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The Ladle and the Knife:
Power Projection and Force Deployment under Reagan

A Thesis by

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Orange, CA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in War and Society Studies

December 2019

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Alexander Bay, Ph.D.

September 2019

The Ladle and the Knife:
Power Projection and Force Deployment under Reagan

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ABSTRACT

The Ladle and the Knife: Power Projection and Force Deployment under Reagan

by Mathew D. Kawecki

This thesis examines the nature and impact of the Reagan administration's self-described projection of "peace through strength." It argues that Reagan's defense spending surge, "Star Wars" (SDI) missile shield policy, and 1983 invasion of Grenada gave the president confidence and political cover that allowed him to withdraw U.S. Marines from Beirut in early 1984. Analysts and commentators focus on his muscular power projection like defense spending, SDI, and the invasion of Grenada, but in practice Reagan exercised a high level of restraint in troop deployment. These projections of power and the avoidance of protracted war in Lebanon gave Reagan further confidence and cover to pursue arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union, against the protestations of anti-Soviet hardliners.

Although Reagan supporters have credited the administration with either frightening or bankrupting the Soviets into disarmament, these policies—particularly his military restraint in Lebanon—did more to bring Reagan himself to the negotiation table. These power projection measures contributed to a "peace through strength" narrative embraced by much of Reagan's domestic audience, allowing him to fend off accusations of Munich-style appeasement. While the defense spending surge helped give Reagan the confidence to ink an arms control agreement, the buildup created nonlinear consequences that will outlive arms control treaties.

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Introduction: The Impossible Presidency – October 21–23, 1983

Upon Ronald Reagan's 1980 election to the U.S. presidency, former president Richard M. Nixon wrote a letter recommending that Reagan focus his personal attention on domestic policy during the beginning of his first term, not travel abroad "for at least six months," and "have experienced people in State and Defense...carry out your policies until you can devote more of your personal time to foreign policy matters."¹ Reagan delegated his foreign policy accordingly. In their respective memoirs, Reagan's National Security Advisor (NSA) Robert "Bud" McFarlane and his Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, frequently at odds with each other over foreign policy and matters of historical record, similarly described Reagan as notably disengaged from international events during his first year as president.² This, however, changed by the weekend of October 21–23, 1983, when world events dramatically demanded from President Reagan successive decisions on the use of military force.

McFarlane, who had just been appointed Reagan's NSA on October 17th, wrote in his memoir that Secretary of State George Schultz, Secretary of Treasury Don Regan, and a former Republican senator joined the president and Nancy Reagan for a "quiet weekend" of golfing in Augusta, Georgia.³ McFarlane accompanied the golfing party as White House support staff.⁴ After a "pleasant dinner at the clubhouse" Friday, October 21st, the First Family retired to the

¹ Richard M. Nixon, "Memo to: President-elect Ronald Reagan," Sept. 1980–Dec. 1981, 17 November 1980, Box 1, Post-presidential Correspondence with Ronald W. Reagan (1974–1993). Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California, 1–2.

² Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1991), 23–38. Robert C. McFarlane and Zofia Smardz, *Special Trust* (New York: Cadell & Davies, 1994), 171–202.

³ *Ibid.*, 257, 260.

⁴ Ronald W. Reagan, *Ronald Reagan: An American Life* (New York: Pocket Books, 1990), 449.

Eisenhower cottage and turned in for the evening. Vice President George H.W. Bush called McFarlane after 3 a.m. to report that the Prime Minister of Domenica, on behalf of six other Caribbean countries, requested U.S. intervention in Grenada in response to a Marxist military coup on the island. McFarlane recounted how he recommended that the president authorize military action to avoid damaging “the credibility of the United States and your own commitment to the defense of freedom and democracy,” and that “the President never hesitated” to authorize Bush to begin “contingent military planning for a landing.”⁵

The next afternoon, when the presidential party was on the sixteenth hole, a gunman broke through golf course security, took five hostages in the pro shop, and asked to speak with Reagan. Both McFarlane and Reagan recalled how the president attempted to talk with the man, but the man refused to speak. Eventually, the gunman surrendered peacefully. As if that was not enough pressure for a single 24-hour period, McFarlane awoke the president early that morning at 2 a.m. with news from the Situation Room that a suicide bomber drove an explosive-laden truck into the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing a minimum of one hundred Marines. Reagan and his advisors rushed onto Air Force One at 7:30 a.m. on October 23rd for a Sunday full of meetings on the dual foreign policy crises in Grenada and Beirut.⁶

Reagan’s October 1983 weekend is a striking example of how quickly world events can engulf even a president who has deliberately delegated foreign policy far away from his or her desk. It supports Jeremi Suri’s chronicles of how the practical constitutional powers of the executive branch have greatly expanded since World War II and leaves us with important

⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, 449. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 261–262. Ronald W. Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 189.

⁶ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 262–267. Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 189–190.

questions.⁷ How does a president prioritize responses to crises when simultaneous conflicts may require use of military force? How does a president prepare for a confluence of events like this, to make life-or-death decisions related to conflicts on different sides of the world on a single Sunday full of meetings, all the while recovering from sleep deprivation and a personally stressful hostage situation?

These are not simple questions to answer. In 2019, Bud McFarlane recounted how Reagan authorized force on that Sunday to invade Grenada to overturn the coup, and also decided on a retaliatory strike on whatever militants were found to be responsible for the Beirut Marine Barracks bombing.⁸ McFarlane's 1994 memoir notes how Reagan gave approval November 14 for a strike against a group of Shia militants that the CIA had linked to the bombing and to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Instead of following through, Secretary Weinberger "directly violated" the president's order and denied authorization for the strike.⁹ McFarlane believed this denial by Weinberger tipped the administration's policy direction in favor of eventual withdrawal from Lebanon in February 1984. For McFarlane, this withdrawal was "one of the worst defeats of the Reagan administration." Twenty-five years later, McFarlane passionately demonstrated his commitment to this opinion when interviewed on the subject.¹⁰ While Reagan's advisors remain divided on withdrawal of the Marines from Beirut to this day, members of his administration and his party almost unanimously believed that U.S. military action in Grenada supported national interests and values right in the United States' backyard. Weinberger, McFarlane, and Schultz were united in their beliefs that the Grenada invasion

⁷ Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), ix–xxiii, 174–260.

⁸ Robert "Bud" McFarlane, interview by the author, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California, March 25, 2019.

⁹ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 270–271.

¹⁰ Ibid., 270–273. McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019.

projected a resolve to contain perceived Soviet and Cuban intervention outside of either state's borders and represented a major public opinion victory on the domestic front.¹¹

This thesis investigates the deliberations and outright machinations that yielded Reagan's projection of military force in Grenada and restraint in and retreat from Beirut. A synthesis of declassified documents, memoirs, historical studies, and an oral history related to these events show that military victory in Grenada and quiet exit from Beirut were by no means foregone conclusions. If events had unfolded in a different manner or if Reagan had different advisors—a different Secretary of Defense, in particular—the president may have found himself entangled in an intractable war in Lebanon well past February 1984. Instead, Reagan withdrew the Marines from Lebanon without being saddled with the stigma of weakness and foreign policy failure that cursed Jimmy Carter throughout the Iran hostage crisis.

How did Reagan come out of the twin crises of Grenada and Beirut still projecting, in the eyes of a majority of American voters, the “peace through strength” he promised during the 1980 presidential campaign?¹² Hal Brands argued in *What Good is Grand Strategy?* that Reagan believed since the 1970s that the Soviet Union was militarily strong and possessed strategic superiority over the United States, but that the Soviet economy would ultimately fail if the United States did not succumb to Soviet power. Brands broke down Reagan's grand strategy into four main components: a major military buildup to strengthen the United States' negotiation position and to weaken the Soviet economy; “intensified competition” with the Soviets in the “Third World”; erosion of Moscow's authority in the USSR and Eastern Europe; and leverage of

¹¹ George Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 323–345. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 263–273. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 101–174.

¹² Elizabeth Edwards Spalding, “The Origin and Meaning of Reagan's Cold War,” in *The Reagan Presidency: Assessing the Man and His Legacy*, ed. Paul Kengor and Peter Schweizer (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 58.

the former three components to negotiate a better relationship between the two superpowers.¹³

This is not an inaccurate description of how Reagan's grand strategy played out, but such a narrative overlooks a constant central theme in Reagan's foreign policy: his administration exercised considerable restraint in deploying U.S. troops overseas.

Brands acknowledged that "Reagan shied away from U.S. troops" and that he "knew that costly military misadventures could easily rupture" the "Cold War consensus" among the American public that emerged during years of perceived Soviet advances.¹⁴ Yet, Brands did not frame this restraint as a central tenet of Reagan's grand strategy, and neither do most other scholars, former administration officials, or Reagan supporters. Cheerleaders and critics alike instead emphasize the more aggressive aspects of Reagan's foreign policy, the defense budget surge, his "Star Wars" Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and covert action in the "Third World" and Eastern Europe, as setting the table for arms control negotiations later in his presidency. This emphasis is understandable, as the Reagan administration spoke much more about "peace through strength," rather than about the strength it gained from restraint and avoidance of unwieldy, costly military engagements like the Vietnam War. Commentators may also overlook the role of Reagan's restraint in deploying troops in his eventual arms control negotiation success because no single member of the administration espoused this long-term strategy. Reagan's advisors lobbied and schemed to convince the president to adopt their policy prescriptions, and different officials and institutions succeeded at different times.

This thesis demonstrates how Reagan's defense budget surge, "Star Wars" program, and military action in Grenada gave Reagan the personal confidence and political cover to withdraw

¹³ Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 107–117.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

U.S. Marines from Beirut rather than escalating U.S. military involvement. Although the national security value of Reagan's retreat from Beirut and reluctance to deploy troops in other potential conflicts is hotly disputed between many of Reagan's senior advisors in their memoirs, careful study of these memoirs, official documents, and Reagan's own writings reveal that restraint became a key component of Reagan's grand strategy. This frequently overlooked restraint spared Reagan the quagmires that plagued several past—and future—administrations and gave him room to move forward with his historic negotiations that marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

Reagan on Defense: From “Evil Empire” to “Ivan and Anya”

Why did Reagan respond with restraint to the October 1983 Beirut Marine barracks bombing? It is perhaps most fruitful to examine this question in the greater context of Reagan's first term. Reagan and Weinberger spent the first two years pumping up the defense budget as promised in the 1980 presidential campaign, and on March 8, 1983 Reagan delivered a speech at the annual meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals where he called the Soviet Union an “evil empire” and the arms race a “struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”¹⁵ Reagan appeared poised before his base to meet any Soviet challenge with great force, even U.S. troops.

The Reagan administration and many of its loyal supporters claim that his defense spending surge won the Cold War by pressuring Soviet economic and political structures to collapse. In short, they argue that Reagan executed the coherent grand strategy Brands described,

¹⁵ James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 70–71.

and that it was thoroughly effective. While it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of Reagan's defense spending surge and SDI in weakening the Soviet Union, these policy initiatives crafted a compelling narrative to the American public—and to Reagan himself—of “peace through strength.” Against this background of power projection and with a resounding military success in Grenada, Weinberger's consistent resistance against utilizing American troops kept Reagan out of Vietnam-like entanglements in Beirut and elsewhere during a period of Soviet decline, creating space for Reagan to negotiate an arms control agreement from a position of self-perceived strength and in a manner he felt satisfied domestic constituencies.

Academics and political operatives, no matter what their view of Reagan's presidential performance, almost unanimously hold up Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's arms control negotiations that yielded a succession of agreements as a triumph of global statecraft. Scores of books have been written on this subject, bearing a wide range of interpretations of what led to the agreements and, thus, to the end of the Cold War. Many historians center on Reagan's pivot in his rhetorical and policy approaches toward the Soviet Union around halfway through his presidency.¹⁶ On January 16, 1984, only ten months after his “evil empire” speech, Reagan asked America to “suppose... for a moment that an Ivan and an Anya could find themselves... with a Jim and Sally, and there was no language barrier to keep them from getting acquainted.”¹⁷ On November 17, 1985, Reagan met with Gorbachev for a summit in Geneva, the first tangible step in warming relations between the two countries.¹⁸

¹⁶ Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 102–156. Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, 70–71. Gail E.S. Yoshitani, *Reagan on War: A Reappraisal of the Weinberger Doctrine, 1980–1984* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 58–142.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁸ Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004), 159–173.

Scholars and political writers have put forward a wide range of hypotheses about why Reagan pivoted to this diplomatic path during this period. Suri and Brands took Reagan's grand strategy at face value, crediting his arms control overtures with ushering in the end of the Cold War, differing in their assessments of Reagan's long-term consistency. Suri dismissed Reagan's "earlier anti-communist belligerence" as at odds with his later arms control initiatives, whereas Brands gives credence to administration officials' later claims that the defense budget increase and SDI were tactics designed to strengthen the United States' hand in negotiations.¹⁹ Many conservative pundits, such as Dinesh D'Souza, have peddled a much less critical version of the Brands narrative, lauding Reagan's grand strategy as premeditated genius that buoyed American political and economic fortunes while forcing Gorbachev to negotiate as communism collapsed under the weight of Soviet response to the U.S. defense buildup.²⁰ Stephen Kotkin, in *Armageddon Averted*, represents the other end of the analytical spectrum as he contended that the arms agreements and the end of the Cold War resulted from Gorbachev's rise to power on the Soviet side. According to Kotkin, Reagan and his team simply reacted to Soviet overtures, and the world is fortunate that Reagan's initially belligerent rhetoric and actions did not forestall this positive outcome.²¹

James Wilson, Beth Fischer, and Gail Yoshitani, in the vein of Suri, all have argued that Reagan indeed changed direction in his grand strategy, though each put forth different reasons for Reagan's alleged transformation. Wilson, in *The Triumph of Improvisation*, credited George Schultz with eroding hardline opposition to arms control within the administration. Reagan

¹⁹ Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 105–119, 126–135. Suri, *The Impossible Presidency*, 252–253.

²⁰ Dinesh D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 129–198.

²¹ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–9, 58–108, 171–190.

ultimately came to recognize Schultz's arms control negotiation strategy as "carrying out my policy."²² Fischer, in *The Reagan Reversal*, rooted the president's shift in his personal psychology, laying out a chronology of incidents in 1983 that she argued frightened Reagan away from his previous bellicose approach as he increasingly recognized nuclear annihilation as an existential threat.²³ Yoshitani, in *Reagan on War: A Reappraisal of the Weinberger Doctrine*, chronicled a linear evolution in grand strategy from covert use of force in Latin America to failed direct deployment in Beirut to Weinberger's restrained approach of force application that limited Reagan's deployment of troops for the remainder of his presidency.²⁴ Yoshitani highlighted Reagan and Weinberger's restraint, an aspect of Reagan's foreign policy overlooked by most scholars of the subject, but presented it as a prepackaged doctrine to which Reagan pivoted after running into less than ideal outcomes using other approaches. Both Reagan and Weinberger's approaches to grand strategy were more complex and uneven than Yoshitani depicted.

Lastly, Melvyn Leffler touched on the domestic political component to Reagan's arms negotiations successes in *For the Soul of Mankind*, describing how the president did not have to face "partisan recriminations and conservative criticism" that dissuaded Democrats Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter from pursuing bold diplomatic initiatives with the Soviets.²⁵

Evaluating whether Reagan's defense buildup, SDI, and military victory in Grenada strained the Soviet economy or frightened Gorbachev into making arms control concessions requires thorough treatment of official documents, correspondences, and oral histories written in Russian. Of the scholars and political writers described above, Kotkin makes the most substantial

²² Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, 86.

²³ Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*, 102–156.

²⁴ Yoshitani, *Reagan on War*, 58–142.

²⁵ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 463–465.

use of Russian language sources, which allowed him to tell the Soviet side of the story in greater detail.

This thesis sets aside questions about the Soviet reaction to Reagan's rhetoric and maneuvers and instead evaluates English language sources from the American side. Regardless of whether Reagan's defense spending surge, SDI gambit, and Grenada invasion frightened or helped bankrupt the Soviet Union, these developments gave Reagan the confidence and political cover he needed to withdraw Marines from Lebanon, and to eventually sit down at the negotiation table with Gorbachev.

1 Cap the Ladle: Peace through Strength – 1968 to June 1982

Ronald Reagan intoned a very different strain of national security rhetoric from his Republican presidential forebears Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Though Nixon and Reagan were both Californians and conservative giants, they were rivals in the 1968 Republican primary and retained foreign policy differences years after that election. Pat Buchanan, who worked as chief opposition researcher for the Nixon campaign, flagged for Nixon a series of speeches and articles where Reagan called for U.S. escalation in Vietnam. This position was starkly opposed to Nixon's own foreign policy platform.²⁶ Buchanan wrote in the margins of one of these filed articles, "Echoes of Goldwater!!!"²⁷ This was not likely a compliment to California Governor Reagan, given Barry Goldwater's resounding 1964 electoral defeat, but perhaps a nudge to Nixon that he needed to somehow lead more hardline conservatives over to his budding détente approach and accepting an end to the military draft. While acknowledging the differences in Nixon and Reagan's foreign policy outlooks, Buchanan highlighted key Reagan speeches for Nixon, encouraging him to ape aspects of Reagan's style and content.²⁸ Nixon wrote a note to his speechwriter Ray Price on one of Buchanan's memos that though Reagan might use "demagoguery," he successfully "reaches the heart," while "we reach the head."²⁹ Nixon and his staff understood that they needed to appeal to Reagan-style conservatives even as Nixon and

²⁶ Vietnam – Reagan, Box 104, Research Files (PPS 500, 501), Campaign 1968 Collection, Richard Nixon Pre-Presidential Materials (Laguna Niguel). Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ronald Reagan Speeches, 1968, Box 1 Ronald Reagan, PPS 501 Research Files Special Files, Campaign 1968 Collection, Richard Nixon Pre-Presidential Materials (Laguna Niguel). Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

²⁹ Pat Buchanan, "Memo to RN," Reagan Ronald Speech Files III (2 of 2), Ronald Reagan Speeches, 1968, Box 1 Ronald Reagan, PPS 501 Research Files Special Files, Campaign 1968 Collection, Richard Nixon Pre-Presidential Materials (Laguna Niguel). Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

Kissinger pursued de-escalation and détente with the Soviet Union and other Communist countries.

Just as Nixon understood the attraction of Reagan's confrontational anti-Communist style, Reagan recognized the appeal to American voters of peace on U.S. terms. If détente succeeded, Reagan was ready to support a successful Republican-led outcome, albeit not under the label of détente. Reagan, still governor of California and an influential conservative voice, initially strongly opposed Nixon and Kissinger's 1971 diplomatic talks with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Reagan was especially livid when the United Nations adopted an Albanian resolution to replace Taiwan with the PRC on the Security Council on the heels of an October 1971 Kissinger visit to Beijing. He called Nixon and demanded that the president convince Congress to cut off appropriations for the UN, and later told Kissinger that "the people [of America]... are really pee'd off."³⁰ Reagan changed his tune in February 1972 when Nixon returned from his historic trip to China. Kissinger related to the president that "Reagan congratulated you" and "said it was one of the greatest weeks of the American presidency." Nixon quipped in response, "Of course Reagan can see it in terms of the political impact, the television impact."³¹ Reagan pivoted similarly from rhetorical belligerence to brokerage of peace during the 1980s with the Soviet Union.

Reagan, after completing his second and final term as California governor in 1975, wrote and narrated a radio program, a platform from which he resumed his long campaign for the presidency. He continued to criticize Nixon-Ford détente and what he viewed as accommodationist foreign policy that would leave the world vulnerable to Communist

³⁰ Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969–1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 104–141.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

exploitation. He hit Nixon and Ford on the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam and the fall of Saigon to North Vietnam, calling the ensuing debate over ending military aid to the South “an echo of the hollow tapping of Neville Chamberlain’s umbrella on the cobblestones of Munich.”³² Shortly after announcing in November 1975 that he would oppose President Ford in the 1976 Republican presidential primary, he categorized the Nixon-Ford foreign policy approach as weak and dangerous. “A decade ago we had military superiority. Today we are in danger of being surpassed by a nation that has never made any effort to hide its hostility to everything we stand for. Through détente we have sought peace with our adversaries.”³³

In the 1980 presidential election, Reagan had an even easier time drawing a distinction between Jimmy Carter’s perceived losses to the Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran and his own promises to strengthen America by beefing up the defense budget. Reagan posed an unapologetic alternative to Carter’s calls to make sacrifices and instill limitations to address economic and energy crises, launching his presidential candidacy by announcing that bold and strong leadership could restore the nation’s fortunes. “The crisis we face is not the result of any failure of the American spirit; it is the failure of our leaders to establish rational goals and give our people something to order their lives by.”³⁴ At the Republican nominating convention in July 1980, he enumerated the troubling events of the Iran hostage crisis, the discovery of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan before asking audiences if the United States was “stronger and more respected” than it was before Carter became president.³⁵ Reagan hit Carter hard on national security up until the eve of the election, punctuating his

³² Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 431–432.

