USSR relations and nuclear arms negotiations fronts. The negotiators from the US and Soviet side had some meetings, but no concrete agreements were made. However, Reagan's tone had marginally changed. He seemed more willing to pursue talks with the Soviets, as well as improve the relations between the two superpowers. This can partially be explained by the similar change of tone in the Soviet side, but more practically by the fact that Reagan had only four years left to make real changes on the Cold War front. In January, Reagan seemed pleased that the representatives of US and USSR had set up some procedures for planning future meetings on nuclear weapons and space arms negotiations. The President did, however, call attention to the fact that his positivity was not to be mistaken with euphoria; he admitted that coming to any agreement could take longer than the four years he had left in office. Nevertheless, Reagan emphasized that it was the first time Soviets themselves had expressed the want for reduction of weapons and perhaps a final elimination.⁶³

While the attitude for negotiating was becoming a bit more flexible, Reagan still adhered to his central ideas for foreign policy that he outlined during his first term. That is, he still wanted to draw attention to the Soviet Union's true nature and be realistic about the negotiations. He also still strongly believed in peace from strength. Reagan maintained that to realistically convince the Soviets that it was in their own interest to openly negotiate a reduction in nuclear weapons, America had to show USSR that the US' 'industrial power, [which the

⁶² Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Representatives of the Washington Times," November 27, 1984, by Smith Hempstone, Woody West, Wesley Pruden, Josette Sheeran, Jeremiah O'Leary, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261039>.

⁶³ Ronald Reagan, Interview With Burl Osborne and Carl Leubsdorf of the Dallas Morning News," January 8, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260016>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Representatives of Independent Radio Networks," January 26, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260064>.

Soviets] know they cannot match' would enter the arms race again and not enable the Soviets to be militarily superior. This increased US military strength would take away the Soviets' trump of being able to come in with ultimatums and negotiate only for their own benefit.⁶⁴

Peace from Strength

During his second term, Reagan continued to campaign for higher defense spending. In addition to framing any future cuts in defense spending as integral in reducing the defensive and security capabilities of the US, Reagan started to bring more attention to the fact that the Defense Department already had made relevant cuts. He sequentially tied this addition in with the frame he had built in earlier years. Reagan was then able to say that not only was cutting expenses from the defense budget bad for security, but it had already been done as much as possible and any more cuts would result in the infringement of US national security.⁶⁵

In 1985, Reagan still framed the military capabilities of the US and USSR as 'imbalanced.' He emphasized that the US had some catching up to do with the Soviet Union, even when this was not accurate anymore. This purposeful framing of US as inferior militarily was done to gather support for bigger defense spending also in his second term and to convince Americans that further military buildup was needed. However, in the second term Reagan had to balance this frame better; he had to show that his first term had been somewhat successful. As such, the President made sure to also frame this gap in military power as shrinking and one that had been shrunk quite a lot in the previous years. In this way, he argued that while some work remained to be done, the US was able to deter any possible plans for attack by the USSR and have a better position for any negotiations.⁶⁶

Deterrence and Defense

Additionally, Reagan still strongly supported the continuation of research into SDI and the idea of deterrence. This was a system that received much spotlight during Reagan's second term as President. Reagan was definitely very proud of SDI and in March 1985 he explained in an interview for *Newsweek Magazine* that he did indeed come up with the idea early in his first

⁶⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With a Group of Senior Executives and Staff Members From the Wall Street Journal," February 7, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259234>.

⁶⁵ R. Reagan, "Interview," January 26, 1985.

