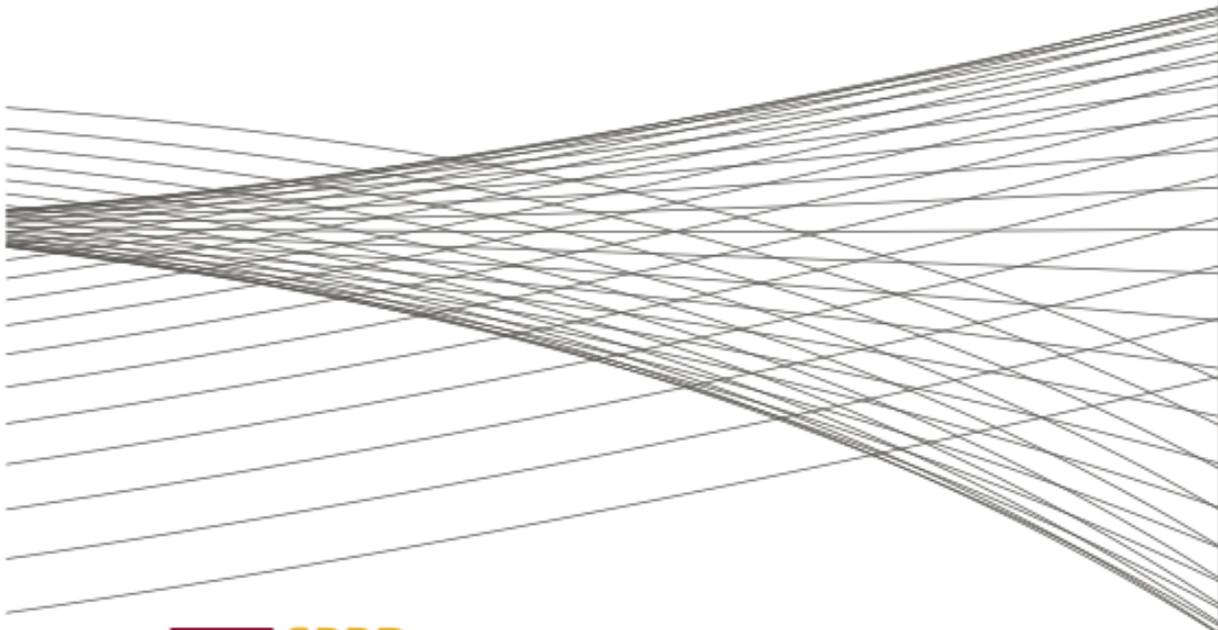




**Principle, Pragmatism, and
Authenticity in Reagan's Rhetoric**

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In recent years, scholars have developed deeply contrasting views of the rhetoric and policies of Ronald Reagan. On the one hand, he has been described as a principled opponent of government, the founder in a way of the contemporary anti-government strain of conservative thought. Others have described a pragmatist who disappointed conservative activists. A similar divide exists about the most important foreign policy issue of the Reagan years, policy toward the Soviet Union. Some see his Soviet policy as a precursor to the aggressive force-oriented policies of the second Bush Administration, while others focus on Reagan's successful arms control negotiations with the Soviets in his second term and praise him for his commitment to avoiding war.

On one point, however, all those who study Reagan are agreed, the transformational power of his rhetoric. Reagan's rhetorical skill was universally accepted quite early in his term. For example, Adam Clymer noted on Christmas Day 1981, that Reagan's "ability to make a case . . . [is] conceded on all sides."¹ The judgment of an early student of his rhetoric, Mary Stuckey, that "Reagan is a model by which other presidents will be judged"² is now the conventional wisdom. Reagan's skill in adapting ideas to people was so great that the very flagship of the liberal media, *The New York Times*, was almost nostalgic about his presidency in an editorial after the former president died. The *Times* noted that Reagan "will almost certainly be ranked among the most important presidents of the 20th century, forever linked with the triumph over Communism abroad and the restoration of faith in free markets at home," explaining that

Reagan “projected an aura of optimism so radiant that it seemed almost a force of nature.”³ It was with rhetoric that Reagan created that aura of optimism as well as a political movement so powerful and enduring that Sean Wilentz labeled the time as the age of Reagan.⁴