³³ *Ibid.*, 548.

³⁴ Yoshitani, *Reagan on War*, 4–5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

October 28, 1980 debate with Carter with a series of questions for the American people: “Is America as respected throughout the world as it was? Do you feel your security is safe, that we’re strong as we were four years ago?”³⁶

For Reagan and the Republican Party he led in 1980, the leadership of “peace through strength” embodied in Reagan was the antidote to Carter’s alleged “weakness” and “vacillation.” “Peace through strength” was not just a vague idea, however. The Republican platform for 1980 tied this concept directly to the quantitative measure of the defense budget by promising:

To achieve overall military and technological superiority over the Soviet Union; To create a strategic and civil defense which would protect the American people against nuclear war at least as well as the Soviet population is protected; To accept no arms control agreement which in any way jeopardizes the security of the United States or its allies, or which locks the United States into a position of military inferiority; To reestablish effective security and intelligence capabilities.³⁷

Contemporaneous polling data showed that a large section of the American public had also come to associate security and global prestige with defense spending, thus it is not surprising that Reagan called for more robust investment of taxpayer dollars into defense. An NBC poll from September 1979, prior to the global crises Reagan blamed on Carter’s leadership failures, reported that 38 percent of participants thought American spent too little on defense. By January 1980, the same polling data revealed that 69 percent of Americans now called for more defense spending.³⁸ A large number of American voters believed that growing the defense budget would make the country safer and more widely respected, ushering Reagan into the White House with a mandate to spend.

³⁶ Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964–1980* (Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing, 2001), 706–707.

³⁷ Yoshitani, *Reagan on War*, 15–19.

³⁸ Bruce Russett and Donald R. Deluca, “‘Don’t Tread on Me’: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in the Eighties,” *Political Science Quarterly* 96, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 381–399.

1.1 Strength through Spending: Pumping Up the Defense Budget

Reagan's Cold War grand strategy did not simply break with Nixon and Ford in his public disparagement of their efforts to pursue détente with the Soviet Union. He also departed considerably from past Republicans' fiscally conservative approach to the defense budget. Nixon believed that the Pentagon budget was bloated, and he explicitly recommended to Reagan that he appoint a Secretary of Defense who would not treat the Pentagon budget as a "sacred cow" and would "clean up the establishment" and "fat in the bureaucracy" at Defense. Nixon recommended "an across-the-board 10% cut in civilian employment" in the Department of Defense (DOD), and suggested one of Nixon's former Secretaries of the Treasury, John Connally or George Schultz, carry out the budgetary liposuction.³⁹ Reagan instead opted for Caspar Weinberger, another Nixon cabinet figure but also a former California deputy of Reagan. Weinberger went on to preside over increases in DOD budget authority exceeding 10 percent each of the first two years of Reagan's presidency.⁴⁰

Before helming the Pentagon upon Reagan's 1981 inauguration, Caspar Weinberger's reputation was that of a merciless budget cutter. Weinberger worked on Reagan's 1966 campaign for California governor to develop, in his own words, "a plan to apply business organizational principles to government, and to fold the one hundred fifty or so state agencies, theoretically reporting to the Governor, into five groups, each under the equivalent of a corporate group vice president." Weinberger worked as Reagan's Director of Finance beginning in 1968, in which capacity he implemented Reagan and his preference for "austerity" in state spending and

³⁹ Nixon, "Memo to: President-elect Ronald Reagan," 17 November 1980, 4–5.

⁴⁰ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 53–72.

produced a small surplus in Reagan's first year that led to "one of the first tax refunds in the state's history."⁴¹

It is useful to reflect on Weinberger's touting of his own budget astringency in California in the 1960s because it contrasts so starkly with the budget largesse he later bestowed upon the Pentagon in the 1980s. Weinberger had developed an even more intensely thrifty reputation as "Cap the Knife"—an alias he relished even late in life—while working as President Nixon's Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) under both Nixon and Ford. When Reagan rejected Nixon's advice to appoint Schultz or Connolly to streamline the Pentagon's budget, Nixon may still have expected his former budget trimmer to slice the defense budget. Weinberger, however, viewed defense needs very differently from how he regarded the federal government's role in health, education, and welfare spending. According to Weinberger, Nixon appointed him as Secretary of HEW to apply "fiscal and managerial discipline" to the federal government's "highest-spending department." Weinberger enacted an agenda of privatization, program reduction, and devolution to local government in the areas of social services under his purview. In his second memoir, he laid out a laudatory narrative about how he opposed the "Iron Triangle" of Congress, lobbyists, and department bureaucracies to "change the status quo" in HEW.⁴²

In contrast, Weinberger became lobbyist-in-chief for a whole host of military technologies and troop enhancements while serving as Reagan's Secretary of Defense. In the realm of national security budgets, "Cap the Knife" became "Cap the Ladle" to his critics, as his military attaché Colin Powell later recorded.⁴³ This was not an about-face for Weinberger, who

⁴¹ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 10–12.

⁴² Caspar Weinberger, *In the Arena: A Memoir of the 20th Century*, with Gretchen Roberts (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2001), 191–252.

⁴³ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 259.

consistently espoused inverse philosophies when it came to the HEW and defense budgets. In 1972, a year before Nixon moved him from OMB to HEW, Weinberger stated his philosophy with abundant clarity in a *U.S. News & World Report* interview:

In education, in health, in welfare, and in almost every other field, what the federal government doesn't do, other levels of government or the private sector will attempt to do. The only unit of government that pays for defense is the federal government. What we don't do in defense at the national level doesn't get done.

That same year at the American Enterprise Institute, Weinberger vented early fears about the defense budget. "If our defense budget is inadequate, nothing else will be of much moment, and we will only know when it is too late." Weinberger took charge of the Pentagon budget eight years later, and in his memoir he wrote, "as I began receiving the classified data on our capabilities, I found it was even worse than I thought. It was truly appalling. Our nuclear deterrent was in serious need of modernization. Our conventional forces were underbudgeted and undersupplied...they were unready."⁴⁴

Weinberger's conclusions on military readiness were not the only interpretation of this classified data available to the president. Carter's outgoing CIA director, Stanfield Turner, provided Reagan with a very different briefing on the U.S.-Soviet military balance on Reagan's first day as president, stating "that the question was not the numbers of bombs and missiles but the operational capacity to use them, and that according to CIA estimates, the USSR had no advantage over the United States...[and] even after a Soviet first strike, the U.S. would have enough strategic nuclear weapons to destroy all Soviet cities with populations over 100,000."⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Reagan and Weinberger moved forward to add \$32 billion to the Carter administration's 1981 and 1982 defense budget requests for Congress. Years later, Weinberger

⁴⁴ Weinberger, *In the Arena*, 274–275.

⁴⁵ Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, 23.

described their goals as “moderniz[ing] all three legs of the strategic triad...our sea-based, air-based, and ground-based nuclear missiles”; “rebuild[ing] our conventional strength, including finally deploying...the M-1 [battle tank]; “additional...equipment for the Rapid Deployment Force”; “enhanced electronic warfare capabilities”; and “improved intelligence capabilities.”⁴⁶ Weinberger’s assessment of U.S. strength and ability to counter the Soviet Union, unlike that of Turner, rested primarily on tabulation of technological capabilities, rather than on either side’s “operational capacity”—to use Turner’s phrase—to translate those capabilities into achieving actual military objectives.

Weinberger’s 1972 rhetoric on defense spending and his recollections of Reagan and his defense modernization strategy are fully consistent with how Weinberger reported his activities to the president in his weekly reports. While Weinberger’s reports from Reagan’s second term are not yet available to the public, recently declassified reports from Reagan’s first term show that the Secretary of Defense spent a considerable amount of his time lobbying Congress and the public to support maximal increase of the defense budget and approval of high ticket military hardware.⁴⁷ Although Weinberger appeared to have merged seamlessly into the “Iron Triangle” he combatted as Secretary of HEW, the consistency of his approach with his past rhetoric on the exceptional nature of defense spending point to ideological motivations for his budget advocacy, rather than any untoward influence of military-industrial lobbyists. In the midst of Weinberger’s steady lobbying of Congress to grow the defense budget, he reported to Reagan that he ended government reimbursement of lobbying costs to defense contractors, a practice he found to be

⁴⁶ Weinberger, *In the Arena*, 276.

⁴⁷ Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California. (Hereafter cited as RRPL)

wasteful and a perverse incentive.⁴⁸ Weinberger also made a point to report small cost-saving measures to Reagan, such as a new procurement program to save on “audiovisual products” used by military personnel globally and a “highest priority” effort to “reduce the volume of travel and its costs for DOD personnel.”⁴⁹

The majority of Weinberger’s weekly reports to Reagan lead off with progress updates on his efforts to lobby congresspeople to vote in favor of approving an increased annual defense budget or approving requests to develop, purchase, and deploy major technologies like the B-1 bomber and land-based MX intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).⁵⁰ As early as March 6, 1981, Weinberger began submitting detailed reports about private meetings with named congresspeople, readouts on briefings given to congressional meetings, and projected vote tallies accompanied by suggestions to the president as to whom he should personally lobby to switch their vote.⁵¹ In his August 7, 1981 report, in the midst of the nationwide air traffic controllers strike, he assured the president that “DOD provided travel assistance early this week to several Members of Congress who faced difficulties in getting to Washington for key votes” on final approval of the administration’s \$2.7 billion FY1981 supplemental defense authorization bill.⁵²

⁴⁸ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, October 15, 1982,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

⁴⁹ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, December 31, 1981,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, April 29, 1982,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

⁵⁰ For a detailed account of the long procurement history of the B-1 bomber, see Nick Kotz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Money, Politics and the B-1 Bomber* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

⁵¹ Weinberger, Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, RRPL.

⁵² Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, August 7, 1981,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

Weinberger prioritized these congressional budget lobbying updates to such a degree that, in his July 9, 1982 report, he even presented the details of a “severe budget situation” and related legislative issues before his reportage of deployment of U.S. Marines to Lebanon.⁵³

Weinberger’s laser focus on Congress as a primary target of engagement coincided with a year and a half period free of overt military conflict. Nixon, in his November 1980 post-election cabinet selection memo to Reagan, explicitly recommended that the president focus his personal attention on domestic policy during the beginning of his presidency, not travel abroad “for at least six months,” and “have experienced people in State and Defense...carry out your policies until you can devote more of your personal time to foreign policy matters.”⁵⁴ Reagan delegated his foreign policy accordingly. Like Weinberger and McFarlane, Reagan’s first Secretary of State Alexander Haig also described Reagan as notably disengaged from international events during his first year as president.⁵⁵ Weinberger’s reports to Reagan show that, contrary to Nixon’s advice, the Secretary of Defense at least as focused on the domestic policy aspects of his job as the president.

For Weinberger, the budgetary battles of Capitol Hill were the nation’s first line of defense. He was concerned that the United States’ industrial base was “eroding,” and he frequently invoked that talking point when lobbying Congress to grow the defense budget and when defending Reagan’s tax cuts.⁵⁶ Weinberger also argued to Congress, as did Reagan, that

⁵³ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 9, 1982,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

⁵⁴ Nixon, “Memo to: President-elect Ronald Reagan,” 17 November 1980, 1–2.

⁵⁵ Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), 57–72, 141–154. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 171–202. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 23–38.

⁵⁶ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 17, 1981,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL. Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, August 1, 1981,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

simultaneously cutting taxes and pumping government funding into the defense industry would generate private sector growth turning the projected \$55 billion deficit for 1981 into a surplus beginning in 1984.⁵⁷

In addition to touting economic revitalization benefits that Weinberger and Reagan divined would follow state investment in the defense industry, there is evidence the Secretary of Defense believed that Pentagon resources were truly insufficient to properly contain the Soviet threat. In Weinberger's weekly reports to the president, he treated all Soviet military and political maneuvers as threats that needed to be matched with superior U.S. force capabilities.⁵⁸ His conception of militarized containment tracked closely with the formulation Paul Nitze, Special Advisor to the President on Arms Control, had promoted within previous administrations beginning with his drafting of the U.S. government's 1950 Basic National Security Policy, known as NSC-68.⁵⁹

While George Kennan, the State Department's first Director of Policy Planning, is widely remembered as the father of the American Cold War strategy of containment, historian John Lewis Gaddis effectively argues that Kennan's immediate successor Nitze carried the day in militarizing and geographically broadening Kennan's approach. As Gaddis put it: "where Kennan tended to look at the Soviet threat in terms of an independently established concept of irreducible interests, NSC-68 derived its view of American interests primarily from its perception of the Soviet threat."⁶⁰ Kennan laid out a multilayered strategy of containing the Soviet Union through economic, political, and military initiatives, focusing efforts on key

⁵⁷ John Ehrman, *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 54–55. Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, August 1, 1981," RRPL.

⁵⁸ Weinberger, Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, RRPL.

⁵⁹ Paul H. Nitze, Ann M. Smith, and Steven L. Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision – A Memoir* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 82–282, 369, 403.

⁶⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 96.

strategic “strong points” like Western Europe and Japan. Nitze’s NSC-68, by contrast, primarily emphasized military measures, applied in the broad service of “adequate defense against air and surface attack on the United Kingdom and Western Europe, Alaska, the Western Pacific, Africa, and the Near and Middle East.”⁶¹

Nitze distanced himself from the Vietnam failures of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, even though declassified meeting notes show that both presidents and their advisors spoke the militarized containment language of Nitze’s NSC-68.⁶² Nitze lamented that Johnson and McNamara had failed to protect vital U.S. interests by letting “events... shap[e] our policy,” rather than shaping events through grand strategy.⁶³ Nitze took McNamara to task in his memoir for what he considered a dangerous 1963 retooling of U.S. nuclear deterrence policy in reaction to Congressional budgetary restrictions. He equally exhibited distaste for how Johnson let domestic political considerations influence his Vietnam decisions, like in late 1965 when Johnson rejected Nitze’s proposal to reform the draft to increase troop volume because Nitze’s plan “still favored what [Johnson] called the ‘Eastern Establishment.’”⁶⁴ He criticized Johnson and McNamara for lacking a strategy in Vietnam, but what he really wanted was an unrestrained commitment to more muscular tactics.

In terms of the defense budget, Reagan and Weinberger strove to deliver what Nitze had long sought: maximum force projection capabilities without regard for congressional pushback or economic limitations. Reagan’s initial embrace of supply-side economics and large tax cuts freed him from the fiscal conservatism that restrained the defense spending of Republican

⁶¹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 87–97.

⁶² David C. Humphrey, Edward C. Keefer, and Louis J. Smith, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June–December 1965* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Documents 16, 76, 97. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v03>.

⁶³ Nitze, Smith, and Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 250–252.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 245–250, 262–263.

White House predecessors.⁶⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, for example, trimmed the fiscal demands of Nitze's NSC-68 strategy of symmetric opposition to every Soviet threat by pivoting to greater reliance on allies and nuclear deterrence.⁶⁶ Weinberger did more than just give the Pentagon the hardware and personnel it wanted. As his military attaché Colin Powell later described, he continually asked for larger budgets from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who "went from their wish lists to their dream lists."⁶⁷

Weinberger anchored his defense buildup argument on symmetric containment of the Soviet Union. In 1981 he asked the Pentagon to publish a glossy booklet entitled *Soviet Military Power* utilizing declassified intelligence to convince readers that Soviet force capabilities far outstripped pre-Reagan military might. Weinberger boasted to Reagan in a weekly report that the document would become a "bestseller," and "may even turn a profit for the government." In the same report, he vowed that the document's purpose was "to inform free people of the free nations of the real challenge they face."⁶⁸ The administration distributed the booklet to Congress, opinion leaders, and even Nixon held in his personal files a copy that Reagan had sent him.⁶⁹

It is difficult to assess whether this booklet influenced its readers in any way, though Weinberger himself admitted to Reagan that "the Soviets have not attempted...to refute any of the facts or figures we presented in our book *Soviet Military Power* in the USSR's own propaganda pamphlet, *Europe in Danger*, decrying U.S. nuclear missile escalation."⁷⁰ What is

⁶⁵ John Ehrman and Michael W. Flamm, *Debating the Reagan Presidency* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 13–23, 101–107.

⁶⁶ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 164–166.

⁶⁷ Powell and Persico, *My American Journey*, 258–259.

⁶⁸ Caspar Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 17, 1981," Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

⁶⁹ Ronald W. Reagan, Letters to Richard Nixon, Box 1, Post-presidential Correspondence with Ronald W. Reagan (1974–1993). Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁷⁰ Caspar Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, November 27, 1981," Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

more clear from his reports to the president is that Weinberger viewed this presentation of the Soviet military threat as essential to his lobbying efforts in the White House and on Capitol Hill.⁷¹ Convincing Americans that they were under threat and needed to purchase protection was the central pillar of Weinberger's national security strategy during the first two years of Reagan's presidency.

1.2 Strength through Arming Allies: The Falklands War – 1982

The United States' role in the 1982 war between Argentina and Great Britain over the Falkland Islands is a clear illustration of how Weinberger directly correlated power projection with spending on defense hardware. On the night of April 1–2, the Argentinian navy invaded the Falklands, a British dependent territory over which Argentina also claimed sovereignty.⁷² Margaret Thatcher's government immediately called on the United States to intervene on its behalf, and Reagan's advisors were divided over how to respond.⁷³ Comparing Weinberger and then-Secretary of State Haig's interpretations of the U.S. role in the Falklands War is instructive. Haig believed it necessary for the United States to mediate negotiations as a neutral party if it were to maintain its stature as leader of the free world.⁷⁴ Weinberger, on the other hand, maintained throughout the crisis that the United States should openly support Britain with arms and intelligence to show the world that America resolutely supported its allies in all circumstances.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Weinberger, Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, RRPL.

⁷² Haig, *Caveat*, 261–266.

⁷³ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 205–206.

⁷⁴ Haig, *Caveat*, 261–298.

⁷⁵ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 203–211.

The two advisors' narratives accord in how they describe each other's opposing Falklands strategy, but disagree as to whether or not the United States provided Britain with extraordinary military support during the first month of the war. After Haig's negotiations broke down, Reagan announced his formal decision on April 30 to sanction Argentina and route "material support" to Britain.⁷⁶ Haig's account of the diplomatic breakdown is detailed, tracing the complex nuances of Argentinian and British history and politics that contributed to the collapse of peace talks in bloody military conflict that left nearly one thousand dead. He faults leaks "from the White House and elsewhere" about secret negotiation details and "extraordinary intelligence support to Britain" with seriously undermining the talks.⁷⁷ Haig stated that these claims were patently false and gave Argentina "firm assurances" that "since the outset of the crisis, the United States had not granted British requests that would go beyond the scope of our customary patterns of cooperation."⁷⁸

Weinberger, writing five years after Haig published his memoir, contradicts this version of events. He recounts how shortly after the start of the war he "passed word to the Department that all existing requests from the United Kingdom for military equipment were to be honored at once; and that if the British made any new requests for any other equipment or other types of support, short of our actual participation in their military action, those requests should also be granted."⁷⁹ He addresses Haig's claim directly as well. "Former Secretary Haig said he spent some time at his negotiating sessions with the Argentines in telling them we had refused to fulfill British requests for arms. If he did tell them that, he was simply wrong."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Haig, *Caveat*, 293. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 207–208.

⁷⁷ Haig, *Caveat*, 261–299.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 284–285.

⁷⁹ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 205–207.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

Recently declassified Pentagon documents show that Weinberger was telling the truth, and that “other types of support” certainly included military intelligence and satellite data.⁸¹ These DOD communications would have been accessible to Haig’s staff if Haig had wished to become fully cognizant of what support the Pentagon provided Britain in the midst of Haig’s shuttle diplomacy. Under a broad definition, the intelligence and logistics assistance Weinberger authorized all fell under the umbrella of “routine” support.⁸² Thus Haig may have simply chosen his words very carefully when he said the leaks about “extraordinary” support were false in order to malign the leakers in favor of his legacy.⁸³ Or Haig chose to willfully ignore any Pentagon support of Britain to maintain plausible deniability as a neutral peace-broker through the course of his April 1982 bid to become a heroic statesman in the vein of his mentor Henry Kissinger. Either way, in light of the newly released Pentagon documents, the Argentines had a right to be suspicious, and Haig’s negotiation efforts proceeded with the serious handicap of either his lack of access to information or his own prevarication as a mediator.