⁶⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Bernard Weinraub and Gerald Boyd of the New York Times," February 11, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259654>.

presidential term, despite the rumors saying he heard about it somewhere. Reagan did, however, also emphasize that this idea came to him while he was already President, not before. Explicitly taking credit for SDI was an interesting move; if it was successful, then Reagan would have gotten credit for something revolutionary, but if unsuccessful, he would have gotten all the blame. This can explain why Reagan put a lot of emphasis in trying to explain and defend SDI among the home and foreign audiences.⁶⁷

In 1985, Reagan started to frame SDI more as a defense weapon (or system) rather than simply a deterrent. In his mind this was the solution to making nuclear weapons obsolete. The President purposefully framed the SDI as a defensive weapon not meant for harming humans and highlighted that the US did not aim to create a first strike opportunity for themselves. To present this argument as more believable, especially to foreign observers and the USSR, Reagan argued that he would internationalize SDI before deployment; in other words, he would share the technology with others.⁶⁸

SDI, nevertheless, had its critics and one of the main criticisms was that by deploying SDI, previously signed treaties like the ABM⁶⁹ would be violated. Reagan countered this by denying any violations of treaties, but more importantly he framed the need for SDI in the context of Soviets already researching a similar system in violation of the ABM. Reagan also placed SDI in an evaluative frame, i.e., why should the world keep adhering to MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) when it could have MAS (Mutually Assured Security)? In this way he gave people a ‘this’ or ‘that’ option where MAD would inherently be a less moral and dangerous choice. Additionally, Reagan believed that SDI should be pursued even when an agreement for nuclear arms reduction or elimination would be reached. He justified this by stating: ‘We all know how to make [nuclear weapons] [...] and sometime, in a time of stress, [...] somebody is going to say [...] maybe it would be handy for us to produce a few.’ Reagan,

⁶⁷ Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Morton Kondracke and Richard H. Smith of Newsweek Magazine,” March 4, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260105>.

⁶⁸ R. Reagan, “Interview,” February 7, 1985; R. Reagan, “Interview,” February 11, 1985; R. Reagan, “Interview,” March 4, 1985; Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Foreign Journalists,” April 25, 1985, by Horst-Alexander Siebert of Die Welt, Mario Calvo-Platero of Il Sole 24 Ore, Toshikaka Yoshida of Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Fred Harrison of Financial Post, Michel Faure of Liberation, Richard Beeston of Daily Telegraph, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260364>.

⁶⁹ The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) was signed in 1972. It was an arms control treaty between the US and the USSR and aimed to curb the use and existence of anti-ballistic missile systems. The treaty was terminated after the US withdrew in 2002. For more see John B. Rhinelander, “The ABM Treaty – Past, Present and Future (Part I),” *Journal of Conflict & Security Law* 6, no. 1 (June 2001): 91-114 and John B. Rhinelander, “The ABM Treaty – Paste, Present and Future (Part II),” *Journal of Conflict & Security Law* 6, no. 2 (December 2001): 225-243.

hence, framed SDI not only in terms of contemporary times but also kept in mind the possible dangers of the future.⁷⁰

Reagan-Gorbachev Summit Meetings

In March 1985, the Soviet Union again got a new leader. This time it was the younger and more reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev. The first months of Gorbachev's leadership, however, saw no major changes in US-USSR relations, as Reagan was still not sure nor convinced that he was dealing with a different type of Soviet General Secretary. In an interview for *The London Times* in early April, Reagan described Gorbachev as belonging to the Politburo and emerging from the same communist system as the previous leaders and that, in the President's opinion, did not indicate that a new direction would take place in negotiations nor relations between the superpowers in general.⁷¹

In his new presidential term, Reagan did, however, not only want to negotiate a reduction of nuclear weapons but understand and find a solution for the mutual suspicion and as a result try to resolve all the big and hindering differences between the two superpowers. He started to purposefully frame the lack of a trustful relationship between the US-USSR as a source of trouble, because 'they were talking *about* each other instead of talking *to* each other'.⁷² Reagan wanted this essential problem to be solved. By framing the differences between the political-economic systems more implicitly, Reagan made sure that he was not depicting his aversion towards the USSR as a want to pressure them into changing, but rather emphasize the coexistence of the US and USSR, as well as avoid any misunderstanding that could end in confrontation. Nevertheless, this transition was not sudden and occasionally the President still called out the expansionist character of the communist system.⁷³

By August 1985, solid plans for a first Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in Geneva had been agreed upon. This was also Reagan's first summit meeting with a USSR leader during his career as President of the United States. Unlike in his first term, Reagan did not insist on discussing

⁷⁰ R. Reagan, "Interview," February 11, 1985.