Much of the commentary in the media and to some extent from historians about Reagan treats his rhetorical skill almost as a kind of verbal magic. The comment of *The New York Times* that Reagan’s optimism was “almost a force of nature” is illustrative of this type of commentary, as is much of the retrospective praise by conservatives of Reagan. For example, Peggy Noonan’s observation about the Westminster Address that the speech “signaled the beginning of a massive shift: from the defensive crouch in which the Western democracies had long huddled into a tall-walking, truth-telling style of faithfulness that would ultimately move mountains”⁵ highly praises Reagan, but does not tell us much about what Reagan actually said. This commentary reflects the fact that while there is recognition that he had enormous skill as a rhetorician, there is no fully adequate explanation of how he created a public response so strong that he is remembered as a political “force of nature.”

Academic critics have done a great deal of important work to fill this gap, especially identifying the general strategies used by Reagan. Some of the most useful work has focused on Reagan’s use of narrative forms and how Reagan’s recasting of the American Dream and restatement of American Exceptionalism produced the sense of optimism described by so many commentators.⁶ This research provides a great deal of information on the overarching strategies that Reagan used. What it does not do is explain how Reagan applied those strategies in order to make his conservative message

appealing not only to fellow conservatives, but to independents and even some moderate Democrats. Reagan worked his rhetorical magic not only with true believers, but with millions of Americans who had no strong ideological views and in many cases little concern with politics. The key question is to determine how he persuaded this audience to embrace what was at the time perceived to be a strongly conservative ideological viewpoint.

In this essay, I draw on previous academic criticism and an analysis of the underlying ideological principles in Reagan's domestic and Soviet rhetoric in order to answer this question. My approach is not concerned with how Reagan moved any particular audience. Rather, I paint with a broader brush, focusing on three overarching patterns in Reagan's rhetoric. The first two patterns are a steadfast commitment to ideological principle in both domestic and foreign policy rhetoric, along with a contrasting commitment to pragmatism in both policy and rhetorical terms, through which he demonstrated that while the principles were not negotiable, policies implementing them could be adapted to the exigencies of the moment. The third is rhetorical authenticity. Reagan demonstrated his authenticity through his rhetoric by always sounding like Reagan. Reagan speeches from the end of his presidency sound very much like Reagan speeches from the Goldwater campaign. By always sounding the same, Reagan gradually convinced the American people that he was exactly who he seemed to be. I argue that Reagan's personal involvement in the speechwriting process is at the core of this sense of authenticity.

In building this argument, I first focus on how Reagan manifested principle and pragmatism in the evolution of his Soviet rhetoric, from the harsh words of 1981 through

the commitment to arms control in 1988. I then argue that the same commitment to both principle and pragmatism is evident in his domestic policy rhetoric, using Reagan's famous attack on government in his First Inaugural as a jumping off point. Finally, I turn to authenticity and demonstrate Reagan's involvement in the speechwriting process throughout his administration.

Contested Views of Reagan's Soviet Rhetoric and Policies

Reagan's role in the end of the Cold War is a quite contested issue. Conservatives emphasize Reagan's arms buildup and the aggressive tone he took with the Soviets. In this triumphalist view, Reagan played a key role in winning the Cold War with aggressive rhetoric and action. Taking almost precisely the opposite view, a number of contemporary scholars argue that beginning in 1984, Reagan turned his policy and rhetoric toward peaceful resolution of the conflict, leading to significant arms control agreements and setting the stage for Mikhail Gorbachev to support reforms that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is certainly odd that two groups of commentators agree on Reagan's central role in the end of the Cold War, but have precisely opposite theories about what that role was. In fact, both groups are right that Reagan's policies and words mattered, but both wrong about his central strategy for bringing the Cold War to a peaceful resolution.