Haig wrote that his Falklands efforts “ultimately cost [him his] job as Secretary of State.” Haig’s forced resignation on June 25th, which occurred fewer than two weeks after the Falklands War conclusion, also happened within three weeks of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and was more complicated than Haig makes it sound.⁸⁴ However, the lack of coordination and outright competition between cabinet members exhibited during the Falklands War would become a recurring theme throughout the course of Reagan’s presidency. As will be seen, at key moments, Reagan empowered a branch of his national security apparatus to move forward with a major

⁸¹ Alexander R. Wieland, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Volume XIII, Conflict in the South Atlantic, 1981–1984* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Publishing Office, 2015), Documents 65, 86, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v13>.

⁸² Wieland, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume XIII, Document 65*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v13/d65>.

⁸³ Haig, *Caveat*, 284–285.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 298, 303–316.

initiative without the support—and sometimes the knowledge—of other departments and agencies.⁸⁵

When Weinberger “passed word to the Department” during Haig’s negotiations to arm the British for confrontation with Argentina, was that a unilateral decision or on the president’s orders?⁸⁶ Weinberger’s vague choice of words was almost certainly deliberate, whether he acted on his own or on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief. Unfortunately, the answer is not yet found in documents available to the public. Later events surrounding the decision to not retaliate against the perpetrators of the Beirut Marine barracks bombing point to private communications between Weinberger and the president that the two kept secret from other members of the cabinet.

Regardless of whether Weinberger bestowed intelligence and logistical support upon Britain before April 30th under specific orders or with general autonomy of decision granted by Reagan, he directly linked his Falklands role as “assistant supply sergeant” to the British Navy with projection of America’s global strength and indispensability to its allies. In his memoir, Weinberger lauded the British for their “resolve and military skill,” but emphasized their reliance on U.S. Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, aircraft fuel, and encrypted radio receivers in winning a naval battle on the American side of the Atlantic.⁸⁷ During the Falklands War, Cap’s procurement ladle extended to a key American ally, whom he supported without hesitation from the moment hostilities erupted. Whether or not he was behind the leaks that dogged Haig’s negotiation efforts, he made no secret of his glee in confirming on April 30th that “the president’s heart was with Britain.” Weinberger characterized the British victory over Argentina as a

⁸⁵ Chapter 2 shows this approach in the development of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and Chapter 3 in the ultimate decision to not retaliate militarily after the Beirut Marine barracks bombing.

⁸⁶ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 205–207.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 214–217.

“successful American action” that demonstrated “evidence of our new capabilities and resolve” in the service of telling “the world that aggression would not be allowed to succeed” and “that freedom and the rule of law had strong and effective defenders.”⁸⁸

Though Weinberger gushed about American and British success in the Falklands War eight years after its completion, in the immediate aftermath he leveraged the war as an example of how America was still woefully unprepared for armed conflict. In a June 4, 1982 report to the president, Weinberger proposed generating a formal study of the impact of American armament on British success in the Falklands, claiming that “preliminary assessments would indicate strong justification for the present direction of our defense program,” particularly in the realm of bolstering air superiority.⁸⁹ The political utility of this analysis was not lost on the president, and his National Security Advisor (NSA) William Clark tasked Weinberger on June 29th with conducting “an in-depth analysis of the military lessons to be learned” from the Falklands War and emerging Lebanon crisis. Clark gave Weinberger a deadline of September 15 for this analysis and asked for “suggested interim public affairs guidance by July 7,” as the “military lessons of those conflicts could become topics of discussion during Congressional consideration of the Administration’s defense request and ultimately influence public attitudes towards U.S. defense policy.”⁹⁰

The wording of Clark’s memo appeared to nudge analysis in a particular direction, and Weinberger landed on conclusions that bolstered the case for more defense spending. In a July 19 memo to the president sharing “early observations” from a study ultimately concluded mid-

⁸⁸ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*. “Heart” on 207. Capabilities on 216–217.

⁸⁹ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, June 4, 1982,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

⁹⁰ Wieland, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Volume XIII, Document 368, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v13/d368>.

October, Weinberger enumerated specific British technological vulnerabilities that made the Falklands War “a closer call than many would believe” and a conflict in which “luck also played a significant role.” He highlighted “the difficulty of Britain—and possibly other allies—to support over time non-NATO military actions without reliance on U.S. assistance.”⁹¹ According to his assessment, better and more defense technology was required not just for the United States to protect itself, but for its allies to protect their interests.

During the first year and a half of Reagan’s presidency, Weinberger was able to focus his energies on increasing U.S. defense spending and expanding military capabilities. On the one hand, he devoted his energies to lobbying Congress for bigger budgets and empowered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to request their dream procurement lists. On the other hand, he approached the Falklands War from the single-minded perspective of arming an ally with hardware and intelligence without regard for diplomatic consequences. For Weinberger, and likely Reagan at the start of his presidency, this is how America was to achieve “peace through strength.”

The twin crises of economic recession and the Israeli invasion of Beirut in mid-1982 forced Reagan to at least momentarily turn away from Weinberger and consider different approaches to national security grand strategy.

⁹¹ Wieland, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Volume XIII, Document 378, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v13/d378>.

2 Raising the Cap: “Star Wars” – July 1981 to June 1983

The recession started in July 1981 and recovery did not begin until shortly before January 1983, when still fewer than 20 percent of Americans thought the economy was improving and Reagan’s popularity reached its first-term low of 35 percent.⁹² Theories of what triggered and ended the recession are numerous, and debate over the matter is a fierce battleground in U.S. domestic politics as the interpretation is tied directly to Reagan’s iconic legacy. Setting aside the gargantuan question of what caused the downturn, it had palpable implications for Weinberger’s defense spending lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. Beginning February 1982, he began reporting intense opposition to Pentagon spending proposals due to a “hostile mood toward the whole budget, including defense.” Particularly annoying to the Secretary was the Republican leadership who believed “that Pentagon spending cuts will erase the large Federal deficit, and that it is ‘only fair that defense be cut.’”⁹³

Weinberger laid out his new battle plan to Reagan to “reverse this trend” of Congress seeking to cut the recently fattened Pentagon down to size. He pledged that he and his deputy Frank Carlucci would step up their public appearances detailing the Soviet threat and necessary budgetary response, that he would present detailed arguments to five congressional budget committees, and that he would host regular Pentagon breakfasts with the Senate defense appropriations subcommittee to coax them into setting down their knives. He asked the president

⁹² Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 221, 234–235.

⁹³ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, February 19, 1982,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

to personally intervene with Republican Senator Ted Stevens, who had declined his breakfast invitation.⁹⁴

Weinberger lobbied hard to keep his bigger budgets, telling his audience at a National Press Club luncheon in March 1982 that the military and defense industry was “the most important social welfare program for which our Federal government must be responsible.” He warned that cuts in long-term defense programs would compound unemployment.⁹⁵ In the midst of the administration’s July 1982 decision to deploy U.S. Marines to join a multinational force of peacekeepers in Lebanon, Weinberger’s top line report item to Reagan was on the “severe budget situation” the Pentagon faced in Congress.⁹⁶ As the recession dragged on, even ideologically conservative bulwarks took swipes at Weinberger’s relentless push for increased spending. In August, Weinberger flagged for the president the *National Journal*’s criticism of the operational effectiveness the administration’s new defense hardware.⁹⁷ By January 1983, Weinberger was reassuring Reagan that the Heritage Foundation *AGENDA 83* report’s attack on the size and usage of the defense budget was due to the “inexperience” of the authors and could be disregarded.⁹⁸

With Weinberger and the defense spending surge under siege, Reagan eventually turned to other advisors for a solution to how he could continue to project military strength to his

⁹⁴ Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, February 19, 1982,” RRPL. It is unclear whether Weinberger believed there was a serious Soviet military threat, but his writing and public comments on defense spending consistently advocated for increased defense spending to project power and stimulate U.S. industry as threat levels waxed and waned.

⁹⁵ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, March 12, 1982,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

⁹⁶ Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 7, 1982,” ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 144.

⁹⁷ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, August 20, 1982,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

⁹⁸ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, January 14, 1983,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

domestic base and to the Soviet Union. Deputy National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane maneuvered to queue up a tailor-made nuclear deterrence pivot in early 1983 that appealed to Reagan's sensibilities, and Reagan ran with it. Within weeks, this idea crystalized in a massive research and development program called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), famously derided by its detractors as "Star Wars." The SDI episode proved to be emblematic of Reagan's approach to grand strategy. His cabinet and White House staff competed in a marketplace of ideas and influence, and Reagan went with solutions that best allowed him to project "peace through strength" to his domestic audience. Reagan cut key advisors out of the decision-making process leading up to the SDI rollout, and this was a tactic he would repeat at other key junctures of his presidency.

2.1 Peddling Peacekeepers: Countering the Nuclear Freeze Movement

Reagan and Weinberger did not only face a recession obstacle to their defense spending designs. On top of the economic downturn, an international nuclear freeze movement gained substantial momentum in the United States during the spring of 1982. The movement was propelled largely by Catholic and Protestant churches and groups. The unifying principle was to pressure governments to pause the number of nuclear warheads at the current level.⁹⁹ The movement gained intellectual heft when George Kennan, Kennedy/Johnson NSA McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy/Johnson Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and Nixon Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) negotiator Gerard Smith penned an article in the Spring 1982 issue of *Foreign Affairs* calling on the administration to adopt a "no first use" nuclear policy.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 197.

¹⁰⁰ McGeorge Bundy et al., "Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance," *Foreign Affairs* Spring 1982. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1982-03-01/nuclear-weapons-and-atlantic-alliance>.

The emergence of these bipartisan ghosts of containment's past to criticize Reagan's nuclear strategy appeared to galvanize a response from the administration. Weinberger pleaded with Reagan in April 1982 to speak publicly and "forcefully" against the nuclear freeze idea.¹⁰¹ Deputy NSA Bud McFarlane, in a sort of rehearsal for the SDI policy initiative he would soon pitch to Reagan, swiftly coordinated a thorough domestic campaign to counter the movement, and the *Foreign Affairs* article in particular. McFarlane's declassified National Security Council (NSC) papers show how his staffer Sven Kraemer secured approval from Reagan's Chief of Staff James Baker to launch a comprehensive public affairs campaign to neutralize nuclear freeze and "no first use" sentiment.¹⁰²

While it may seem untoward for the NSC staff to run a taxpayer-funded domestic public relations campaign to convince Americans they needed a particular form of nuclear deterrence, McFarlane makes no secret of the campaign in his memoir. He boasts without regret that "over the course of 30 days, we found that in fact we had effectively begun to counter the freeze movement. We did it by depth of persuasion. It was not dirty tricks. It was engagement, giving the public the information it needed to understand our point of view. And it worked."

For the most part, McFarlane's memoir and declassified papers tell similar stories. McFarlane's staff compiled a briefing book based on Weinberger's talking points and their own research. McFarlane, his team, and other senior national security officials then fanned out state-by-state for a total of "85 appearances... in the 12 major media markets of the United States" in early autumn 1982¹⁰³ McFarlane did leave out of his public narrative a concerted effort by NSA

¹⁰¹ Caspar Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, April 2, 1982," Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

¹⁰² Sven Kraemer, "Memo to James Baker," Nuclear Freeze, Public/legislative (1), Box 4, Robert "Bud" McFarlane RAC Box 1, RRPL.

¹⁰³ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 198. Nuclear Freeze, Public/legislative (2), Box 4, Robert "Bud" McFarlane RAC Box 1, RRPL. Nuclear Freeze, Public/legislative (6), Box 4, Robert "Bud" McFarlane RAC Box 1, RRPL.

Bill Clark and NSC staffer Paul Bremer—who later became Iraq’s chief executive authority after the 2003 U.S. invasion—to privately persuade the U.S. Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy to drop the nuclear freeze movement and support a nuclear buildup.¹⁰⁴ NSC staff argued that the Soviets had gained a substantial nuclear edge over the United States during the previous years of détente. Clark wrote a letter to Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, who had just become Archbishop of Chicago in August, urging him to put a damper on the nuclear freeze movement and to redirect Catholic opinion against the socialist Sandinistas of Nicaragua.¹⁰⁵

McFarlane also left the names of Republican electoral operatives out of his memoir depiction of the counter nuclear freeze campaign.¹⁰⁶ McFarlane chaired an August 25, 1982 Arms Control Public Affairs meeting to plan the monthlong campaign, where two of the eight participants were perennial Republican campaign strategists Lee Atwater and William Greener III.¹⁰⁷ Atwater’s boss at the time, Reagan’s Director for Political Affairs Ed Rollins, characterized Atwater as an “Oliver North in civilian clothes” who had “no rules or standards in [his] operating manual” and would “do anything to win.”¹⁰⁸ The day after Reagan’s 1984 election victory, Atwater moved from his position as deputy presidential campaign manager to become a full partner at the consulting firm Black, Manafort and Stone, alongside Paul Manafort and Roger Stone, recently famous for political operations related to the 2016 presidential campaign. One of their largest clients in 1985 was Rupert Murdoch’s The News Corp. Ltd., an

¹⁰⁴ Nuclear Freeze, Public/legislative (2), Box 4, Robert “Bud” McFarlane RAC Box 1, RRPL. Nuclear Freeze, Public #2 (2), Box 4, Robert “Bud” McFarlane RAC Box 1, RRPL.

¹⁰⁵ Nuclear Freeze, Public #2 (2), Box 4, Robert “Bud” McFarlane RAC Box 1, RRPL.

¹⁰⁶ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 198.

¹⁰⁷ Nuclear Freeze, Public/legislative (6), Box 4, Robert “Bud” McFarlane RAC Box 1, RRPL.

¹⁰⁸ Ed Rollins, *Bare Knuckles and Back Rooms: My Life in American Politics* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 125.

indicator of Atwater's demonstrated value as an invaluable media influencer.¹⁰⁹ Bill Greener planned and executed an additional public affairs campaign in the spring of 1983 in coordination with the NSC promoting Reagan's increase of the defense budget.¹¹⁰ Greener worked with Manafort for four decades, had a planning role in every post-Reagan Republican convention, and served as executive director for public events and ceremonies for the 2017 presidential inauguration. Defense spending remains a pillar of his political clients' media messaging.¹¹¹

In spite of these NSC and party operative tactics, Weinberger foundered in his congressional lobbying initiatives as the recession wore on. He had a particularly difficult time attempting to secure congressional approval for basing of MX Peacekeeper missiles, the land-based element of America's "nuclear triad" of intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear subs, and bombers.¹¹² The sticking point, even for congressional allies of Weinberger, was where and how to base the MX missiles, especially given the nuclear freeze movement and voter concerns about their neighborhoods becoming a nuclear first strike target of the Soviets. In March 1982, Weinberger informed the president that Republican congresspeople requested declassification of Soviet threat material so they could demonstrate to their constituents that the threat required domestic missile basing.¹¹³ In June he implored the president to "coordinate" the administration's MX position across departments and agencies, and identified Senator John Heinz as a lobbying target of opportunity.¹¹⁴ The following month he assured Reagan that the B-

¹⁰⁹ Thomas B. Edsall, "Partners in Political PR Firm Typify Republican New Breed," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1985, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/04/07/partners-in-political-pr-firm-typify-republican-new-breed/8d0b8c04-fabc-43ae-887b-25c7e8af0ec0/>.

¹¹⁰ Bill Greener Project, ExecSec Box 22, RRPL.

¹¹¹ Bill Greener III, "When the Headlines Don't Equal Reality," *Inside Sources* <https://www.insidesources.com/headlines-dont-equal-reality-paul-manafort/>.

¹¹² McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019.

¹¹³ Caspar Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, March 26, 1982," Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

¹¹⁴ Caspar Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, June 25, 1982," Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

1 bomber was ahead of cost and scheduling targets in time to strengthen America's hand in arms control negotiations, but that clear advocacy guidance on the MX to congressional allies was required to rescue that particular program.¹¹⁵

Although Weinberger informed Reagan in July that the House approved MX production, from that point on he underreported the reality of his congressional budgetary struggles.¹¹⁶ Bud McFarlane's memoir chronicles how Congress had rejected two separate MX basing proposals before December 1982, and pins blame for this administration failure squarely on the shoulders of Weinberger. McFarlane quotes Senators Sam Nunn of Georgia, Bill Cohen of Maine, and John Tower of Texas as saying any MX basing initiative put forward by Weinberger would fail because "he was not considered credible on defense issues." These congressmen informed McFarlane that Weinberger's stubborn advocacy of defense systems criticized even by some Pentagon officials undermined his reputation as an evenhanded analyst. McFarlane faults Weinberger for his persistent inflexibility and "contemptuous attitude toward the Congress," which certainly comes through in his tenacious weekly reports to Reagan insisting he make no compromise with congressional defense spending skeptics and MX opponents in particular.¹¹⁷

McFarlane's declassified papers show that he indeed harbored this concern about Weinberger's lobbying effectiveness as events unfolded, not just years after the fact. On December 17th, a week and half after both chambers of Congress voted a third time to deny funds for the MX missile network, he wrote directly to NSA Bill Clark, alleging that "Cap [is] captive of vested interests in a particular system elsewhere," and beholden to "ideologues with respect to

¹¹⁵ Caspar Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 16, 1982," Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

¹¹⁶ Caspar Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 23, 1982," Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

¹¹⁷ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 223–224. Weinberger, Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, RRPL.

arms control.”¹¹⁸ McFarlane demurred when asked about the former comment in a 2019 oral history interview, but the latter comment highlights the gulf between Weinberger and McFarlane on grand strategy. This dispute over deterrence would echo in the later conflict between Weinberger and Secretary of State Schultz on arms control negotiations with the Soviets.¹¹⁹ Though there appears to be more to McFarlane’s disapproval, what is clear is that he felt that Weinberger was enough of a liability to attaining effective nuclear deterrence capabilities that he took the risk of giving Clark, a close ally of Weinberger, written criticism of the Secretary of Defense that could have undermined McFarlane’s relationship with the Secretary if Clark had shared it.¹²⁰

It was against this background of nuclear freeze and congressional stalemate on the MX that Reagan gave his famous “evil empire” speech to the National Association of Evangelicals on March 8, 1983.¹²¹ In the decades since the speech, it has been widely remembered as a general escalation of rhetoric against the Soviet Union that epitomized Reagan’s views of his superpower rival. However, the phrase “evil empire” was invoked as part of an explicit call to Evangelical Protestants and any other amenable listeners not to join their Catholic and mainline Protestant coreligionists in the nuclear freeze movement:

So in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the temptation of pride—the temptation of blithely declaring yourself above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Robert “Bud” McFarlane, “Memo to Judge William Clark,” 17 December 1982, Sensitive Chron 1982 (1), Robert “Bud” McFarlane RAC Box 6, 7 (10), RRPL.

¹¹⁹ McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019.

¹²⁰ McFarlane, “Memo to Judge William Clark,” 17 December 1982. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 223–224.

¹²¹ Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, 70–71.

¹²² Cannon, *President Reagan*, 273.

Though Reagan's polled popularity had reached its nadir only a couple of months earlier, this public speech from the president made more of a splash than a one-month guerrilla media offensive helmed by McFarlane.¹²³ It is very difficult to gauge whether Reagan's escalation of rhetoric and the NSC's media management would have overcome the twin obstacles to the MX of recession and the nuclear freeze movement. These efforts soon proved to be unnecessary. Two weeks after the "evil empire" speech, Reagan unveiled a bold new defense project that opened the heavens wide to uninterrupted spending.

2.2 The Triumph of Imagination: The NSC Staff's "Star Wars" Gambit

On March 21, 1983, two weeks after the "evil empire" speech, Undersecretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger informed George Schultz of an unexpected conversation he had with Bud McFarlane. Eagleburger said that Reagan was going to make a speech on March 23 announcing an alternative to the flailing MX, a "high-tech strategic defense system that can protect us against ballistic missiles and thereby protect our offensive capabilities. Schultz was nonplussed, as he and his staff believed that announcing the goal of a nuclear-free world would seriously undermine America's alliance with Western Europe. Schultz met with Reagan later that day to urge him to tone down the speech, insisting that the Pentagon did not yet have the technology to back the type of research and development to be announced, and that the "revolution in our strategic doctrine" communicated in the speech would worry allies who would think the United States no longer cared to protect them. Schultz pressed hard with Reagan and the NSC staff for

¹²³ Cannon, *President Reagan*, 234–235.

substantive edits, but ultimately the president agreed to only slightly downplay the message that this Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) would eventually eliminate nuclear weapons.¹²⁴

Schultz had three main problems with the announcement of SDI in addition to Reagan and the NSC staff having kept him in the dark. First, he knew for a fact that the United States did not “have the technology” to install “an impenetrable shield” based in space to strike down nuclear missiles. He believed that technically this research and development might, at best, yield an operable system a decade later. Second, he had serious strategic problems with the proposed system, which the Joint Chiefs confirmed would only be able to target land-based missiles but would not defend against bombers or missiles launched from submarines. Third, he noted that “because the Soviets will see this as an effort to render their offensive capability obsolete... the run-up period to deployment will be highly dangerous.” The SDI speech was essentially an announcement that the United States intended to eventually discard the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, a move the Soviets would view as over belligerence, especially in the recent wake of the “evil empire” speech.¹²⁵

Weinberger received even shorter notice of the SDI speech than Schultz. In his 1991 memoir, he praises SDI as a work of strategic genius, yet his annoyance toward his “friends in the White House” who informed him of the speech by a “hurried and surreptitious call” the morning it was given still resonates. Though Weinberger was traveling in Portugal that day, it is likely he would not have learned of the speech any sooner if he had been present in Washington. Weinberger attributed the late notification to “a portion of the White House staff... still desiring total surprise.” He secured last minute approval from Reagan to inform NATO defense ministers

¹²⁴ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 249–264.