⁷¹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks in an Interview With Nicholas Ashford and Charles Douglas-Home of the Times of London," April 4, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259926>.

⁷² Italics added by me. R. Reagan, "Interview," April 25, 1985.

⁷³ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Foreign Journalists," April 29, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259315>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Arab Journalist Nasser Eddin Nashashibi," June 11, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259447>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Representatives of College Radio Stations," September 9, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260098>.

only nuclear arms reductions. His goal for the upcoming meeting in Geneva was to also get to know Gorbachev better and discuss the root aspects of the differences between their two countries. Reagan was less hostile in rhetoric, but in the interviews preceding the summit, he continually outlined that he wanted to make Gorbachev understand that the US and rest of the free world had no hostile intentions towards the USSR and all tensions were created by the expansionist character of the USSR.⁷⁴

Of course, there were also plans to discuss nuclear reduction. On the eve of the summit, critics pestered Reagan about SDI as being a possible stumbling block for the negotiations, as it was known that Gorbachev did not like American pursuit of the system. Reagan countered the critics, among which were Soviets, by framing the SDI as being the integral part for erasing the mutual hostility, suspicion, and paranoia between the superpowers. In his opinion this would be the result because of all the aspects of SDI that he had been highlighting previously, i.e., it being a defensive weapon and rendering nuclear weapons obsolete, it would be shared with the world etc.⁷⁵

The first meeting in Geneva proceeded with no major breakthroughs, but in retrospect it was important in reengaging the two superpowers in dialogue. One of the most important outcomes was that Gorbachev and Reagan agreed on two more summits. However, the highly expected second summit, originally said to take place sometime in 1986, seemed to be getting out of reach by February of 1986. Journalists were talking about a new chill in the Soviet-US relations. Reagan countered these speculations by framing the slowing down of nuclear talks as a consequence of the complexities of such negotiations that mainly stemmed from the imbalance in nuclear weapon arsenals the two countries had. While implicitly still referencing Soviet military advantages, Reagan overall remained hopeful that negotiations would resume also independent of a summit meeting. The President also maintained confidence in Gorbachev being interested in having an arms reduction agreement.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Telephone Interview With Lockwood R. Doty of Washington Broadcast News," August 24, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters, John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260500>; R. Reagan, "Interview," September 9, 1985; Ronald Reagan, "Remarks in an Interview With Written Representatives of Le Figaro of France, Together of Written Responses to Questions," September 26, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/258524>.

⁷⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Brian Widlake of the British Broadcasting Corporation," October 29, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259490>; Ronald Reagan, "Remarks in an Interview With Representatives of Soviet News Organizations, Together With Written Responses to Questions," October 31, 1985, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259629>.

⁷⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Lou Cannon and David Hoffman of Washington Post," February 10, 1986, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project,

As the year progressed, people started to doubt if any breakthrough was even going to be likely in the arms reduction talks. Reagan countered this too, by explaining that it was normal to move on very slowly with talks like this. He framed the talks in the historical context and compared his own slow advancement with previous attempts at negotiating with the Soviets. At the same time, the President, preemptively to criticism, framed his situation as unique – he was the first to aim for an arms reduction, not a limitation agreement. This way he could easily explain why he had had no tangible success with the Soviets when compared to his predecessors.⁷⁷