¹²⁵ Ibid. For more on the SDI announcement and details of the research and development program, see Frances FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

of the immanent change in defense policy. He also underscored the importance of coordinating with allies on strategic defense by emphasizing that for allies he did not have time to inform, the “displeasure at not knowing about the initiative ahead of time outweighed their appreciation of the significance of the new proposal.”¹²⁶ Weinberger and Schultz’s concerns about allied reactions proved to be prescient, as SDI proved to be a bone of contention raised by otherwise staunch Reagan supporter Margaret Thatcher, who was skeptical of the missile shield’s technological viability and concerned it would weaken the defensive bond between the United States and Western Europe.¹²⁷

The president had decided that a missile defense shield would replace mutually assured destruction as the cornerstone of U.S. nuclear deterrence, and his two ranking national security cabinet members had not been informed. How did a sea change in U.S. nuclear deterrence materialize without the knowledge of the Secretaries of Defense and State? During the first two years of his administration, Reagan relied on his Secretaries of Defense and State to prosecute his foreign policy. During that time, the NSC staff played only a bit role, most likely due to weak leadership in the NSA role. When Reagan’s first NSA Richard Allen resigned in January 1982 due to allegations that he received a bribe from a Japanese journalist in exchange for an interview with Nancy Reagan, Deputy Secretary of State Bill Clark took his place. Clark was a close ally of Reagan and Weinberger and had served as Reagan’s chief of staff when he was governor of California. He also brought Bud McFarlane, who was then Counselor to Secretary of State Haig, over to the White House as his new Deputy NSA.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 291–307.

¹²⁷ Suri, *The Impossible Presidency*, 239. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 234.

¹²⁸ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 188–189.

Clark worked well with the president and secretary of defense, but he left the details of national security policy to the veteran McFarlane.¹²⁹ McFarlane knew the ins and outs of White House, NSC, and executive interagency policy development, and he was not afraid to leave his mark on presidential decisions. In a memoir chapter tellingly titled “Making Things Work,” McFarlane depicts himself as delivering a concise foreign policy to a White House staff in disarray. His assessment of Reagan’s first year was dim. “The first year [was] one of drift, reacting to events—generally with success, as luck would have it—instead of planning and directing them whenever possible.” He describes how in a meeting with White House staff he cut through the foreign policy “naysaying coming from the principals at the table” and enumerated a foreign policy of “five components”: 1) strengthen the U.S. economic base to pay for foreign aid and defense; 2) “restore” defense capabilities; 3) bolster alliances with Europe and Japan; 4) mediate a peace process between Israel and its neighboring Arab countries; and 5) stimulate growth in developing countries through “trade, aid, and investment.” McFarlane recorded Reagan’s deputy chief of staff Mike Deaver’s response. “I’ll be damned. I think we just got a foreign policy.”¹³⁰

It is unlikely that McFarlane captured Reagan’s imagination with his policy memos and national security jargon. McFarlane did not really formulate a new foreign policy for Reagan. McFarlane’s distillation of Reagan’s gut instinct and actions into bullet points may have made Deaver and other staffers feel the administration was more focused, but this approach did not alter Reagan’s leadership style. Reagan disparaged the writing style of McFarlane and other

¹²⁹ Cannon, *President Reagan*, 280.

¹³⁰ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 193–194.

advisors who worked on his SDI speech in his diary the day before the speech, making special note of the extensive edits he had to make “to change bureaucratic into people talk.”¹³¹

The president did not give the NSC staff the reins of foreign policy upon Clark and McFarlane’s arrival. As illustrated in the case of the Falklands War, Weinberger and Haig were still the primary players. Historian Andrew Preston highlighted how Reagan’s NSAs lacked a “direct, productive relationship with the president,” in marked contrast to their predecessors.¹³² However, McFarlane worked tirelessly to generate ideas and policies that would advance the president’s—and sometimes his own—national security agenda. In the case of SDI, McFarlane and Haig’s successor Schultz agree in their memoirs that Reagan desired to implement some kind of a missile shield over the nation ever since he visited the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) in Colorado Springs in 1979 and was shocked to learn that the U.S. military had no way to stop incoming Soviet nukes from obliterating American cities.¹³³ Weinberger maintained that SDI was fully the brainchild of the president.¹³⁴ But it was McFarlane who laid the groundwork for SDI by proposing the underlying technology to the president in a careful manner that circumvented his superiors Clark, Schultz, and Weinberger. McFarlane tooled his proposal in such close alignment with Reagan’s dream of nuclear abolition that the president kept plans of SDI and the rollout speech from Weinberger and Schultz, theretofore his closest advisors on national security.¹³⁵

McFarlane laid out a straightforward narrative of how he came to convince the president to publicly unveil the SDI concept, and there is little reason to doubt his core narrative. Nitze

¹³¹ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 139.

¹³² Andrew Preston, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 245–246.

¹³³ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 228. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 261–264.

¹³⁴ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 239.

¹³⁵ Cannon, *Ronald Reagan*, 284–288. McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 224–239.

confirms that McFarlane and Reagan were the key players, and Weinberger and Schultz's accounts, while much less informed and detailed than McFarlane's, corroborate his story.¹³⁶ McFarlane and Clark's military assistant John Poindexter had lunch with Admiral James Watkins, Chief of Naval Operations, early January 1983 to discuss strategic defense alternatives to the stalled MX basing configurations rejected by Congress. McFarlane asked Watkins to ask his Army, Marines, and Air Force counterparts if they supported the deployment of a missile shield to eventually block a Soviet nuclear first strike capability. Watkins reported back that the Joint Chiefs were on board.¹³⁷

McFarlane and Watkins orchestrated their pitch to Reagan in a February 11, 1983 meeting with the Joint Chiefs. McFarlane, perhaps overstating as coincidence that "as it happened, Judge Clark was out of the country that day," sat directly to Reagan's right and chimed in at the conclusion of Watkins' SDI proposal stating that "new technologies may offer the possibility of enabling us to deal with a Soviet missile attack by defensive means."¹³⁸ Reagan immediately requested that the Chiefs promptly prepare a report to him on how to launch this kind of missile shield initiative.

When McFarlane briefed Clark upon his return the next day, Clark fully recognized that a missile shield was firmly part of Reagan's vision and that he needed to ensure it was actualized. Joint Chiefs Chairman Jack Vessey called Clark within 48 hours of the meeting, somewhat incredulous, to confirm that Reagan wanted a missile shield proposal from the Chiefs. According to Poindexter, "the Chiefs had been thinking about strategic systems" but "the Chiefs didn't know" about the NSC and Reagan's plans for SDI. Vessey and the other Chiefs had only just

¹³⁶ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 224–239. Nitze, Smith, and Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 400–403. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 261–264. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 304–312.

¹³⁷ Cannon, *Ronald Reagan*, 282–284. McFarlane and Smardz, 226–229.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

adopted Watkins' proposal as their own recommendation to the president a week before the February 11 meeting.¹³⁹ Clark confirmed that Reagan wanted a formal report from Vessey, and the president had a written proposal by early March.¹⁴⁰

Even Weinberger, who professed total ignorance of how the SDI speech materialized and conspicuously avoided giving any credit to McFarlane, casually mentioned that his "own feeling is that the [SDI] issue was finally and completely decided in the president's mind after a meeting... with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on February 11." In both of his memoirs and other statements about SDI, Weinberger claimed to have always fully supported the missile shield idea.¹⁴¹ Vessey and Watkins have since insisted that Weinberger politely opposed the Chiefs' support of U.S. investment in ballistic missile defense but told the president that he "should hear them out" nonetheless.¹⁴² The reasons for Weinberger's opposition are not clear from documents or memoirs, but he may have been unwilling to support the program because it was so far from becoming technologically viable. The Chiefs' claim about Weinberger's opposition is supported by the fact that Weinberger and Schultz were kept in the dark about the March 23rd SDI speech until nearly the last moment. In 2019, McFarlane confirmed that Reagan asked him directly and specifically to not inform either Secretary of the speech until it was too late to cancel the public appearance, as the president believed both men would oppose the initiative unless it was irrevocably publicized.¹⁴³

McFarlane shared Weinberger's view that the defense spending surge was at the core of U.S. power projection, but simply believed that Weinberger had undermined the policy with his

¹³⁹ Frederick Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance: The U.S. Navy in the 1980s* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 254, 258.

¹⁴⁰ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 230.

¹⁴¹ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 304. Weinberger, *In the Arena*, 282–284. Cannon, *President Reagan*, 284–285.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 284–285. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance*, 322n.

¹⁴³ McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019.

congressional lobbying failures. McFarlane wrote on December 17, 1982 that the “Senate took wise action” when it struck down Weinberger’s MX basing proposal.¹⁴⁴ Not only did McFarlane believe that Weinberger was not credible as a defense spending advocate, but he was backing a strategic concept called “densepack,” that McFarlane found to be a foolish and dangerous strategy. Weinberger failed to sell Congress on a Pentagon proposal to base all MX missiles within close vicinity of each other so that incoming Soviet nukes would blow each other up when targeted at the same location.¹⁴⁵ It is perhaps not surprising that McFarlane quickly concocted an imaginative nuclear deterrence alternative to the considerably less inspiring defense fantasy Weinberger peddled unsuccessfully to Congress.

One month later, McFarlane marshalled his staff to draft National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 75 for the president. This policy document outlined a strategy for addressing “the existing and projected gap between finite U.S. resources and the level of capabilities needed to implement U.S. strategy.” McFarlane’s staff highlighted for the president the need to sustain “steady, long-term growth in U.S. defense spending and capabilities—both nuclear and conventional.” McFarlane and his staff, like Weinberger, connected spending and capabilities directly to global power projection, calling the surge “the most important way of conveying to the Soviets U.S. resolve and political staying-power.”¹⁴⁶ McFarlane was in line with Weinberger in strategic direction on defense spending, but with NSDD-75 he had begun to lay the groundwork for a new tactical approach by highlighting the importance of Reagan and Weinberger’s defense spending goals in spite of Weinberger’s waning ability to attain them.

¹⁴⁴ “Memo,” 17 December 1982, Chron Files Folder 8, Robert “Bud” McFarlane RAC Box 4, RRPL.

¹⁴⁵ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 223. McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019.

¹⁴⁶ James Graham Wilson, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Volume VI, Soviet Union, October 1986–1989*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Publishing Office, 2016, Document 260, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d260>.

Reagan's diaries, personal letters, and internal correspondences with advisors do not directly reference NSDD-75, or any other "bureaucratic talk" produced by the NSC staff, for that matter.¹⁴⁷ McFarlane's triangulation with Jim Watkins of the JCS in the February 11 did successfully inspire Reagan to move forward with full enthusiasm on strategic anti-ballistic missile defense, although McFarlane's motivations for announcing SDI were considerably different from those of the president. McFarlane claimed that he conceived of SDI as a way to tax the Soviet economy through military spending to the breaking point and explained that anti-ballistic missile defense also could make up for Weinberger's failure to secure approval for MX basing. For McFarlane, SDI itself had no strategic purpose in actual nuclear deterrence, even though he presented it to Reagan—through Watkins and the other Joint Chiefs—as a way to eliminate nuclear weapons. He told Reagan biographer Lou Cannon that he had developed SDI as a bargaining chip to trade away in exchange for USSR nuclear disarmament, as the Soviet leadership would panic when they recognized their inability to keep pace with U.S. research and development. For McFarlane SDI was a means to the end of bluffing the Soviets off the table, or rather, forcing them to the negotiation table.¹⁴⁸

McFarlane first shaped this narrative for the public more than ten years after the March 1983 SDI speech, and, without further declassification of official documents, it is not possible to verify with certainty if this was his strategic thinking at the time. More than three and a half decades later, the United States has yet to develop a working missile defense shield, thus McFarlane certainly has a stake in presenting the SDI concept as one he always intended as a bluff. It is, however, rather easy to verify that Reagan had a different view of SDI's purpose.

¹⁴⁷ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 139. Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, ed., *Reagan: A Life in Letters* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁸ McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 215–228. Cannon, *Ronald Reagan*, 280–288. McFarlane is consistent in how he describes his strategy in all three of these sources.

Whether McFarlane's assessment that SDI was integral to U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiation was brilliant foresight or convenient hindsight, Reagan believed that the United States had the technological capability to install a missile shield and that this would lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons. Reagan's March 23rd speech rang out with soaring rhetoric about "a program to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive" birthed by "technology that spawned our great industrial base and that have given us the quality of life we enjoy today."¹⁴⁹

The writings of Reagan and his advisors exhibit Reagan's true belief in the power of this technology. Reagan's September 14, 1982 diary entry bubbles with enthusiasm for "an exciting idea that nuclear weapons can be used in connection with Lasers to be non-destructive except as used to intercept and destroy enemy missiles far above the earth."¹⁵⁰ He reportedly echoed this refrain on at least one occasion quoting a scientist character played by Paul Newman in *Torn Curtain* (1966), who vowed that "we will produce a defensive weapon that will make all nuclear weapons obsolete, and thereby abolish the terror of nuclear warfare."¹⁵¹ On December 18, 1984 he quoted himself as telling the Joint Chiefs, "More & more I'm thinking the Soviets are preparing to walk out on the talks if we won't give up research on strategic defense system [SDI]."¹⁵²

It is possible Reagan could have altered some of these entries years later, but he would not have much incentive to feign naivete in negotiations when his supporters could just as easily praise him for bluffing the Soviets into giving up nukes. In several letters to personal friends written between 1986 and 1988, Reagan adamantly asserted that he never intended for SDI to be

¹⁴⁹ Cannon, *Ronald Reagan*, 282–288.

¹⁵⁰ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 100.

¹⁵¹ FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 23.

¹⁵² Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 288.

used as a bargaining chip, and in one letter stated that his purpose was to “develop a defensive shield so effective that we can use it to rid the world once and for all of all nuclear missiles.”¹⁵³ He also sticks to the script in his memoir, in cinematic fashion, touting SDI as an antidote to the mutually assured destruction approach to deterrence. “It was like having two westerners standing in a saloon aiming their guns at each other’s head—permanently. There had to be a better way.”¹⁵⁴

Weinberger and Schultz, both writing years after Reagan left office, also maintain that Reagan never had any intention of using SDI as a bargaining chip.¹⁵⁵ McFarlane later stated that he was anxious about “central vulnerabilities of the idea” related to NATO ally perceptions and lack of technological preparedness, but that he could not stop Reagan from running with the concept from the February 11 meeting through the March speech. McFarlane even let on that he had planned for Reagan to use the idea with key congressional figures to forge bipartisan consensus on maintaining the defense spending surge.¹⁵⁶ McFarlane’s internal White House maneuvering in Clark’s absence and without Schultz and Weinberger’s knowledge support the implication that he saw SDI as a bluff, first to motivate the president to change strategies on how to fuel defense spending, then to put forth an idea of nuclear defense that Congress could not politically refuse, and finally to force the Soviets to the negotiation table.

Regardless of the competing visions and maneuvers of his advisors, in his March 23, 1983 speech Reagan put forth his personal idealistic vision of a world where U.S. technology and innovation would neutralize all nuclear threats. Reagan wrote in his diary that night that his

¹⁵³ Skinner, Anderson, and Anderson, ed., *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 428–431.

¹⁵⁴ Reagan, *An American Life*, 547.

¹⁵⁵ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 264. Weinberger, *In the Arena*, 283.

¹⁵⁶ McFarlane, *Special Trust*, 230.

advisors “seemed to think [the speech] would be a source of debate for some time to come.”¹⁵⁷

The prediction turned out to be accurate. Critics dubbed SDI “Star Wars,” deriding it as the fanciful yearnings of a president whose mind was still in Hollywood.¹⁵⁸ Four days later, *The New York Times* editorial page issued an opinion piece entitled “Nuclear Facts, Science Fictions” that not only dismissed SDI as a “pipe dream,” but quoted a section of his speech back at the president highlighting the danger of building an ostensibly defensive system in a world filled with offensive weapons, which “can be viewed as fostering an aggressive policy and no one wants that.”¹⁵⁹

Speechwriter Anthony Dolan, who penned Reagan’s “evil empire” speech, claimed that Reagan himself embraced the “Star Wars” label, since it evoked a film series where the forces of good defeat the dark side.¹⁶⁰ In this starkly defined cosmic struggle, Reagan’s senior advisors—no matter how skeptical before the SDI announcement or angry about having been cut out of the loop—quickly aligned themselves with Reagan’s new strategy. Though Schultz continued to question the technological viability of SDI and potential adverse impact on relationships with NATO allies, he admitted that “the extravagant launching of [SDI] gave the proposal a special visibility that dramatically caught the attention of the Soviets.” Schultz would later make use of SDI to further his arms control aims in negotiations with the Soviets.¹⁶¹ Schultz and his colleagues did not realize how volatile the subject of SDI was on the Soviet side. Twenty years later, Soviet arms negotiator Oleg Grinevski wrote how Premier Yuri Andropov interpreted SDI

¹⁵⁷ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Ehrman and Flamm, *Debating the Reagan Presidency*, 114.

¹⁵⁹ “Nuclear Facts, Science Fictions,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 1983.

¹⁶⁰ D’Souza, *Ronald Reagan*, 177.

¹⁶¹ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 261–264.

as confirmation that Reagan had “embarked on a sudden application of a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, and now they are trying to protect the U.S. from our retaliation.”¹⁶²

Weinberger labelled Nitze “one of the strongest opponents of SDI,” but details only a non-confrontational academic proposal of metrics that would disfavor SDI in lieu of any effort to directly contradict the president’s strategic vision.¹⁶³ Nitze scrubbed any hint of his opposition to SDI from his memoir, in contrast to his sharp criticism of Johnson’s handling of the Vietnam War. Writing on the heels of Reagan and Schultz’s successful series of arms control talks, he disavowed any notion that he was opposed to the strategic concept of SDI and states that he simply sought for it to be developed in a cost-effective manner.¹⁶⁴

Although Weinberger himself initially opposed strategic missile defense in the February 11 Joint Chiefs meeting, he became a vociferous advocate of SDI, pressing for continued investment in the program as late as 1991, when he called it “the single strategic concept that offers the most hope to the world since nuclear weapons were first deployed.”¹⁶⁵ Whether or not Weinberger’s faith in SDI as a strategic concept was genuine, he certainly saw its value in buoying his defense spending requests. He immediately created a Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) within the Pentagon that reported directly to him, both to foster prestige and visibility for the program and to prevent other DOD units from diverting appropriated SDI money. He attempted to secure FY 1984 funds for SDI following the speech but was blocked by Congress. Weinberger managed to appropriate large additional sums for DOD earmarked for

¹⁶² Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, 73.

¹⁶³ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 320–325.

¹⁶⁴ Nitze, Smith, and Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 253–270, 407–408.

¹⁶⁵ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 327–329.

SDI: \$1.4 billion in FY 1985, \$2.67 billion in FY 1986, \$3.27 billion in FY 1987, \$3.6 billion in FY 1988, and \$3.74 billion in FY 1989.¹⁶⁶

Weinberger had hit a fundraising wall with MX basing, but SDI harvested resources that continued to grow even after he resigned from his position in 1987. The Secretary of Defense published a second and final edition of *Soviet Military Power* early in 1983. At the time, he presented it to Reagan as an annual publication informing Congress and voters about the need for spending to counter the Soviet military threat. His last mention of this fundraising strategy to Reagan was two weeks before the SDI speech.¹⁶⁷ It is likely that the defensive “Star Wars” idea did more for Weinberger’s defense spending efforts than threat promotion ever could. McFarlane may have executed an end run around Weinberger to secure more influence with the president in matters of defense policy, but Weinberger made the most of the strategic shift and embraced the budgetary injection. Although it was formulated by Weinberger’s soon-to-be grand strategy rival, SDI helped empower him to continue to focus on defense spending and to counsel against troop deployment.

The SDI episode showed Reagan that the NSC staff could formulate creative solutions to thorny political problems like recession pressure on defense spending and the nuclear freeze movement. McFarlane gleaned “the need for secrecy in launching any fundamental reorientation of policy” as the “vital lesson” of SDI. In a rather visceral description of the policy creation process, McFarlane wrote that the “premature disclosure of our planning for SDI would have evoked such a storm of criticism as to assure its abortion.”¹⁶⁸ It is remarkable that when

¹⁶⁶ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 310–313.

¹⁶⁷ Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, February 18, 1983,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL. Caspar Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, March 11, 1983,” Secretary of Defense Weekly Reports to President Ronald Reagan, ExecSec RAC Box 7, RRPL.

¹⁶⁸ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 235.

McFarlane wrote this and when he held fast to the same lessons nearly verbatim in a 2019 interview, he highlighted the importance of the president keeping key cabinet officials—not just the press—in the dark regarding a monumental pivot in national security strategy.¹⁶⁹ Ironically, within the year Weinberger would employ similarly secretive tactics against McFarlane to prevail in an ideological showdown over deployment of U.S. troops in the Middle East.

¹⁶⁹ McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019.

3 Cap the Knife: “Only the Fun Wars” – June 1982 to November 1985

Weinberger was initially skeptical about the technological feasibility of SDI and annoyed about having been kept in the dark about the program’s rollout, but he came around to Reagan’s new strategic approach to nuclear deterrence. McFarlane’s creative mechanism for perpetuating the defense spending surge and taxing the Soviet defense economy allowed Weinberger to keep ladling cash into defense programs and technology. Both Reagan’s supporters and detractors frequently point to the administration’s defense spending power projection and depict Weinberger as the administration’s arch-hawk. The defense secretary’s role in Reagan’s troop deployment decisions during the Beirut and Grenada crises, however, display an often-overlooked aspect of Weinberger’s grand strategy and its influence on Reagan. While Weinberger sought to maximize defense spending, he exercised consistent restraint in deployment of U.S. troops. “Cap the Knife” was no longer thrifty with budgets, but he was ruthlessly stingy when it came to utilization of troops.

Matters in Beirut and Grenada both came to a head the weekend of October 21–23, 1983, and Reagan could no longer rely on defense spending and SDI buzz alone to meet his power projection needs. A close look at documents, memoirs, and an oral history of Reagan’s Beirut and Grenada troop deployment decisions show that if these two crises had not converged simultaneously, and if Weinberger had not persistently and dogmatically adhered to restraint, Reagan’s foreign policy may have taken a very different course.

Reagan acted quickly to invade Grenada, but ultimately decided to pull U.S. Marines out of Beirut in early 1984 and not put American combat troops back on the ground for the

remainder of his presidency. Weinberger praises both of these decisions in his memoir, and claims—erroneously, in the case of Grenada—that he supported both decisions when Reagan made them. McFarlane and Schultz praise Reagan’s decisive action in Grenada as masterful power projection but blame Weinberger for actively undermining diplomatic successes in Lebanon by fatally restricting utilization of American troops abroad.¹⁷⁰

Weinberger would probably not disagree with their characterization of his refusal to cooperate. He was fundamentally at odds with both Schultz and McFarlane over how troops should be used, and he made no secret that he thought Schultz and McFarlane’s strategies of mixing military and diplomatic tactics were seriously misguided.¹⁷¹ Weinberger went to great lengths—including countering his national security colleagues through subterfuge—to apply his dogmatic restraint consistently throughout his tenure at the Pentagon.

For a period, Reagan explored Schultz and McFarlane’s more liberal utilization of troop deployment to project power during the Beirut conflict. By 1984, however, Reagan emerged from the Beirut and Grenada conflicts firmly in Weinberger’s camp. U.S. ground troops were out of the Middle East, and the administration instead focused its power projection directly at the Soviet Union in the form of intermediate-range Pershing II missiles deployed in West Germany.¹⁷² The successful show of force in Grenada, the SDI-enabled defense spending surge, and deployment of missiles on the Soviets’ doorstep allowed Reagan to project “peace through strength” to American voters in the midst of retreat from Beirut. Withdrawal from an intractable conflict ensured that continued American losses in Lebanon would not encumber his presidency as the Vietnam War had done to his predecessors.

¹⁷⁰ McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 257–273. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 220–234, 323–345. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 101–174.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 135–174.

¹⁷² Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 373–377.

3.1 Strength through Troop Presence: Beirut – June 1982 to October 1983

Alexander Haig attributed his demise as Secretary of State to his failure to deliver a negotiated agreement to end the Falklands War. The Falklands brought Haig a step closer to the precipice, but it was Israel's June 6, 1982 invasion of Lebanon very soon after that opened irreparable rifts between Haig and Weinberger, and Haig and the president.¹⁷³ Weinberger, as in matters of defense spending and troop deployment writ large, held onto an unwavering, dogmatic approach throughout the conflict. He subordinated the Lebanon conflict to his Soviet-focused Cold War power projection aims. Prioritizing global U.S.-Soviet competition led Weinberger to two principles that undergirded his actions and statements. First, Weinberger sought to avoid alienating Arab nations for fear that they would re-align with the Soviet Union or reinstitute an oil embargo. McFarlane has since made the credible argument that this fear froze Weinberger in a belligerently anti-Israel posture.¹⁷⁴ Second, and more importantly, Weinberger blocked deployment of troops at every juncture because he did not believe that his national security colleagues had a defined mission that furthered U.S. interests.¹⁷⁵

Haig, like Schultz and McFarlane after him, believed that the United States could make the most of a horrific situation to build a lasting peace in the Middle East upon Israel's impending defeat of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).¹⁷⁶ Some press outlets understandably misunderstood the difference between Haig and Weinberger to hinge on support for or opposition to Israel.¹⁷⁷ Weinberger fed into this narrative by publicly comparing Israel's

¹⁷³ Haig, *Caveat*, 298, 303–346.

¹⁷⁴ McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 198–213, 168–173. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 62–84. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 135–174.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 150–174. Yoshitani, *Reagan on War*, 113–114, 125–142.

¹⁷⁶ Haig, *Caveat*, 303–352. McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 212–213. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 104–114.

¹⁷⁷ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 141.

role in the Lebanon war to that of U.K. antagonist Argentina in the Falklands War in a televised June 20 condemnation of Israel. This directly contradicted Haig's neutrality-focused news conference the previous day.¹⁷⁸

Interpreting the ideological clash of Reagan's national security titans as one over Israel policy overlooks the commonalities between the State-Defense struggles over the Falklands and Lebanon wars. In each case, the Secretary of State—first Haig and later Schultz—endeavored to conduct shuttle diplomacy between sides to broker a lasting peace agreement. They followed what Brands labeled the “heroic statesmen” path blazed by Henry Kissinger in the Nixon and Ford years.¹⁷⁹

Weinberger, on the other hand, adhered to his parallel strategies of unrestrained armament and highly restrained troop deployment. In both the Falklands and Lebanon, this orientation guided him to block U.S. troop involvement as much as possible, and to seek to arm whichever side he considered more of a U.S. ally at the moment. Because of his advocacy, the United States provided technology, equipment, and support to the British in the Falklands war against Haig's wishes. Schultz complained in exasperated tones that Weinberger proposed selling tanks to Saudi Arabia over breakfast in August 1982 in the midst of the Lebanon crisis. Schultz was “incredulous at the disruptive timing of the idea,” and believed this action would have pushed Israel out of negotiations and into further belligerence. Schultz humorously describes “listening and eating my eggs for fifteen minutes” while Weinberger delivered his tank proposal before he looked up and shut him down. “Cap, I find everything you said

¹⁷⁸ Haig, *Caveat*, 343.

¹⁷⁹ Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 59, 99–101. The term shuttle diplomacy describes negotiations conducted by a mediator between two parties who are unwilling or unable to directly engage in face-to-face discussions.

incomprehensible.”¹⁸⁰ Their relationship did not improve over their following years of shared federal service.

Weinberger’s playbook on Lebanon mirrored his Falklands tactics. Schultz was a more formidable internal adversary than Haig, however. This was mostly due to Schultz’s maintenance of a uniquely positive relationship with Reagan throughout his tenure. Haig, on the other hand, had been on thin ice since would-be assassin John Hinckley Jr. shot Reagan in March 1981. Haig infamously told the press, “As of now, I am in control here,” a statement far out of line with constitutional protocol regarding delegation of presidential authority.¹⁸¹ Haig groused in his memoir about “gorgeous” leaks from White House staff complaining that his Falklands diplomacy efforts constituted “grandstanding” and that he had “even stolen the limelight” from Reagan.¹⁸² In June 1982, NSA Bill Clark confided in his deputy McFarlane that Haig had run afoul of Nancy Reagan regarding some “matters of protocol” on a European trip during the outbreak of war in Lebanon, and that the relationship between Secretary of State and President was “the worst [he’d] ever seen.” McFarlane wrote that although he was “torn” because Haig had been his “sponsor” throughout his diplomatic career, he recommended to Clark that the president replace Haig with George Schultz, Nixon’s former Secretary of Treasury.¹⁸³

Regardless of whether Reagan agreed with his leaky staff about Haig’s Falklands performance or whether discourtesy toward the First Lady amped up the friction, Haig sealed his fate with an act of insubordination upon returning to Washington during the opening week of the Lebanon war. By his own admission, on Saturday, June 12, Haig issued orders—without the requisite presidential permission—to the U.S. Middle East peace envoy to demand that all

¹⁸⁰ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 75.

¹⁸¹ Haig, *Caveat*, 150–160.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁸³ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 200–201.

foreign forces withdraw from Lebanon. The orders included geographic specifics, and Haig transmitted the instructions even though NSA Bill Clark explicitly told him that Reagan wanted to wait until Monday to discuss strategy with his full national security team. Haig justified his actions with a claim that Clark was pulling a fast one on Reagan—presumably on behalf of his California ally Weinberger—and that Haig’s actions were meant to help the president regain control of his own policy. Haig’s own version of events included his phone call to the president in which Reagan withheld approval for issuing the orders, but Haig plowed forward anyway.

It was not a surprise to anyone except Haig himself when on June 25, within a few weeks of the end of the Falklands war and the beginning of the Lebanon war, Reagan accepted what was probably an insincere resignation offer by Haig. The same day, while a smarting Haig drafted a retroactive resignation letter protesting the administration’s foreign policy, Reagan publicly announced that Haig resigned, and that George Schultz agreed to take his place.¹⁸⁴

Reagan had followed Nixon’s advice and delegated power over foreign policy to his Secretaries of State and Defense during the first year and a half of his presidency. Having removed his Secretary of State less than three weeks into a metastasizing war in the Middle East involving a host of states that the United States viewed as important allies—Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt—Reagan at last waded into foreign policy decision-making. As Haig bitterly pointed out in his memoir, Reagan ultimately enacted the Lebanon policy Haig himself had previously tried to push through without the president’s approval.¹⁸⁵ The difference was that it was now apparent that Reagan, not the exiled Haig, was “in control here.”

Haig, working remotely in an advisory capacity until Schultz’s mid-July confirmation, proposed that the United States send troops as part of a multinational force (MNF) to support the

¹⁸⁴ Haig, *Caveat*, 307–316. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 200–205. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 3–4.

¹⁸⁵ Haig, *Caveat*, 310–312, 348–352.

Lebanese government against pressure from Israel, Syria, the PLO, and other foreign forces. Weinberger and the Joint Chiefs opposed the scheme, in part because the Secretary of Defense felt that the mission was not narrowly defined and attainable. On July 3th, Reagan approved the deployment of U.S. Marines to staging positions near Lebanon.¹⁸⁶ This was the deployment that Weinberger, probably nonplussed about having lost the troop presence battle to an already vanquished Haig, buried beneath his priority issue of the “severe budget situation” in Congress.¹⁸⁷

Deployment of combat troops to achieve a foreign policy goal may have been closer to Reagan’s gut national security instincts than Weinberger’s mode of restraint. Reagan did not shy away from calling for troop deployment in his pre-presidential mode of criticizing sitting presidents as weak. In October 1965, Reagan proclaimed, “We should declare war on Vietnam. We could pave the whole country and put parking strips on it and still be home by Christmas.”¹⁸⁸ According to Reagan’s Deputy Chief of Staff Mike Deaver, when Haig wielded nearly identical rhetoric in an early 1981 proposal to invade Cuba to counter subversion of allied governments in Central America, it “scared the shit out of Ronald Reagan.” Haig’s request to “give [him] the word” to “make that island a fucking parking lot” did not convince Reagan to move beyond covert operations in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁸⁹

It is unclear whether having taken the actual reins of executive power modified Reagan’s military intervention calculus, or if he found the rhetoric distasteful when trumpeted by Haig in particular. Haig’s tone and patent ambition to run foreign policy—and possibly one day the White House—may have induced Reagan to rethink his past views on deployment of combat

¹⁸⁶ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 44–48. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 143–144.

¹⁸⁷ Weinberger, “Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 9, 1982.”

¹⁸⁸ Ronnie Dugger, *On Reagan: The Man and His Presidency* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1983), 344.

¹⁸⁹ Cannon, *President Reagan*, 163.

troops. McFarlane, by no means one to shy away from recommending use of combat troops, recalled how he and State Department colleague Paul Wolfowitz tried to convince Haig to moderate his “passionate” views on invading Cuba. Haig dismissed their carefully constructed risk assessment as “bureaucratic pap” and a “cookie-pushing piece of junk.”¹⁹⁰ He had managed to alienate even his ideological and institutional allies.

Weinberger told the president when Haig made his Cuba proposal that he agreed a better executed Bay of Pigs-style invasion “might have a satisfactory result.” However, one of the “principal lessons” the defense secretary had learned from the Vietnam War was that American public opinion would not support such an action unless they were “convinced that our national interests required, indeed demanded, that we go to war.”¹⁹¹ It is not surprising that Reagan sided with Weinberger over Haig on Cuba in 1981, especially given that even Haig’s own staff could not bring themselves to support their boss’s Bay of Pigs redux. The Secretary of Defense’s argument stuck to the “peace through strength” script, and Reagan stayed on this path until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and removal of Haig.

George Schultz, unlike Haig, diplomatically marshalled his reinvigorated State Department staff and NSC staff—including McFarlane, Eagleburger, and Wolfowitz—to develop dispassionate proposals for integrating U.S. combat troops into a peace plan for Lebanon and the Middle East as a region. Reagan unleashed Schultz and McFarlane as his heroic statesmen, their diplomatic efforts underwritten by U.S. soldiers. In mid-August, 800 U.S. Marines joined 1200 Italian and French soldiers overseeing the orderly retreat of the PLO to ships en route to Tunisia.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ McFarlane, *Special Trust*, 178–181.

¹⁹¹ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 31.

¹⁹² McFarlane, *Special Trust*, 205–213. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 86–91.

Just as Weinberger invoked Vietnam when arguing against sending combat troops to Cuba, the Vietnam War loomed large in Weinberger, Schultz, and McFarlane's interpretations of the 1982 Lebanon war. Reagan's advisors were very aware of Reagan's political focus on breaking the "Vietnam syndrome," a promise he laid bare in his August 18, 1980 campaign address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Convention in Chicago. The VFW had broken an 80-year precedent to endorse Reagan for president, and he understood his audience. He defined the "Vietnam syndrome" as the belief that peace would come in Vietnam, and in other areas of conflict if America "would simply stop interfering and go home." The "lesson for all of us in Vietnam," the president noted, was that we must "have the means and the determination to prevail" in armed conflict. Reagan presented an "alternative path" to the "dangerous isolation" of Jimmy Carter: "peace through strength" built on a defense budget that would restore a "vital margin of safety."¹⁹³

Reagan's principal lieutenants all were in agreement on growing the defense budget but differed on what it meant to have the "means and the determination to prevail." McFarlane believed that the U.S. failure in the Vietnam War was that President Johnson did not "define the problem...for the American people, define the political and military strategy for solving that problem, and develop popular support for that solution." In the same vein as Nitze, he believed that it was every administration's responsibility to develop effective grand strategy and lead the American public in that direction, rather than letting political consideration and concerns about votes determine strategic direction. McFarlane was particularly fixated on the media portrayal of the 1968 Tet offensive, which he characterized as "an enormous defeat for the north" that the

¹⁹³ Ronald W. Reagan, "Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago" (August 18, 1980), The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-veterans-foreign-wars-convention-chicago>.

media misinterpreted for the American public, with disastrous results for the U.S. war effort. During his time at the NSC, McFarlane made media management—through a balance of media engagement and deliberate secrecy—a central focus of his strategic efforts, evidenced in his campaign to counter the nuclear freeze movement, the SDI rollout, and later the invasion of Grenada.¹⁹⁴

Schultz was also keen on eradicating the Vietnam syndrome. Summing up his speech at a 1984 Trilateral Commission meeting, he lamented in his memoir that “the lesson of Vietnam was continually being cited to reject any use of military force unless in exceptional circumstances and with near total public support in advance.” That same year in October, Schultz again diminished the importance of public opinion in national security policymaking during a speech at Park Avenue Synagogue in Manhattan. “The public must understand *before the fact* that occasions will come when their government must act before each and every fact is known—and the decisions cannot be tied to the opinion polls.” On April 29, 1985, the tenth anniversary of South Vietnam’s final defeat at Saigon, Schultz gave a public speech in the State Department lobby, where he said that for Vietnam “the true horror had come with the Communist takeover, as the 24 million people of South Vietnam became victims of a totalitarian state.” He went on to categorize the subsequent Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia as a direct result of that takeover. Schultz emphasized the “mistakes in how the war was fought” but affirmed that “the *morality* of our effort [in Vietnam] must now be clear.” Schultz put it plainly that these were the lessons that guided his own foreign policy. “This is not merely a historical exercise. Our understanding of the past affects our conduct in the present, and thus, in part, determines our future.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 144, 215–235, 26–267. Nitze, Smith, and Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 245–250, 262–263.

¹⁹⁵ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 552–553, 646–649.

Schultz delivered these statements about Vietnam and military force shortly after Reagan withdrew U.S. Marines from Beirut in early 1984, but this strategic thinking was reflected in his actions throughout U.S. military involvement in Lebanon. Regardless of U.S. public opinion, Schultz believed “Diplomacy could work these problems most effectively when force—or the threat of force—was a credible part of the equation.”¹⁹⁶ Unlike McFarlane, he did not express a desire to shape media messaging in a hands-on manner. Rather, the Secretary of State wanted to include military force as part of his diplomatic toolkit, much like Kissinger did in his negotiations with North Vietnam. The presence of U.S. troops in a conflict zone was a lever that Schultz sought to use in achieving diplomatic goals.¹⁹⁷ While he did not operate in secrecy like Kissinger and McFarlane, neither did he have the autonomy or power that Kissinger wielded in the Nixon administration.

Schultz continually contended with Weinberger, who held fast to a belief that the means to prevail hinged on public opinion, which was directly correlated with having a defined and attainable military objective that clearly supported U.S. interests.¹⁹⁸ Weinberger was a fervent anti-Communist and much more supportive than Schultz of CIA Director Bill Casey’s covert operations in Latin America, which Schultz felt constantly undermined his diplomatic efforts in that region.¹⁹⁹ But while Weinberger supported unrestrained covert—and often violent—disruption of regimes friendly to the Soviet Union, he fervently opposed what he called an “intermixture of diplomacy and the military.” Putting troops in “impossible” situations not only

¹⁹⁶ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 650.

¹⁹⁷ Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam* (New York: Public Affairs, 2018), 182–183.

¹⁹⁸ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 31–32, 143–160.

¹⁹⁹ Joseph Persico, *Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey, From the OSS to the CIA* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), 394–571. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 423, 787–790, 866–867. Schultz, writing several years after Casey’s death, had been so mystified by Casey’s policy maneuvers and behavior he wondered if they were caused by his brain tumor.

endangered U.S. troops, but soured public opinion on administrative national security objectives. Weinberger felt that he was continually shutting down “wild adventures” proposed by McFarlane and the NSC staff, including a scheme to invade Libya in a joint operation with Egypt.²⁰⁰ The Libya-Egypt episode does not appear in currently declassified documents and McFarlane does not mention it in his memoir written three years after Weinberger’s, but neither does he refute the claim in the manner that he takes issue with many of Weinberger’s other statements.²⁰¹

In July 1982, Reagan gave the order to install a U.S. troop presence in Lebanon. He did so over the objections of Weinberger and the Joint Chiefs that U.S. involvement did not pass the U.S. interests test.²⁰² 800 U.S. Marines arrived at port in Beirut on August 25th and oversaw the peaceful evacuation of PLO leader Yasser Arafat and 8500 PLO personnel.²⁰³ On September 1, Reagan unveiled a detailed Middle East peace plan developed by Schultz, McFarlane, Eagleburger, Wolfowitz, and their cohort. The president called for a “fresh start” in the Middle East, endorsing 1) a five-year period of full Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza; 2) “immediate adoption of a settlement freeze by Israel”; 3) eventual negotiated governance of West Bank and Gaza divided between Israel and Jordan, not an independent Palestinian state; and 4) integrity of Jerusalem as a unitary city and preservation of Israel’s security.²⁰⁴ Schultz and McFarlane believed this peace plan was predicated on U.S. military presence in the region, and for the time being, the president was on board.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 30–32, 159–174.