Despite the doubts, the two leaders did meet in October 1986 – not in Washington as originally planned, but in Reykjavik. During this summit, important issues were agreed upon and a major reduction agreement was tangible until the last moment. Gorbachev declared that he was willing to sign, but only if SDI was scrapped. Reagan refused to compromise on the defensive system and the summit concluded without an agreement. Reykjavik was perceived and framed as a failure (especially by the foreign observers), but in retrospect it was a turning point in the US-USSR relations and reduction talks. Reagan himself saw this as a huge disappointment at the time but framed it as a tough point in the negotiations, something that could be overcome.⁷⁸

In December 1987, the third summit took place in Washington. This ended up being the triumph that Reagan had strived towards since his first term as President. The INF treaty was finally agreed upon and signed and long-awaited progress in US-Soviet negotiations was achieved. While many applauded this treaty, there were critics too. The latter's main concern was the possible vulnerability of Europe. Reagan, however, countered this by framing the elimination of intermediary nuclear weapons as important for the safety of civilians. Additionally, he highlighted the fact that the short range, battlefield, and conventional weapons would remain, and safety was still guaranteed.⁷⁹

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/257695>; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With Representatives of the Baltimore Sun," March 12, 1986, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/258473>.

⁷⁷ Ronald Reagan, "Interview With R. W. Apple, Jr., Gerald M. Boyd and Bernard Weinraub of the New York Times," March 21, 1986, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/258739>.

⁷⁸ J. Mann, *The Rebellion*, 46; A. Brown, *The Human Factor*, 182; Ronald Reagan, "Interview With White House News Correspondents," April 28, 1987, by Jerome R. Watson of Chicago Times-Sun, Owen Ullman of Knight-Ridder Newspapers, James R. Gerstenzang of Los Angeles Times, Jeremiah O'Leary of Washington Times, Julie Johnson of Baltimore Sun, Thomas J. Brazaitis of Cleveland Plain Dealer, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/252753>; Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, pp 675-679.

⁷⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Excerpts From an Interview With Conservative Columnists Following the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting," December 9, 1987, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American

The last summit meeting between Gorbachev and Reagan took place in spring of 1988 in Moscow. For this meeting Reagan did not promise any big agreements. He framed the START⁸⁰ negotiations as something that would be good to sign but highly unlikely due to its complexity. The President portrayed setting a deadline for such a complex treaty as counterproductive and possibly leading to an unsatisfying agreement if rushed. Reagan also made a connection to the newly signed INF treaty to frame the upcoming Moscow summit in the positive light of continued negotiations and prevent any critics from highlighting the summit as a failure if no solid agreement was reached.⁸¹

While no agreement was reached, it was an important meeting in and of itself. This summit gave Reagan the opportunity to see the Soviet people and he appreciated the many similarities to American people that were noticeable. By 1988 it is visible that Reagan had mellowed out his harsh rhetoric against the Soviets. While he still did not believe in the communist system and the views that the Soviets held about human rights, their role in the regional conflicts etc., Reagan had come to respect Gorbachev as a politician and an individual and even regarded the General Secretary as a friend. Despite this, Reagan maintained that ‘trust but verify’ should be an integral part when dealing with the Soviets alongside realism, and peace from strength.⁸²

Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/252166>; Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Foreign Journalists Prior to the Venice Economic Summit,” May 26, 1987, by Ennio Caretto of La Stampa, Peter Pringle of the Independent, Baudouin Bollaert of Le Figaro, Jean Francois Lisee of La Presse, Yasuhiro Tase of Nihon Keizai, Fritz Wirth of Die Welt, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/252310>.

⁸⁰ The Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) were arms control negotiations between the US and USSR (later Russia) that began in 1982. They succeeded the SALT talks that were undertaken in the 1970s.

⁸¹ Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Alastair Burnet of ITN Television of the United Kingdom,” March 10, 1988, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/254222>.