²⁰¹ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*.

²⁰² Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 30–32, 140–145.

²⁰³ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 209–210. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 81–82.

²⁰⁴ Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *The Reagan Phenomenon—And Other Speeches on Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1983), 150–151. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 86–91, 96–98.

²⁰⁵ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 206–213, 267–273. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 96–98.

Polls in the early 1980s pointed to American voters' high level of interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In October, 86 percent of American respondents agreed with the statement that Israel was "a small, courageous, democratic nation which is trying to preserve its independence." While the phrasing of the Israel poll question was leading, the overwhelmingly positive response indicates public focus on the region. Voters also exhibited sensitivity to oil price spikes resulting from geopolitical developments like the 1973 OPEC oil embargo, the 1979 Iranian revolution, and the 1980 start to the Iran-Iraq War. A late 1981 poll showed that American participants listed Saudi Arabia and Israel as the two most important nations in terms of "American vital interest," polling at 84 and 81 percent respectively.²⁰⁶

U.S. media fed into this existing interest in the region by displaying images of human carnage in Beirut. Schultz wrote that "the symbol of this war has become the baby with its arms blown off."²⁰⁷ Reagan used that same language in his August 12th diary entry, where he recorded that he "used the word 'Holocaust' deliberately" to put pressure on Israeli Prime Minister to keep "the symbol of his country [from] becoming 'a picture of a seven month old baby with its arms blown off.'" This war provoked American voters' fears and consciences more than most global conflicts, and Reagan agreed with Schultz that it was in America's interest to seize this "possible golden opportunity to make a fresh start toward achieving a long-term settlement of the region's problems."²⁰⁸ A July 19th Harris poll found that 40 percent of respondents supported deploying U.S. troops to Lebanon, a remarkably high number given post-Vietnam aversion to overseas military excursions.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Nimrod Novik, *The United States and Israel: Domestic Determinants of a Changing U.S. Commitment* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1986), 21, 155. Yoshitani, *Reagan on War*, 74–75.

²⁰⁷ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 60–61.

²⁰⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, 427–428. Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 97–98.

²⁰⁹ Eytan Gilboa, "Trends in American Attitudes toward Israel," in Gabriel Sheffer, ed., *Dynamics of Dependence: U.S.–Israeli Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987), 67. Yoshitani, *Reagan on War*, 74–76.

Weinberger's floundering defense budget efforts may also have nudged the president to pursue a more overt display of power projection. His weekly reports to the president began to implore Reagan to intervene directly with key congresspeople on MX basing beginning in March 1982, reaching a fever pitch in July when he afforded more prominence to the "severe budget situation" than his update on U.S. Marine deployment to Beirut.²¹⁰ Weinberger's prioritization of legislative lobbying could have been a response to Reagan's direct orders or due to the Secretary's own defense spending fixation. Either way, the reports portended hurdles in the administration's plans for continued expanding its nuclear arsenal. With the administration's "peace through strength" image hampered by the recession-induced budget turbulence and a majority of voters concerned about instability in the Middle East, Reagan opted for U.S. troop presence in Lebanon.

While Schultz and McFarlane endeavored to use the U.S. Marine presence to enforce diplomatic decisions and negotiations, Weinberger directed troop movements in a manner that limited their mission to the single objective of evacuating the PLO. Although Reagan overruled Weinberger's initial objections and sent troops to Beirut, the president gave him full control over the "disposition of troops," a delegation of authority that flummoxed Schultz. The Secretary of State wanted a "more active role" for the Marines than strictly staying in port to escort the PLO onto ships.²¹¹ Weinberger denied this request, insisting that the Marines stick to their evacuation mission and not enter the city. With the PLO evacuation successfully completed, the Secretary of Defense began withdrawal of the Marines from Beirut on September 10th with completion of the

²¹⁰ Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, March 26, 1982." Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, June 25, 1982." Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 7, 1982." Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 16, 1982."

²¹¹ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 75–78.

withdrawal scheduled for September 16th.²¹² Schultz and McFarlane adamantly opposed the withdrawal. Schultz believed that withdrawal sent “a message of weakness” throughout the region, and McFarlane called the order “treacherous” in his memoir.²¹³

McFarlane recorded that the Marines had all evacuated by September 14th and blames Weinberger’s evacuation orders and termination of U.S. troop presence for the violent events that ensued. On the 14th, Maronite Christian Prime Minister of Lebanon Bashir Gemayal was assassinated in a bomb blast. Two days later, Maronite Phalange militia entered the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila and murdered over 600 unarmed Palestinians including children and elderly refugees. With the PLO and MNF gone, the only armed protective presence were Israeli forces, who stood by as the slaughter ensued. Reagan was incensed and perplexed by the atrocity, asking McFarlane, “What could move people to do something like this?”²¹⁴ He betrayed further surprise and perhaps naivety in his presidential autobiography, admitting that he woke up the morning he learned of the massacres expecting “a quiet day” with his Saturday radio broadcast the only item on schedule.²¹⁵ If the president did not expect any events of note to follow the assassination of the Lebanese head of state, the conflict certainly proved to be more complex than he had first imagined.

By all accounts, the Sabra and Shatila massacres pushed Reagan firmly in Schultz and McFarlane’s corner on U.S. troop presence in Beirut.²¹⁶ Reagan wrote in his September 19th diary entry, “I finally told our group we should go for broke. Let’s tell the people we are in at the request of the Lebanese—sending the multinational force [MNF] back in...No more half way

²¹² Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 101–104.

²¹³ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 209–210. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 75–78.

²¹⁴ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 209–211.

²¹⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, 436–437.

²¹⁶ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 209–213. McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 104–114. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 151–155.

gestures, clear the whole situation while the MNF is on hand to assure order.”²¹⁷ Weinberger, writing with the benefit of hindsight, recorded his and the Joint Chiefs’ opposition to the September 29th redeployment of U.S. Marines. He argued that there was no defined mission and that the Marines would “almost certainly become embroiled in major combat while ‘peacekeeping’ between Syrians and Israelis.”²¹⁸

Right or wrong, Weinberger’s arguments failed to move the president, who had just witnessed a massacre of refugees on the heels of U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon. Reagan, who had publicly compared Nixon’s withdrawal from Saigon to appeasement of Hitler at Munich, probably had no intention of making himself vulnerable to the same criticism.²¹⁹ Weinberger’s reluctance to deploy American troops probably did not sound like “peace through strength” to Reagan. On top of that, Weinberger was failing the president in the Congressional battle over domestic missile basing. Reagan turned from his Secretary of Defense to his heroic statesmen Schultz and McFarlane to project power through troop deployment.

3.2 “A Shot Heard Round the World”: Grenada – May 1982 to November 1983

McFarlane and his NSC staff subordinates believed that U.S. troops should be utilized to support U.S. political objectives on a global scale, not just in Beirut or the Middle East. He and Wolfowitz had applied the brakes to Haig’s Cuba invasion scheme, but McFarlane’s NSC team began lobbying the president to intervene in the neighboring island of Grenada as early as May 19, 1982, when Alfonso Sapia-Bosch drafted an NSC document supporting U.S. removal of

²¹⁷ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 101.

²¹⁸ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 151–155.

²¹⁹ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 431–432.

Maurice Bishop, the head of Grenada's pro-Cuba government.²²⁰ The NSC staff archives do not reveal what factors fed into the timing of Sapia-Bosch's advocacy for Bishop's removal, but it is likely that the impetus came from internal staff dynamics than any changes in the Grenada's political landscape.²²¹ Bishop was not a new political player in the Caribbean, and he had openly established a relationship with Cuba in 1979 when he came to power.²²² Sapia-Bosch's Grenada intervention paper trail begins during the Falklands War, when Weinberger was providing material support for a British military conflict in the Americas. It is possible that McFarlane and his staff believed Reagan might be more open to overt military intervention based on the Falklands experience. Within weeks, however, the Israeli invasion of Beirut focused the attention of the president and his advisors on the Middle East.

NSC staff advocacy for intervention in Grenada continued apace. In February 1983, Bishop's government claimed that the United States was planning to invade Grenada, and NSC staff tested the idea of disrupting Bishop's government with the Senate Intelligence Committee. Key Senators demurred on supporting of such forward-leaning action, but staff persisted in lobbying the president. During his March 23rd SDI speech, Reagan showed a reconnaissance photo of an airfield in Grenada allegedly built by Cubans to highlight the Communist threat next door.²²³ NSA Bill Clark wrote a memo to Reagan in May 1983 requesting approval for a "more active program to reduce the threat of Maurice Bishop." Until more documents related to Grenada are declassified, it remains unclear how the president responded to this request. No

²²⁰ Alfonso Sapia-Bosch, 19 May 1982, Grenada 1982, Box 2, Alfonso Sapia-Bosch RAC Box 5, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California. (Hereafter cited as RRPL)

²²¹ Sapia-Bosch, Box 2, Alfonso Sapia-Bosch RAC Box 5, RRPL.

²²² Ehrman and Flamm, *Debating the Reagan Presidency*, 121.

²²³ Richard Reeves. *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006), 179–180. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 324.

White House files on Grenada after September 1983 are yet available, adding to the murkiness of decision-making on the subject.²²⁴

In the decades following his presidency, Reagan and his advisors have put forward a consistent narrative of the October 25, 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada. According to this narrative, echoed by Bud McFarlane as recently as March 2019, Reagan authorized an invasion of Grenada in direct response to the distress call of Grenada's Caribbean neighbors. Reagan and his senior advisors have maintained that the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) requested U.S. military intervention on October 23rd, in response to the overthrow of Maurice Bishop on October 13th and his eventual murder on October 19th. They explained that to preserve operational security, the president kept the mission secret from Congress—and even close ally Margaret Thatcher—until the last possible moment.²²⁵ White House documents, and even the recollections of Reagan's lieutenants, betray a more complex chronology. In reality, the decision to invade Grenada was both well-planned in advance and more contested among Reagan's advisors than any single advisor has explicitly admitted.

On October 4th, Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 105, calling for regional security support for Grenada's neighbors in limiting the influence of Bishop's government. The directive called for the United States to “maintain sufficient military presence in the Eastern Caribbean to deter aggression...and to respond to any such aggression.” There is at least one redacted point, likely referring to covert operations. The document ends with a remarkably short follow-up window. “The coordinated, diplomatic, military, intelligence,

²²⁴ Box 2, Alfonso Sapia-Bosch RAC Box 5, RRPL. William Clark, “Memo to Ronald Reagan,” Grenada May 1983, Box 2, Alfonso Sapia-Bosch RAC Box 5, RRPL.

²²⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, 446–58. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 257–273. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 323–345. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 101–133.

resource, and contingency plans called for in the items above should be forwarded for review by the president by October 15, 1983.²²⁶

Over the following two weeks, Grenada exploded into turmoil, culminating with the U.S. invasion on October 25th. Government documents from this period remain classified, but memoirs provide hints of an unfolding conflict that deviates from the official narrative. On October 13th, a military coup overthrew Bishop's government and put him under house arrest. Four days later, Bud McFarlane replaced Bill Clark as Reagan's National Security Advisor.²²⁷ Reagan had forced Clark's resignation in the midst of the brewing Grenada crisis, a move Lou Cannon attributed to his worsening relationships with Reagan's White House staff, Schultz, and Nancy Reagan.²²⁸

On October 19th, the coup plotters executed Bishop and his key supporters by firing squad.²²⁹ Weinberger and Schultz both wrote that McFarlane chaired a Crisis Pre-Planning Group meeting on October 20th and discussed the use of force. Each presented this as the start of contingency planning for potential military intervention to protect regional stability and American medical students resident on the island. Both men also point to the unanimous October 21th decision of the OECS, delivered to the State Department by Prime Minister of Dominica Eugenia Charles, as the final push that led Reagan to greenlight the U.S. invasion after he received the early morning phone call at the golf course in Augusta in the wee hours of October 22th.²³⁰

²²⁶ "NSDD-105: Eastern Caribbean Regional Security Policy," 4 October 1983, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency, accessed July 27, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP97M00248R000500100002-3.pdf>.

²²⁷ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 257–260.

²²⁸ Cannon, *President Reagan*, 372–373. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 257–260.

²²⁹ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 325–326.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 295–300. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 110–112.

Bud McFarlane echoed this same narrative of Eugenia Charles' cry for help and his early morning call to Reagan in a March 2019 interview.²³¹ Like Schultz and Reagan, he told the story of how McFarlane informed the president that Charles asked the United States to intervene in Grenada to protect OECS countries, and how the president made the decision right then to invade on the 24th or 25th.²³² On the surface, this is true. But this rendition of the decision story omits important prelude and postlude. The story is incomplete without mention of the year and a half of NSC staff lobbying for intervention in Grenada and the NSDD authorization of still-classified action related to Grenada earlier that month.²³³ Even more immediately relevant to Reagan's decision is McFarlane's admission in his memoir that sometime between the October 13th coup and McFarlane's assumption of NSA duties on October 17th, he "instructed that [the NSC staff] determine whether the other Caribbean states, including Dominica...might be inclined to coordinate a call for assistance from the United States that would legitimize our involvement in the events occurring in their region."²³⁴ McFarlane orchestrated this call for help before Bishop's execution had taken place.

There is nothing inherently untoward about building diplomatic consensus to achieve a political or military aim, but it does show that the decision to invade Grenada was one developed internally within the United States side, not spontaneously solicited by Grenada's neighbors. McFarlane mentions this as a brief aside in his memoir, separated from his core narrative on Grenada and the Augusta golf weekend. He begins his description of the Grenada crisis with the somewhat misleading statement, "Our intelligence on Grenada was very poor."²³⁵ The NSC staff

²³¹ McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019.

²³² Ibid. Reagan, *An American Life*, 449–451. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 328–330.

²³³ "NSDD-105," Central Intelligence Agency.

²³⁴ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 258.

²³⁵ Ibid., 257–269.

had tracked Bishop's government since McFarlane's arrival, and Reagan referenced Grenada's alleged Cuba connections as a talking point in his SDI speech.²³⁶ McFarlane and Reagan's other foreign policy advisors all presented the Grenada invasion as a quick decision in response to an OECS distress call, when in fact the NSC staff had advocated for this type of action for quite a while.

Paradoxically, while Reagan and his advisors downplayed the volume of preparatory NSC discussion and research invested in the Grenada action, they also overemphasize the president's decisiveness. While memoir accounts point to the October 22th Augusta phone call as Reagan's key decision point, Schutz lets on that "at about six o'clock that Monday evening, October 24th, President Reagan gave the final order to proceed."²³⁷ This is a chronological detail conspicuously omitted in Reagan, Weinberger, and McFarlane's accounts.²³⁸ This final Grenada decision came a day and a half after McFarlane woke Reagan up with news of the Beirut Marine barracks bombing.

Between the initial October 22th decision and final October 24th decision came two National Security Planning Group (NSPG) meetings on the 23rd involving Reagan, Schultz, Weinberger, Casey, McFarlane, and NSC staff members including Oliver North. The subjects of both meetings are recorded as "Lebanon/Grenada," but other than subject and participant list, the meeting minutes remain classified.²³⁹ Reagan and most of his advisors separate the president's decisions about how to respond to the Grenada and Lebanon crises, with Weinberger going to the

²³⁶ Box 2, Alfonso Sapia-Bosch RAC Box 5, RRPL.

²³⁷ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 334.

²³⁸ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 260–270. Reagan, *An American Life*, 446–58. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 101–133.

²³⁹ "Lebanon/Grenada, October 23, 1983, 9 a.m.," Box 74, ExecSec NSPG (91306), RRPL. "Lebanon/Grenada, October 23, 1983, 4 p.m.," Box 75, ExecSec NSPG (91306), RRPL.

extreme of not acknowledging any chronological connection between the crises.²⁴⁰ Schultz, a notable exception, serves up the truth of the matter plainly. “I went right into the Situation Room in the White House, where we dealt with both crises—in Beirut and in Grenada—at once.”²⁴¹

In a 2019 oral history interview, McFarlane began to present the crises as separate decisions but soon jumped back and forth somewhat erratically between Grenada and Beirut as if they were treated as a dual decision. He presented Grenada as an overwhelmingly successful projection of American power that sent the Soviet and Cuban allies a clear message. In McFarlane’s eyes, Grenada was a model for what Reagan should have done in Lebanon following the barracks bombing. McFarlane became visibly agitated when he identified Weinberger as the dissenting advisor who implored Reagan to neither use American troops in Grenada nor Lebanon. McFarlane said that on October 23rd, Weinberger lost both arguments, and Reagan agreed that day to authorize muscular ground troop responses in both Grenada and Lebanon.²⁴²

Schultz’s memoir supports McFarlane’s claim that Weinberger opposed military responses in both Grenada and Lebanon. Schultz detailed Weinberger’s “intense” debate on October 23rd with the rest of Reagan’s team over Grenada, and his persistent efforts on October 24th to divert the president from an invasion to mere transmittal of an ultimatum to the coup plotters. According to Schultz, Weinberger claimed that the Grenada invasion needed “a much larger force before an operation could begin.”²⁴³ Schultz and McFarlane have not divulged what

²⁴⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, 446–58. McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 257–273. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 101–174.

²⁴¹ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 330.

²⁴² McFarlane, interview by the author, March 25, 2019.

²⁴³ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 330–335.

ultimately pushed Reagan to give the go-ahead on October 24th to invade Grenada, but both made clear that his final decision happened over Weinberger's adamant protestations.

The administration viewed the Grenada invasion as an unequivocal success. Nineteen American soldiers, 45 Grenadians, and 25 Cubans were killed, but images like those of evacuated American medical students kissing the tarmac upon their arrival in South Carolina overwhelmed any visions of death on the airwaves. While the surprise invasion triggered a strongly negative reaction from Reagan's political opponents, including the initiation of impeachment proceedings by seven House Democrats, it was immensely popular among conservatives and moderates.²⁴⁴ Reagan and his supporters viewed the victory as "peace through strength" par excellence. In the words of conservative writer Dinesh D'Souza, "For the first time since the Vietnam War, the United States had committed ground troops abroad, sustained casualties, emerged victorious and won the support of the American people."²⁴⁵

It is telling that Weinberger misleadingly portrayed himself as an unwavering supporter of the invasion in his memoir.²⁴⁶ Like D'Souza and other ideologues, Weinberger likely viewed the Grenada episode as the solution to the Vietnam syndrome. He was against the invasion when the outcome was uncertain. But with a combat win under his belt, another "peace through strength" box was checked. Reagan had used ground troops in an apparent resounding victory. That proved to be sufficient for his entire presidency. Weinberger did not lose any future arguments with his rivals over combat deployment.

²⁴⁴ Cannon, *Ronald Reagan*, 392–394. Ehrman and Flamm, *Debating the Reagan Presidency*, 121–123. Jules Tygiel, *Ronald Reagan and the Triumph of American Conservatism* (New York: Pearson, 2006), 148. Reagan's pollster Richard Wirthlin compiled data showing that the majority of the American public, with the exception of Reagan's most staunch opponents, approved of the Grenada invasion.

²⁴⁵ Dinesh D'Souza, "How the East Was Won," *American History* (October 2003): 37.

²⁴⁶ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 101–133.

Schultz called the Grenada invasion “a shot heard round the world by usurpers and despots of every ideology,” claiming that “Western democracies were again ready to use the military strength they had harbored and built up over the years in defense of their principles and interests.”²⁴⁷ Ironically, the opposite happened with U.S. Marines in Lebanon following the Grenada episode. Weinberger maneuvered steadily and successfully to convince Reagan to withdraw from Beirut by February 1984. Grenada may not have had the global impact Schultz claimed, but it did reverberate within the halls and psyches of Reagan and his advisors.

3.3 Missiles for Men: Withdrawal from Lebanon – November 1983 to February 1984

McFarlane and Schultz walked out of the October 23rd NSPG meetings believing that Reagan had fully resolved to invade Grenada and reinforce U.S. Marine presence in Lebanon. McFarlane recounted how Bill Casey gathered an intelligence package over the next few weeks that identified an Iranian Revolutionary Guard-supported Shia militant cell in Bekkaa valley as responsible for the Marine barracks bombing.²⁴⁸ McFarlane convened an NSPG meeting on November 14th and secured Reagan’s approval for a joint retaliatory strike with the French scheduled for November 16th.²⁴⁹

Unexpectedly, the French conducted a November 16th strike on Baalbek, Bekkaa Valley, without any help from the U.S. military. McFarlane was livid in his memoir, growling that Weinberger told him on the 16th that he denied Reagan’s request to strike. According to McFarlane, “Weinberger launched into a long series of obfuscations about misunderstandings with the French and all the things that could have gone wrong with an attack.” McFarlane

²⁴⁷ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 340–341.

²⁴⁸ McFarlane, interview with the author, March 25, 2019.

²⁴⁹ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 270–271.

categorized this as “directly violat[ing] a presidential order” and claimed that Reagan exuded bewilderment when he told the president about Weinberger’s apparent insubordination. “I don’t understand,” he reports Reagan as saying. “Why didn’t they do it.... We should have blown the daylights out of them. I just don’t understand.”²⁵⁰

Declassified documents from the period support the basic chronology of McFarlane’s recollections. The November 14th NSPG meeting indeed dealt with intelligence reports that the “Husaynis,” the pro-Iranian group the CIA had blamed for the barracks bombing, were holed up in Baalbek, though the minutes do not indicate a decision to conduct a strike against them.²⁵¹ But it is natural that such a sensitive decision is not recorded in the declassified minutes, given its sensitive nature. McFarlane’s deputy, John Poindexter, filed away a note from Reagan to top NSC staff vaguely referencing a “snafu in communications” related to Baalbek, Lebanon.²⁵²

The most likely origin of this “snafu” was the president himself. In a March 2019 interview, McFarlane revealed that—years after he wrote his memoir—an unnamed source told him that Weinberger secretly called Reagan using the White House East Wing military switchboard the night of November 15th and convinced him to cancel the November 16th strikes. McFarlane admitted he had monitored the West Wing phone lines to make sure Weinberger did not call the president, and that it was plausible that Weinberger outwitted him and got to Reagan. This narrative fits with Weinberger’s version of the story, and it was likely that the SecDef took direct responsibility for the cancellation order to protect Reagan’s relationships with Schultz and McFarlane. McFarlane stated that Reagan lied directly to his face about not knowing why Weinberger cancelled the strike, a breach of trust that frustrated McFarlane.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 270–271.

²⁵¹ “November 14, 1983,” Box 77, ExecSec NSPG (91306), RRPL.

²⁵² “Memo from RR,” Baalbek, Lebanon, John Poindexter RAC Box 1, 2 (3), RRPL.

²⁵³ McFarlane, interview with the author, March 25, 2019.

Why would the Commander-in-Chief lie to one of his own advisors about a decision he had the right to make? Further declassification of documents will probably not answer this question, since we will never hear the private conversations between Reagan and Weinberger or the internal thoughts of the president. One plausible explanation is that Reagan sought out McFarlane, Schultz, and Weinberger each for valuable counsel, and he did not want to alienate any of them by clearly taking sides with the opposing party on a particular issue. McFarlane and Schultz threatened resignation on several occasions over disputes with other advisors. McFarlane and Weinberger ultimately resigned from their posts during Reagan's second term. While they both cited personal reasons, there were almost certainly policy reasons that factored into their decisions.²⁵⁴ Reagan's advisors, and these three men in particular, were sensitive to losing policy arguments. Reagan chose to tread carefully. In Weinberger, he had a lieutenant willing to take sole responsibility for decisions to restrain military action, even to the point of concealing the president's agreement with his decisions. While McFarlane became frustrated with Reagan decades after his presidency, this delegation of responsibility to the SecDef ensured that McFarlane and Schultz directed their ire toward Weinberger, rather than turn their dissatisfaction toward the president.

Weinberger persisted in undermining Schultz and McFarlane's efforts to apply political pressure through retaliatory strikes. This enraged both men, as well as Donald Rumsfeld, Gerald Ford's former Secretary of Defense who had taken over for McFarlane as Special Envoy to the Middle East. As chief negotiator in Lebanon, Rumsfeld attempted to take the Syrian government to task for having shot down two U.S. reconnaissance planes on December 3rd, resulting in the death of one American pilot and the imprisonment of another. That same day, artillery fire

²⁵⁴ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 286–287. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*.

originating in Syrian-held territory killed eight Marines. By January 1984, Rumsfeld was trying to extract concessions from the Syrians in exchange for a pause in U.S. reconnaissance flights. After presenting the Syrians with a negotiation proposal, he learned that Weinberger had suspended reconnaissance flights on December 18, 1983 without informing State, NSC staff, or Rumsfeld. Schultz recounted how this lack of coordination led him to report to the president on January 11th, “Don [Rumsfeld] believes...Syrian views on Lebanon appear to have hardened in response to domestic criticism of the MNF here and in Europe.”²⁵⁵ McFarlane characterized this type of action as deliberate lack of coordination on Weinberger’s part, “so determined was Secretary Weinberger’s resistance to any use of force at all.”²⁵⁶

In a March 2019 interview, McFarlane faulted Reagan for his inability to develop and then zero in on strategic foreign policy priorities. He recalled how upon Reagan’s reelection in 1984, he submitted a document to the president highlighting twelve key foreign policy objectives and asked Reagan to select two or three as his primary focus. To McFarlane’s dismay, Reagan returned the document to him with the comment, “Bud, let’s do them all!”²⁵⁷

Reagan did have foreign policy priorities, however. They just did not align with McFarlane’s. McFarlane believed that American withdrawal from Lebanon set the stage for the next three decades of unrest in the region.²⁵⁸ Securing lasting peace and stability in Beirut was not an end in itself for Reagan. McFarlane’s analysis was more incisive when he mused about the factors pushing Reagan toward withdrawal in February 1984. He admitted that “any foreign policy that put lives at risk was not going to make it through the political filter of an election

²⁵⁵ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 228–229.

²⁵⁶ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 272.

²⁵⁷ McFarlane, interview with the author, March 25, 2019.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

year.”²⁵⁹ Speaking of the Beirut withdrawal to Lou Cannon, McFarlane admitted that a presidential election year “does concentrate your mind.”²⁶⁰

Ronald Reagan cultivated foreign policy concentration and focus throughout his first term. It just was not policy-based. Reagan was intent on crafting a narrative of “peace through strength,” and he projected that image to potential voters. His televised speech of October 27, 1983, shortly after the Beirut bombing and Grenada invasion, illustrates how it was possible to apply a military success in one part of the world to another theater where the American military had just suffered a bloody massacre:

The events in Lebanon and Grenada, though oceans apart, are closely related. Not only has Moscow assisted and encouraged the violence in both countries, but it provides direct support through a network of surrogates and terrorists. It is no coincidence that when the thugs tried to wrest control over Grenada, there were thirty Soviet advisors and hundreds of Cuban military and paramilitary forces on the island....

You know, there was a time when our national security was based on a standing army here within our own borders and shore batteries of artillery along our coasts and, of course, a navy to keep the sealanes open for the shipping of things necessary to our well-being. The world has changed. Today, our national security can be threatened in faraway places. It’s up to all of us to be aware of the strategic importance of such places and to be able to identify them.²⁶¹

The speech outlined no specific policies or commitments. Reagan probably did not know throughout 1983 whether he would support Weinberger’s or Schultz and McFarlane’s approach to troop deployments, and he betrayed no particular leaning in the speech. But he established that success in Grenada also counted for Lebanon, and that all of these engagements were part of a global struggle against the Soviet Union. Reagan managed to downplay the link between U.S. military credibility and the Lebanon conflict, in contrast to how Johnson, McNamara, and other

²⁵⁹ McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 273.

²⁶⁰ Cannon, *Ronald Reagan*, 397.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 393.

previous leaders had become convinced that credibility hinged on U.S. victory in Vietnam.²⁶²

Regan prepared his audience to change their definitions of what power projection might mean and left the door open for either sending additional troops to Lebanon or abandoning the project entirely if it was determined not to be of “strategic importance.” Within four months, Reagan chose the latter.

Reagan’s emphasis of Cuban and Soviet influence in Grenada was probably a significant exaggeration of the reality on the ground, based on recently declassified NSC documents.

McFarlane presented an October 30th “interagency intelligence assessment” on Grenada to Reagan that stated only forty Cuban advisors (not hundreds) were present, and that “statements by U.S. personnel” (including the president) that “quantities and types of weapons in Grenada are beyond what would have been considered necessary for Grenada’s defense [alone]” was not supported by evidence in Grenada. Instead, according to this intelligence assessment, “it [was] reasonable to believe that the captured arms stocks inventoried to date were intended to ensure internal security and to defend Grenada against attack.”²⁶³ In a cover letter to the report, McFarlane implored Reagan not to let this assessment dissuade him from conviction of Soviet involvement. “As you will see, the estimate is very conservative....It seems to me that the intelligence community—having been too expansive last week—is now swinging to the other extreme....That is too bad....it seems to me that the evidence is there to sustain the judgment that the Cuban/Soviet program went well beyond the training of Grenadans for local defense. I would not bother reading any except the highlighted portions.”²⁶⁴

²⁶² H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 326–334.

²⁶³ “Interagency Intelligence Assessment: Preliminary Assessment of Cuban and Soviet Involvement in Grenada,” 30 October 1983, 10/28/83–11/7/83 Chron Files, Robert “Bud” McFarlane RAC Box 6,7 (10), RRPL.

²⁶⁴ Robert “Bud” McFarlane Letter to Ronald Reagan, 31 October 1983, 10/28/83–11/7/83 Chron Files, Robert “Bud” McFarlane RAC Box 6,7 (10), RRPL.

Whether Reagan disregarded the actual bottom line of the intelligence assessment because of his personal ideological leanings or McFarlane's advice to "not bother" with the details of the report, he continuously held Grenada up as a victory against the Soviets. McFarlane, for his part, expressed his own opinion to NSC subordinates Oliver North and Constantine Menges that evidence of Cuban and Soviet influence would probably be less damning than administration officials had claimed. He recommended to his team that the president not "bring all the material captured in Grenada to Washington and display it with press coverage," since "simply laying it out might not be as impressive as a smaller representative display together with oral explanations of the scale of operations which could be sustained by terrorists."²⁶⁵ McFarlane took up a tactic that Schultz would soon adopt in marshalling support for U.S. military action: pivoting from the threat of Soviet control and invasion to terrorist plots by America's enemies.

The day after Reagan's October 27th Lebanon/Grenada speech, Schultz met with Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin. The two statesmen discussed the United States' planned November 23rd deployment of intermediate-range Pershing II nuclear missiles in West Germany. Schultz insisted, "We do not have a policy of confrontation. We can have discussions about important problems, but they cannot simply be about arms control."²⁶⁶ Reagan had just spun Grenada as a major victory over the Soviets, and the president and his advisors were united in moving forward with the Pershing II's to project "peace through strength" in Western Europe, an area of widely accepted "strategic importance." Schultz described a "flurry of negotiation" with the Soviets in the month leading up to the planned Pershing II deployment.

²⁶⁵ Robert "Bud" McFarlane Note to NSJMP [National Security John M. Poindexter]: "The President's Interest in Displaying Captured Cuban Material." 30 October 1983, 10/28/83–11/7/83 Chron Files, Robert "Bud" McFarlane RAC Box 6,7 (10), RRPL.

²⁶⁶ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 372–373.

Proposal rejections on both sides yielded no results, and the Reagan administration moved forward with missile deployment in West Germany on November 23rd. Soviet negotiators quit arms control talks in Geneva to protest the move.²⁶⁷

Leaving aside the massive questions of how the Pershing II deployment influenced the American public and Soviet government, Reagan was clear in his memoir about how the deployment made him feel empowered:

We had changed the rules of the game. And [the Soviets] didn't like it. The United States was in its strongest position in two decades to negotiate with the Russians from strength. The American economy was booming. We'd come a long way since the late seventies, when our country was plagued with self-doubt and uncertainty and neglecting our military forces. In spirit and military strength, America was back, and I figured it would be only a matter of time before the Soviets were back at the table.²⁶⁸

Reagan's account of the Pershing II deployment has the ring of a prophecy self-fulfilled. During the 1980 election he had foretold the dawning of morning in America and fulfilled "peace through strength" in his own eyes with the defense buildup, the launching of SDI, the successful ground troop invasion of allegedly Soviet-controlled Grenada, and the deployment of nukes on the Soviets' doorstep. Historian Robert Dean chronicled how masculine identity drove American leaders toward irrational and dangerous escalation in the Vietnam War.²⁶⁹ If there was a gendered aspect to Reagan's "peace through strength," Grenada and missiles displayed enough manhood for Reagan's purposes. He emphasized these victories, and let his advisors fight it out on how to proceed in Lebanon. Weinberger's obfuscations and arguments won the day, and the administration quietly relegated Lebanon to the realm of strategic unimportance in the wake of multi-party intransigence during Rumsfeld's failed attempts to negotiate a lasting ceasefire.

²⁶⁷ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 374–375. Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, 78.

²⁶⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, 586–587.

²⁶⁹ Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

On February 7, 1984, Rumsfeld informed Prime Minister Amin Gemayel that the United States was withdrawing its Marines from Lebanon. That same evening, Air Force One landed at Point Mugu Naval Station near Malibu, and Reagan proceeded by helicopter to his ranch. Deputy NSA Poindexter distributed copies of a “statement on the situation in Lebanon” to reporters and answered questions about “decisive new steps” including “naval gunfire and air support” and a presidential request for Weinberger to “submit a plan for redeployment of the marines from Beirut Airport to their ships offshore.” Neither the report nor Poindexter used the word “withdrawal.”²⁷⁰

3.4 A Syndrome No Longer: The Weinberger Doctrine – April 1984 to November 1985

Even after the February withdrawal from Beirut, Schultz did not give up on his quest to leverage U.S. troops as a tool in international negotiations. In fact, his invocation of the “Vietnam syndrome” at an April 1984 Trilateral Commission meeting was in part a swipe at Weinberger and the Beirut withdrawal. “The lesson of Vietnam was continually being cited to reject any use of military force unless in exceptional circumstances and with near total public support in advance.”²⁷¹

In what was likely a retort to Schultz’s public articulation of troop deployment strategy, Weinberger laid out a rubric of restraint in a November 28, 1984 speech at the National Press Club titled “The Uses of Military Power.” The speech enumerated six restrictive tests he believed leadership should consider before leveraging military force to achieve goals related to national interests.²⁷² To paraphrase, the United States should only commit combat troops

²⁷⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, 400–401.

²⁷¹ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 552–553, 646–649.

²⁷² Yoshitani, *Reagan on War*, 137–138.

overseas if 1) the engagement is “vital to our national interest of that of our allies; 2) leadership does so “wholeheartedly...with the clear intention of winning; 3) leadership has “clearly defined political and military objectives”; 4) the relationship between force composition and objectives is “continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary”; 5) “the American people and their elected representatives” support the engagement; and 6) it is done as “a last resort.” These tests constituted what became known as the Weinberger Doctrine.²⁷³

Conservative *New York Times* columnist William Safire blasted Weinberger’s speech in a December 1984 opinion-editorial titled “Only the ‘Fun’ Wars.” Safire called the Weinberger Doctrine and expression of “the world according to the most Vietnam-traumatized elements of the Pentagon.” Safire characterized Weinberger’s tests as “stunning” and the equivalent to suggesting “we take a poll before we pull the trigger.” “No wonder the epitome of a military operation in the mind of Pentagonians has become Grenada, the quick crushing of a lightly gang of thugs by a huge task force operating in the dark for a few weeks. Oh, what a lovely war.”²⁷⁴ Schultz echoed Safire’s sentiment in his memoir, calling the Weinberger Doctrine “the Vietnam syndrome in spades, carried to an absurd level, and a complete abdication of the duties of leadership.”²⁷⁵

After Reagan’s painful failures in Lebanon, Weinberger’s advised restraint appeared to carry the day over criticism from the likes of Safire. The administration did not use ground troops during the three and a half years between the Lebanon withdrawal and Weinberger’s November 1987 resignation.²⁷⁶ While Safire, Schultz, McFarlane, and others saw Weinberger’s restraint as neglect of America’s security responsibilities, Reagan did not cease delegating troop

²⁷³ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 441–442.

²⁷⁴ William Safire, “Only the ‘Fun’ Wars,” *New York Times*, 3 December 1984, Section A, Page 23.

²⁷⁵ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 650.

²⁷⁶ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 419–459.

deployment decisions to his SecDef, likely with full knowledge that he would continue to not put troops at risk.

Schultz recounted how Safire mailed him a copy of his “Only the ‘Fun’ Wars” column overlaid with a handwritten note from Henry Kissinger: “Bill – one of your best. We must never be in the position where our only options are waging total war or accepting total defeat.”²⁷⁷ Perhaps Schultz longed for ready access to military tools available to Kissinger during his secret negotiations with North Vietnam.²⁷⁸ George Ball, former Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, detected this impulse in Schultz. Two weeks after Safire’s piece repudiating the Weinberger Doctrine, Ball penned a *New York Times* column lambasting Schultz for three recent speeches where he felt “his obsession with terrorism...distort[ed] his normally judicious view of the world.”²⁷⁹ Schultz had made terrorism the focus of his arguments for U.S. troop engagement in Lebanon, citing the suicide bombings and kidnappings of American citizens in as hallmarks of this new threat to national security. Ball, possibly wishing that his former bosses had applied some version of the Weinberger Doctrine to decisions precipitating escalation of the Vietnam War, warned against counterterrorism becoming a fatal ideological blind spot, in the vein of Nitze’s militarized containment or Kennedy era modernization theory that helped fuel an increase in U.S. military commitments.²⁸⁰

Weinberger and Ball make strange grand strategy bedfellows, and it is unlikely they would acknowledge much shared affinity between their policy prescriptions. But they differed from Schultz, McFarlane, and Kissinger on the lessons they took from the Vietnam War.

²⁷⁷ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 651.

²⁷⁸ Brigham, *Reckless*.

²⁷⁹ George Ball, “Schultz is Wrong on Terrorism,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1984, Section 4, Page 21. <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/16/opinion/shultz-is-wrong-on-terrorism.html>.

²⁸⁰ Michael E. Latham. *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Weinberger and Ball, for different sets of reasons, believed that the Vietnam War could not have been won merely with better tactics. For Weinberger, the key was lack of American public and congressional support. That was enough to persuade him to maneuver for withdrawal from Lebanon, and to successfully advise Reagan against ground troop deployment for the rest of his tenure as SecDef.

Reagan could have taken a variety of paths coming out of the tumultuous Beirut and Grenada weekend of October 21–23, 1983. McFarlane and Schultz had believed that Reagan would move with decisive military force in both arenas. After Grenada, they were sure Reagan would remain firm in support of a Beirut garrison. McFarlane and Schultz had won the battle over Grenada, but Weinberger won the long-term policy war against his heroic statesmen adversaries. The Beirut barracks bombing and Rumsfeld’s subsequent negotiation failures soured Reagan on long-term military engagements. As long as Weinberger was at the Pentagon, Schultz had to conduct diplomacy without ground troops at his disposal.

In what Weinberger probably saw as an ironic and cruel twist, at the same time Reagan adopted the spirit of the Weinberger Doctrine, he also pivoted to Schultz’s diplomatic approach to arms control. On January 16, 1984, three weeks before confirming U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon, and only ten months after labeling the Soviet Union an “evil empire,” Reagan delivered his “Ivan and Anya” speech encouraging Americans to find common ground with ordinary Soviets.”²⁸¹ By November 17, 1985, one year after the Soviets walked out of Geneva arms control talks, Schultz led the charge in a reboot of the talks. This time around, Reagan and Gorbachev sat down face-to-face.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Yoshitani, *Reagan on War*, 81.

²⁸² Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, 98–105.

When Reagan wrote in his memoir that America had been “plagued with self-doubt and uncertainty,” it is possible he was at some level writing about himself.²⁸³ Throughout the Lebanon conflict, his detached delegation of decisions to bickering advisors reflected, in part, an uncertainty about how to wield military power. By his January 1984 “Ivan and Anya” speech, however, he had delivered his promised defense buildup, resuscitated the spending surge with SDI, and secured a visible ground troop victory in Grenada.²⁸⁴ As Reagan laid out in his October 27, 1983 speech, he believed the victory in Grenada counted for Lebanon, too. It may be that a sizable swath of American voters bought that argument. The word “malaise” is readily used to describe the American public’s response to the taking of American hostages in Iran—none of whom died—under Carter, but never to the killing of hundreds of American Marines in Beirut under Reagan.

Regardless of whether the American public believed their president was on the road to “peace through strength,” or if the Soviet government actually believed Reagan had strengthened America’s hand, Reagan himself believed he had done so. Ideologically conservative biographers like D’Souza have highlighted the defense spending surge, the defense buildup reboot through SDI, and Grenada victory as setting the negotiation table for victory over the Soviets.²⁸⁵ These developments probably had a larger influence on Reagan’s own decision to negotiate than on the decisions of the Soviets or any other parties. Reagan had done what he needed to do to project “peace through strength” to a domestic audience. He could move forward

²⁸³ Reagan, *An American Life*, 586–587.