⁸² J. P. Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 349; A. Brown, *The Human Factor*, 226; Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Arrigo Levi of Canale 5 Television of Italy,” March 10, 1988, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/254247>; Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Foreign Television Journalists,” May 19, 1988, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/253795>; Ronald Reagan, “Interview With Soviet Television Journalists Valentin Zorin and Boris Kalyagin,” May 20, 1988, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/254016>; Ronald Reagan, “Interview With European Journalists,” May 24, 1988, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/253992>.

Chapter 3: Diachronic Comparison of Reagan's Framing Practices

The two previous chapters focused on Reagan's two presidential terms respectively. This chapter, on the other hand, aims to showcase developments between the two terms by investigating the changes and continuities in framing and by drawing attention to the diachronic aspects of the interviews. This is done with the purpose of comparing the two presidential terms and analyzing if Reagan did indeed have a strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union.

Reasons Behind the Changes in Framing Practices

As shown in chapter one, Reagan applied harsh rhetoric when discussing the Soviets and the USSR when taking office in 1981. Reagan framed this straightforward and, in his opinion, true depictions of the Soviets as realism during his first but also his second term. However, this outright criticism mellowed out by 1985; not only did Reagan use harsh criticism less, but he also used a more conciliatory tone. This soft change can be considered as sequential framing, i.e., utilizing the same frame, but implementing various aspects of it over time.⁸³

For example, during his first presidential term, Reagan highlighted the flawed system of communism, the expansionist character of the USSR and their infringement on people's rights and freedom among other things. In the second term, Reagan refrained from stressing these aspects, but still occasionally made references to them. He did, however, add a central idea of coexistence of US and USSR, i.e., he did not aim to change the Soviet system but rather find ways to understand each other better. This frame was only added later and is not visible during Reagan's first years as President.

This change in tone can be considered through several perspectives. Based on the investigation of literature and primary sources, there are a few explanations that seem relevant. The most likely catalysts for the change of tone and framing were domestic aspects. During his first term, Reagan had achieved nothing tangible when it came to nuclear arms negotiations with the Soviets; Reagan's peace from strength and realism had led to no results. Audiences and politicians abroad and at home increasingly considered Reagan's approach as provocative. The closer to the end of the first term Reagan moved, the more criticism surfaced. Hence, the most feasible course of action to get reelected was for Reagan to respond to the criticism. By framing his policies in more conciliatory terms Reagan ensured that he could continue to pursue

⁸³ A. Mintz, S. B. Redd, "Framing Effects," 197.

his policies in the second term. Some observers did consider it election-year politics, and to an extent it was, but this change ended up enduring.⁸⁴

The permanence of this subtle change after the elections can be explained by the foreign political and military climate. Reagan was confronted with the reality of MAD very directly when taking office. He was briefed in detail about the protocols in place in case a nuclear attack would happen; there was no protection against destruction, only retaliation. As President, Reagan was also responsible for authorizing a nuclear (counter)attack. To that end, Reagan was always accompanied by a military aid who carried ‘the football’, the case containing the directives for launching nuclear weapons.⁸⁵ As a former actor, Reagan was also deeply shocked by the 1983 movie *The Day After*, which depicted a post-nuclear attack on the town Lawrence in Kansas. The movie’s effects are visible in a few interviews, from accounts of the people around him as well as from Reagan’s own autobiography. This movie, in combination with his responsibilities as President, convinced Reagan further, that a nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought.⁸⁶

Continuations and Changes

In retrospect, Reagan’s Cold War strategy was quite clear already from his early years as President. The fact that critics claim Reagan had no strategy or that his actions and words were conflicting can be attributed to the salami framing effect. Salami framing assumes that people have myopic tendencies when making decision and to combat that, a course of action is broken down into smaller and graspable policy steps.⁸⁷ To explain, Reagan carried the central foreign policy goal of nuclear reduction and elimination from his first term to the second one. To achieve that, however, he outlined a few in-between steps that needed to be undertaken before the goal could be realized. Namely, building a realistic understanding of the opposing USSR (realism) and American military buildup (peace from strength and deterrence). These sub-policies were carried on to the second term as well.

What was different about the two terms, however, was how Reagan framed these sub-policies. That difference can be attributed to the sequential framing context, just like the rhetoric about the Soviets in general. As mentioned above, Reagan pursued the realism angle more extensively and explicitly harshly in the first term compared to the second term. The need

⁸⁴ J. Mann, *The Rebellion*, 99.

⁸⁵ R. Reagan, *An American Life*, 237, 257-258.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 585.

⁸⁷ A. Mintz, S. B. Redd, “Framing Effects,” 197.

for American military buildup also featured more prominently in the first term. In the second term, Reagan continued to emphasize the importance of military strength for achieving peace, as well as the fact that there was still some catching up to do with the Soviets. However, during his last years in office, Reagan framed military buildup as having been somewhat successful and sufficient to at least get the USSR to come to the negotiating table and offer real proposals as well as finally signing the INF agreement.

Similarly, the idea of deterrence remained central in Reagan's Cold War strategy. However, in his second term as President, Reagan framed deterrence not only as a result of military buildup, but also tightly in connection with SDI. An even bigger difference was that Reagan started to emphasize the importance of a defensive system and eventually even equated deterrence with defense. The policies of realism, military buildup, and deterrence and defense were all tightly linked steps towards a goal of nuclear reduction and/or elimination. However, by presenting them as separate steps, Reagan made it easier to grasp how exactly he planned to achieve reductions. Additionally, by sequentially shifting the elements that Reagan was highlighting when framing these policies, the President showed that progress was occurring and, in that way, he was able to create meaning over time.

While many of Reagan's approaches can be seen as continuous throughout his career as President, albeit some with minor changes, there were also elements that emerged only during Reagan's second term. One such element, an important one, was Mikhail Gorbachev. As shown in the previous chapter, it took Reagan a bit of time to start framing Gorbachev differently than other Soviet leaders before him, but after some communication and summits, Reagan admitted that Gorbachev was someone he could consider a friend. It could be argued that it was also Gorbachev's reform-minded policies and character that convinced Reagan that there was no need for continuing the harsh rhetoric and showing of military might to the extent that he had been doing it in his first presidential term.

Aside from framing, Reagan's strategy also emerged in priming effects. Priming influences attention by highlighting some things while ignoring others and by doing this can lead to remembered associations and influence political considerations of the audience.⁸⁸ For example, the peace from strength initiative that Reagan adopted when he first became President in 1981, was something that journalists picked up very easily. Firstly, they all referenced the idea of peace from strength as being central to the negotiations with the Soviets and, secondly, they also started to increasingly consider it a smart approach. Hence, Reagan's repetitive

⁸⁸ Ibid., 199.

frames on this topic made sure that the audiences listening to him would think about the topic in the same way as he did.

Based on the above-mentioned, Reagan clearly had a strategy for dealing with the Soviets, as well as with the nuclear weapons negotiations. Namely, he adhered to key central ideas of realism, peace from strength, deterrence, and defense with the goal of disarmament and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. At the same time, it is also visible, that over the years the President (reactively) refined his strategy. Based on contemporary circumstances (such as which Soviet leader he was dealing with and what the socio-political climate was), Reagan made small changes to his foreign policy approach and consequently the framing of it. For example, he took a more flexible stance to negotiating as well as lessened the harsh rhetoric against the Soviets in the mid-1980s. This helped Reagan to accommodate any (future) criticism, respond to unexpected events and be successful.

Despite these minor changes, the framing of the strategy remained remarkably consistent through Reagan's time as President. In addition to explaining this through Reagan having a thought through strategy, it can partly also be explained by the specifics of the interview format. As the interviews analyzed in this thesis were pre-planned, the President had time to prepare for possible questions as he knew who was going to interview him and generally what topics they would discuss. As such Reagan could consider what he had said in previous interviews and build on that. This way he avoided contradicting himself and undermining his own framing and strategy. Such a clear-cut consistency might be less obvious in other sources like speeches, press conferences, etc.