²⁸⁴ While journalistic and Congressional opposition to the administration excoriated the president for what they viewed as a violation of the War Powers Act, Reagan’s polling data showed that the invasion was popular among a majority of American voters. Cannon, *Ronald Reagan*, 392–394. Ehrman and Flamm, *Debating the Reagan Presidency*, 121–123. Jules Tygiel, *Ronald Reagan and the Triumph of American Conservatism* (New York: Pearson, 2006), 148.

²⁸⁵ D’Souza, *Ronald Reagan*, 155–159, 173–197.

with negotiations armed with talking points about his record to fend off accusations of a march toward Munich-style appeasement.

Perhaps more important than Reagan's claimed national security accomplishments was that he was no longer weighed down by the festering Lebanon conflict. Many commentators and historians, whether they are Reagan supporters or detractors, tend to overlook that Reagan's pivot to arms control negotiations happened while he was withdrawing troops from Beirut. Reagan and Schultz's arms control triumphs progressed during a period when Weinberger did not deploy ground troops anywhere else in the world. Military restraint was a silent, yet essential plank in Reagan's "peace through strength" platform. During his presidency, this silence bolstered Reagan's image as a strong leader in the eyes of his supporters. Three decades later, however, silence on the 1984 withdrawal from Lebanon feeds into incomplete and sometimes dangerous interpretations of Reagan's legacy. It is worth considering how Reagan's presidency might have fared if the U.S. military had remained mired in Beirut.

Conclusion: Defense, Uncapped – 1986 to Present Day

While Reagan's advisors fought over the meaning of the Vietnam War to develop and support policy recommendations, more recent politicians and analysts similarly leverage their own interpretations of Reagan's legacy in contemporary debates. Many Reagan supporters have claimed that Reagan's defense spending surge, further compounded by SDI, either frightened the Soviets into arms control negotiations or stressed the Soviet economy to the point that Gorbachev had to pursue arms reductions.²⁸⁶ Those who claim that the spending increase and SDI scared the Soviet Union also tend to credit Reagan's Grenada invasion with the same effect.²⁸⁷

This thesis argues that, regardless of any impact these developments might have had on the Soviet Union, they created space for Reagan to negotiate an arms control agreement from a position of self-perceived strength and in a manner that satisfied his domestic constituencies.²⁸⁸ Perhaps most importantly, Reagan had enough confidence in the "peace through strength" narrative of defense spending, SDI, and Grenada that he withdrew from a worsening military conflict in Lebanon against the protestations of key advisors. This withdrawal and avoidance of

²⁸⁶ James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Viking, 2009), 241–251.

²⁸⁷ D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan*, 180–190. Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994).

²⁸⁸ Reagan faced considerable resistance on arms control even from establishment figures like Nixon and Kissinger. Even Carter's NSA Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had defected to the Reagan camp in support of his tough anti-Soviet posture, pushed back against Reagan on arms control. Reagan ultimately won the battle for conservative public opinion. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Game Plan: A Geostrategic Framework for the Conduct of the U.S.–Soviet Contest* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986). Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, "To Withdraw Missiles We Must Add Conditions," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1987, V1.

subsequent combat troop entanglements, especially when compared with Soviet military woes in Afghanistan, was itself a source of strength.

The Triumph of Diplomacy

Schultz, by contrast, believed that Weinberger's restraint handicapped his global diplomatic efforts. For Schultz, America's newly strengthened military forces should have been used to their maximum, regardless of U.S. public opinion:

To Weinberger, as I heard him, our forces were to be constantly built up but not used: everything in our defense structure seemed geared exclusively to deter World War III against the Soviets; diplomacy was to solve all the other problems we faced around the world; 'reasonable assurance' of support from the American people be obtained? By a congressional vote for action against a terrorist group or for a rescue operation for Americans in danger? Only if and when the population, by some open measure, agreed in advance would American armed forces be employed, and even then, only if we were assured of winning swiftly and at minimal cost.²⁸⁹

Reagan followed the policy of buildup and restraint that Schultz decried, and Schultz was forced to use diplomacy without the direct pressure of military presence, "to solve all the other problems we faced around the world." Schultz's tenure has been widely regarded as successful. Most prominently, Schultz and Reagan are remembered for arms control, and the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in particular. Reagan famously remarked that Schultz was carrying out "my policy" on arms control. Perhaps Schultz did not secure these achievements in spite of Weinberger's restraint, but rather because of it. If not for Weinberger's policy of military restraint, Schultz may have spent much more time shuttling across the Middle East than to Geneva, Reykjavik, and Moscow to meet with the Soviets.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 650.

²⁹⁰ Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, 86–142.

Writing his memoir at the start of the Clinton administration, Schultz seethed about Weinberger's refusal to use America's "constantly built up" forces but praised the general arc of Reagan's foreign policy as a "triumph."²⁹¹ Historian James Wilson used the same word to laud Schultz, Reagan, Gorbachev, and Vice President Bush for their willingness to improvise on the path toward arms reductions.²⁹² Schultz seemed to have believed he and Reagan secured these achievements in spite of being denied the tool of robust U.S. military presence. He questioned Weinberger's dogmatic restraint, but not his constant military buildup. Schultz probably believed he could have achieved much more if he wielded the military force that Kissinger did under Nixon. Nixon himself believed that Reagan's failure in Lebanon was due to under deployment of troops.²⁹³ But Schultz could not play the combat troops card because Weinberger believed the American public would not support this use of military force. In a twist on Clausewitz's iconic principle, Schultz was denied the use of war as an extension of politics, so he had to secure political objectives through diplomatic means.²⁹⁴

Blowback: Covert Action and The Hidden Costs of Spending

The administration's defense spending and troop deployment decisions surely influenced Reagan's confidence and domestic approval of his handling of foreign policy. However, Reagan's grand strategy had many consequences outside the realm of his domestic image of strength. Weinberger's dogmatic emphasis on increasing spending and avoiding unpopular wars limited Reagan's exposure to the Clausewitzian "friction" that combat troop engagements

²⁹¹ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*.

²⁹² Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*.

²⁹³ Richard Nixon, *In the Arena*, (New York: Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster, 1990), 400.

²⁹⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88.

inevitably unearth.²⁹⁵ But conventional warfare does not have a monopoly on the production of “friction.” Historian Alan Beyerchen’s interpretation of Clausewitz highlights war’s nonlinear and multivariable nature.²⁹⁶ On the eve of the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Chalmers Johnson warned that the global scope and nature of American foreign policy was about to produce deleterious “blowback.”²⁹⁷ Since Reagan was ultimately restrained in his usage of U.S. troops, nonlinearity and blowback proceeded from other dimensions of his foreign policy, such as covert action.

While historian Hal Brands paints a largely positive picture of Reagan’s grand strategy as coherent and effective, he takes him to task for his “embrace [of] morally and sometimes legally problematic initiatives in the Third World,” which did “more to encourage than restrain the threats that would preoccupy the next generation of American policy makers.”²⁹⁸ Brands is not alone in nodding to the blowback sown by initiatives like arming Osama bin Laden’s *mujahideen* in Afghanistan, selling arms to Iran in exchange for hostages, and running weapons to unpredictable forces in Nicaragua and El Salvador.²⁹⁹ Reagan supporters often argue that these initiatives further pressured the Soviet Union to give into U.S. arms reductions demands.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 121.

²⁹⁶ Alan Beyerchen, “Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Winter 1992–1993), 59–90.

²⁹⁷ Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 216–229.

²⁹⁸ Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 143.

²⁹⁹ Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan’s Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014). Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 19–186, 520–576. Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991), 333–365. Harold Hongju Koh, *The National Security Constitution: Sharing Power after the Iran-Contra Affair* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Lindsey O’Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America’s Secret Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018). Persico, *Casey*, 394–571. James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). United States, President’s Special Review Board, *The Tower Commission Report: The Full Text of the President’s Special Review Board* (New York: Bantam, Times Books, 1987).

³⁰⁰ D’Souza, *Ronald Reagan*. Paul Kengor, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York: Regan, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2006), 146–293. Schweizer, *Victory*.

However, in-depth analyses of contested “Third World” regions, such as Ahmed Rashid’s *Taliban*, frequently show that the Soviet Union struggled to control local populations regardless of U.S. intervention. In the case of Afghanistan, U.S. covert support for *mujahideen* fed into a political and social situation that plagued U.S. foreign policy for decades, to say nothing of inadvertently nurturing the eventual perpetrators of the September 11th attacks.³⁰¹

Not only do war and covert action produce nonlinear consequences and blowback, but so can the act of defense spending itself, even when the military buildup is restrained in actual application as it was under Weinberger. Even if Weinberger and Reagan’s defense spending surge contributed in some way to bringing the Soviets to the negotiation table, the massive spending increases have had economic, social, and cultural effects outside the narrow bounds of foreign policy. Notably, during the first fifteen years of SDI, American taxpayers paid sixty billion dollars on anti-ballistic missile defense technology without producing a capable interceptor.³⁰² It is more difficult to obtain data about the success of similar research over the last twenty years due to the classified nature of the projects, but more than 35 years after Reagan unveiled SDI, no American leaders are talking about space technology making nuclear weapons obsolete.

Not only might money spent on defense not yield as valuable an economic or social return for the country as investment in other sectors, but defense spending can produce hidden negative consequences. Anthropologist Catherine Lutz demonstrates in a study of Fayetteville, North Carolina how a community’s economic dependency on a military base can produce unintended corrosive effects.³⁰³ Taxpayers’ income is diverted to funding military bases, and

³⁰¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

³⁰² FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 498.

³⁰³ Catherine Lutz, *Homefront: A Military City and the American 20th Century*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

communities are shaped in ways their members would not likely choose if given a range of options.

While Weinberger and other Reagan advisors claimed spending on defense would revitalize the U.S. industrial base and economy, economist Robert Higgs and historian Aaron Friedberg have argued that defense spending in the United States and Soviet Union have not produced economic recoveries, but instead hinder economic growth and diversity. These conservative-leaning scholars stop short of applying their criticisms directly to Reagan, perhaps because they supported his taxation and deregulation policies, but the patterns they identify in earlier decades come into even sharper relief in the 1980s.³⁰⁴ Several economists and political scientists have demonstrated how defense spending decisions and contracts engrave economic and social patterns into the nation's geography that make it very difficult to reduce future spending.³⁰⁵ Political scientist Kenneth Mayer effectively debunks myths that blame the defense industry for manipulating national security decisions through lobbying and influence peddling, but his research further emphasizes the one-way nature of defense spending.³⁰⁶ Once spending is authorized, political, economic, and social forces make it very difficult to rewind that momentum.

Defense spending can also create economic problems for future generations. Robert Hormats, former senior economic advisor to Kissinger and one of Haig's Assistant Secretaries of State, grants Reagan credit for pushing the Soviet Union to the brink with U.S. defense spending

³⁰⁴ Ehrman, *The Eighties*, 54–55. Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Robert Higgs, *Depression, War, and Cold War: Challenging the Myths of Conflict and Prosperity* (Oakland: The Independent Institute, 2009). Weinberger, "Secretary of Defense Weekly Report, July 17, 1981."

³⁰⁵ Ann Markusen, Peter Hall, Scott Campbell, and Sabina Deitrick, *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Rebecca U. Thorpe, *The American Warfare State: The Domestic Politics of Military Spending* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014). Kindle.

³⁰⁶ Kenneth R. Mayer. *The Political Economy of Defense Contracting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

but also details the dangerous fiscal cost of doing so. Hormats lauds George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton for paying down the high costs of Reagan's military buildup. Hormats' defense of Reagan's defense spending policy is half-hearted, at best.³⁰⁷ Was it really necessary for two successive presidents to pay the cost of equipment and troops their predecessor never came close to fully utilizing?

John Arquilla, a conservative defense analyst and certainly no opponent of Reagan's, criticized the 1980s defense buildup as completely mismatched to the national security challenges that emerged after the Cold War. He described how Reagan's surge pumped money into outdated programs and equipment designed to fight the conventional nation-state wars of the past. He delineated legacy defense systems still absorbing massive sums of taxpayer money twenty years after Reagan added them. Arquilla argued that these systems have not been useful in combatting terrorist targets or holding territory in places like Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁰⁸

The Triumph of the National Security State: Treaties are Temporary, Spending Endures

In 2006, Arquilla wrote *The Reagan Imprint* while working on Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's staff. As with McFarlane and Schultz's views of the Vietnam War, Arquilla believed that America could win wars it was losing—or wars it had not yet elected to fight—if leaders would only adopt the right tactics or procure the right equipment.³⁰⁹ Arquilla's Pentagon superiors Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, like McFarlane and Schultz, expressed frustration that they were not given the necessary military support to succeed in

³⁰⁷ Robert D. Hormats, *The Price of Liberty: Paying for America's Wars from the Revolution to the War on Terror* (New York: Times Books, 2007), 248–260.

³⁰⁸ John Arquilla, *The Reagan Imprint: Ideas in American Foreign Policy from the Collapse of Communism to the War on Terror* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 112–146, 211–237.

³⁰⁹ Arquilla, *The Reagan Imprint*, 112–146.

Lebanon during the early 1980s. In 2003, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz directed a U.S. military fully grown out of Reagan's defense buildup, and no Weinberger to hamstring their efforts. They now occupied Weinberger's position. This time around, they opted not just for U.S. military presence, but full-scale invasion of a Middle Eastern country. During the first year of the U.S. occupation, Rumsfeld and the Pentagon administered governance of Iraq directly through Paul Bremer, one of McFarlane's NSC point men on the 1982 nuclear freeze campaign. As with Grenada, the administration did not find the weapons caches they expected to find in order to justify the invasion. Of course, unlike Grenada, the war stretched on for years and faded out in bipartisan ignominy.

Weinberger's former military attaché Colin Powell sensed the danger of an expanding military in the hands of leaders itching to use it to achieve difficult political goals overseas. In his 1995 memoir, Powell shared an anecdote highlighting a power projection attitude shared by George Schultz and his predecessors who prosecuted the Vietnam War. Powell served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs during the first six months of the Clinton administration, and counseled Weinberger-like restraint to Clinton's team in a White House meeting on potential U.S. intervention in Bosnia:

The debate exploded at one session when Madeleine Albright, our ambassador to the UN, asked me in frustration, "What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?" I thought I would have an aneurysm. American GIs were not toy soldiers to be moved around on some sort of global game board.... I told Ambassador Albright that the U.S. military would carry out any mission it was handed, but my advice would always be that the tough political goals had to be set first. Then we would accomplish the mission.³¹⁰

Powell feared what "heroic statesmen" like Albright, as Schultz before her, would try to do with the increasingly "superb military" they had at their disposal. Powell, in this anecdote,

³¹⁰ Powell and Persico, *My American Journey*, 576–577.

expressed wariness of politicians who would deploy U.S. troops without appropriately weighing the cost. Journalistic and literary works have documented the psychological and social effects on individuals who experience combat, and Powell had experienced the Vietnam War firsthand.³¹¹ Ironically, when he served in the George W. Bush administration in Schultz's former position alongside Rumsfeld, he did not restrain administration from launching a war that—like Vietnam—lasted for more than a decade and failed to “accomplish the mission.”

Hormats, writing only four years into the second Iraq War, showed how the costs of war wiped out the fiscal accomplishments of the preceding two presidents in paying the mortgage on Reagan's defense buildup.³¹² Current and future administrations will likely continue to pay in some way for the Iraq War. Thus, Reagan's defense spending surge was both costly in the initial spending and the future conflicts resulting from leaders inspired by the political potential of this ever-growing “superb military.” Weinberger and Reagan exercised restraint in troop deployments in the 1980s, but as the 2000s have shown, that is no guarantee that future administrations will confine themselves to only the “fun” wars.

After the end of the Cold War, U.S. military spending eventually dipped back down to pre-Reagan levels. However, this “peace dividend” might have further reduced the defense budget to lower 1970s levels if the buildup had not taken place first.³¹³ Reagan's 1983 SDI proposal prolonged the defense spending surge well beyond when bipartisan Congressional opponents were aiming to put on the brakes. Reagan and George H.W. Bush inked nuclear arms reduction deals with the Soviets, but SDI spending—under a series of evolving missile defense

³¹¹ C.J. Chivers, *The Fighters: Americans in Combat in Afghanistan and Iraq* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018). Scott A. Huesing, *Echo in Ramadi: The Firsthand Story of U.S. Marines in Iraq's Deadliest City* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery History, 2018). Phil Klay, *Redeployment* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014). Karl Marlantes, *What it is Like to Go to War* (New York: Grove Press, 2011).

³¹² Hormats, *The Price of Liberty*, 276–299.

³¹³ John Prados, *How the Cold War Ended: Debating and Doing History* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2011), 190–191.

labels—continued in perpetuity.³¹⁴ Perhaps Schultz was right, and the “Vietnam syndrome” did restrain Weinberger from using troops to pursue politics by other means. If the American government does not limit troop deployments out of a disciplined fear of “expend[ing] its strength to the point of exhaustion” and “bankrupt[ing] its own policy, and future,” as military theorist B. H. Liddell Hart put it, perhaps an “Iraq syndrome” will restrain leaders for a time.³¹⁵ But when the prior war is paid off, and the defense budget still burgeoning, the time likely will come again to wield that “superb military” against the global political crisis of the day.

Garry Wills criticized Reagan for continually constructing a “substitute past, an illusion of it,” in order to simplify hard truths for Americans in a manner that clarified the nation’s identity. In Wills’ words, Reagan “found the Kremlin in Hollywood and defeated it.”³¹⁶ Reagan was effective in reconstructing the past when contrasting his “peace through strength” with Carter’s “malaise,” and in presenting the victory in Grenada as a global Cold War win that applied to the situation in Lebanon. Reagan’s supporters and popular culture similarly construct a “substitute past” out of Reagan’s presidency where “peace through strength” came through defense spending and a muscular foreign policy. Historian James Young wrote how monuments of the Vietnam War were “often ironic, self-effacing conceptual installations that mark...national ambivalence and uncertainty.”³¹⁷ In contrast to memorials of and films about Vietnam, the Reagan era produced pop culture memorials like the film *Top Gun* (1986), based on a 1981 skirmish between American and Libyan fighter pilots. Andrew Bacevich argued that military films with an “upbeat message” like *Top Gun* “magically made those [Vietnam] wounds

³¹⁴ FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 496–499.

³¹⁵ Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1954), 366.

³¹⁶ Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America: Innocents at Home* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1987), 386–388.

³¹⁷ James E. Young, “From *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*,” in Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, ed., *The Collective Memory Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 372.

disappear.” *Top Gun* was “warfare...against a political backdrop shorn of messy ambiguities,” much like the “peace through strength” Reagan projected rather successfully.³¹⁸

Reagan’s defense spending may have given him the confidence and cover he needed to negotiate an arms control agreement with Gorbachev, but the economic, social, and cultural legacies of spending are more permanent than his legacy of disarmament. On August 2, 2019, the Donald Trump administration formally withdrew the United States from Reagan and Schultz’s INF Treaty. The treaty was the centerpiece of the “triumph” Schultz and Wilson referenced in their book titles and had set in motion twenty years of successive nuclear arms reductions by Russia and the United States. Between the 1987 signing of INF and today, global warhead stockpiles decreased from 70,000 in 1986 to fewer than 15,000.³¹⁹

Withdrawal from the INF Treaty of course does not completely undo Reagan and Schultz’s arms control accomplishments. The warheads eliminated by the INF and other treaties are gone forever. The Trump administration may succeed in replacing Reagan’s arms control regime with another, perhaps one that demands commitments from China as well. But there is no guarantee that a new agreement will materialize. Even if the United States and Russia strike a better arms control deal in the coming years, withdrawal from INF is symbolic of a persistent phenomenon. For a range of reasons, it is easier for an American president to discard a treaty than to reduce the defense budget. As Mary Dudziak has pointed out, the U.S. national security state has continually expanded since the end of World War II. Even as the Cold War has passed, and as the War on Terror will pass, “war time” will endure.³²⁰ Our leaders may exercise the

³¹⁸ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How American are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 113–117.

³¹⁹ Lori Esposito Murray, “What the INF Treaty’s Collapse Means for Nuclear Proliferation,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 1, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/what-inf-treatys-collapse-means-nuclear-proliferation>.

³²⁰ Mary L. Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 135–136. Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

disciplined military restraint of Cap Weinberger for a time. However, unless we also restrain the ladling of increasing sums into the defense budget, we are bound to see another Vietnam or Iraq once the “syndrome” of restraint wears off yet again.

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