Conclusion

This thesis answers the following research question: what continuities and changes can be observed in Ronald Reagan's framing of US-Soviet relations and nuclear disarmament talks in Reagan's interviews between his first presidential term (1981-1984) and his second presidential term (1985-1989)? By investigating Reagan's framing, the dissertation ultimately argues that Reagan had a Cold War strategy when taking office in 1981, but that this strategy matured during his presidency. This insight adds to the (historiographical) debate on Reagan's Cold War policies.

This research shows that Reagan's approach between 1981-1984 was more hardline when it came to US-Soviet relations and nuclear disarmament negotiations. The President was often and more openly critical of the Soviet Union, an approach that Reagan called realism.

Reagan also insisted on an extensive US military build-up and on having deterrent capabilities to be able to negotiate from a position of strength. Additionally, Reagan was very rigid when it came to the nuclear disarmament negotiations. He generally framed these stances in terms of the US needing to catch up to the Soviet Union and with the goal of achieving peace and nuclear disarmament through verifiable and equally beneficial conditions.

The thesis also proves that in 1984 Reagan adopted a more conciliatory approach. While the rhetoric mellowed out, the contents of Reagan's policies and framing remained somewhat the same over the years. The major aspects of realism, peace from strength and deterrence remained central during Reagan's second term, but the framing of it shifted marginally. From 1985 onwards Reagan did not accent the villainous character of the USSR as explicitly and adopted a more flexible approach to nuclear disarmament talks, hinting that interim agreements were possible. He also emphasized deterrence from early on in his presidency, but this shifted to being framed as defense during his second term. One thing that changed very little was Reagan's insistence for military buildup. He only framed it slightly differently by pointing out some of the success of the build-up between 1981-1984, but underlining that further work needed to be done.

The aspects of realism, peace from strength, deterrence/defense formed the central aspects of Reagan's Cold War strategy for dealing with the nuclear disarmament negotiations, and US-Soviet relations, hence their continuation into Reagan's second term. The minor changes in approach and framing occurred because Reagan had to consider and/or respond to contemporary circumstances and alter that strategy as fit. As such, this research emphasizes that the strategy was observable since 1981, but it matured over Reagan's presidency.

This thesis also offers some specific explanations for this change. Firstly, it presents the 1984 presidential elections and the growing criticism of Reagan's policies and lack of success in the Cold War front during the first half of the 1980s as a catalyst for the change. It additionally argues that the permanence of this shift in framing was most likely because of Reagan's role as President in a possible nuclear war if it was to happen. The realities of MAD became very clear to Reagan, and that convinced him that nuclear war cannot be fought nor won. This feeling was amplified by the movie *The Day After*.

This analysis offers a diachronic comparison of Reagan's first and second term. While it provides a good overview of Reagan's policies over the years and enabled to see any changes in approaches and framings, this type of comparison has a few shortcomings. Firstly, by focusing on the entirety of Reagan's term as well as his policies and framing of the USSR in general, the thesis could not be too specific about the relevance of some specific episodes.

Coupling this research with one that focuses on one specific case can offer a more nuanced view. Additionally, the dissertation focuses exclusively on presidential interviews. This does add a relevant source to the debate about Reagan's Cold War strategy, but an interesting comparison would also have been found in contrasting interviews with other sources. This way, it will become clear if the well-visible strategy is also as straightforward in other sources.

Lastly, this dissertation investigated the perspective of the US President. It would be interesting to conduct a similar investigation of framing by the Soviet General Secretaries as well as by third parties in Europe and the Global South during the same time-period. This would also shed light on their approaches as well as clarify the way the same events were framed by different parties. This type of research would also make explicit the nuances and contradictions in Reagan's framing that cannot be observed by investigating only the American perspective.

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