Reflecting the conservative perspective, Charles Krauthammer praises the Westminster Address, for example, for taking "the first step in the restoration of the democratic militance" by calling for "the vigorous defense of the ideas of democratic revolution, not just in theory, not just as a spiritual or a political movement, but an actual

revolution by democrats against the Soviet empire.”⁷ His view matches closely the comments of Noonan cited earlier and reflects the dominant conservative perspective that Reagan essentially forced the Soviets to end the Cold War.⁸ For example, in a discussion of “Neoconservatism’s Future,” Joshua Muravchik writes that “Reagan’s belligerent approach to the cold war,” led to “a sublime victory” over “the mighty juggernaut of the Soviet state.”⁹

Many liberals, especially during Reagan’s presidency, essentially agreed with the conservative view that Reagan showed unremitting hostility to the Soviets, although they believed the rhetoric was unnecessarily strident and played little role in ending the Cold War. This group attacked Reagan for using harsh language, especially his reference to the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” and the “focus of evil in the modern world,”¹⁰ labeling these words as needlessly provocative and arguing that they risked war. Anthony Lewis’s comment that the “Evil Empire” speech was “simplistic,” “sectarian,” “terribly dangerous,” “outrageous,” and “primitive”¹¹ reflected a common perspective.¹² Some took an even stronger tone. Joseph Harsch said at the time the speech was delivered that Reagan’s rhetoric “leads logically to an arms race, to confrontation, to avoidance of negotiation, and would someday, in logic, point toward war.”¹³

In fact, neither the conservative praise of Reagan’s “militance” nor the liberal critique of it will stand up. It is now clear that Reagan strongly supported real arms control and was terrified of nuclear war. Paul Lettow observes that “Reagan’s anti-nuclearism is one of the best kept secrets of his political career, for it fails to conform to conventional wisdom” and concludes that “Reagan’s nuclear abolitionism was visionary, even utopian.”¹⁴ John Lewis Gaddis adds that although Reagan called for nuclear

abolition at several points “almost everybody at the time missed” the point that he really believed in finding a way to eliminate nuclear weapons because it “defied so many stereotypes.”¹⁵ Lou Cannon references Strobe Talbott’s view that Reagan was “a radical, a nuclear abolitionist” and argues that “Reagan’s vision of nuclear apocalypse and his deeply rooted conviction that the weapons that could cause this hell on earth should be abolished would ultimately prove more powerful than his anticommunism.”¹⁶ Cirincione concludes that “Those who dismissed Reagan’s own repeated statements on the need for disarmament were . . . wrong.”¹⁷

The view that Reagan’s aggressive foreign policy “forced” the Soviets to essentially surrender is also untenable. In fact, Reagan was quite unwilling to consider truly provocative actions. John Patrick Diggins quotes an advisor to Reagan as saying that the president “has the reputation of being a gunslinger but . . . [was] the most cautious, conservative guy in those meetings.”¹⁸ Diggins also notes that while “many of his admirers still think he was the John Wayne of the cold war, itching for a duel. He was just the opposite.”¹⁹ Reagan in fact was “a pragmatist, a negotiator, a diplomat, and a statesman,” who “was unconfined by ideology.”²⁰ Of course, Reagan did not “force” the Soviets to do anything. It was Gorbachev who initiated the reform campaign.

The contrasting interpretation is that Reagan shifted his tone about the Soviets as he prepared to run for re-election in 1984 and this shift paved the way for substantive arms control agreements. In this view, Reagan’s rhetoric was defined by quite a strident attack on the Soviets from 1981 to 1983 and then shifted to emphasize arms control, leading to the successes of the second term. In describing this pattern, some argue that Reagan’s policies and rhetoric were confusing or even contradictory. Diggins observes

that “A president who seemed to start out a hawk and ended a dove was indeed a riddle.”²¹ Diggins goes on to explain this apparent contradiction by arguing that Reagan’s “growing fear of nuclear escalation veering out of control” led to both a change in policy and rhetoric.²² In this perspective, “Reagan’s attitudes underwent a profound change” and “Whereas his cold war speeches had once been confrontational and accusatory, they were now conciliatory and mollifying.”²³ Jack Matlock, ambassador to the Soviet Union during Reagan’s second term, makes a similar argument concluding that a “shift in focus of the president’s statements” began in the last part of 1983 “because it represented Reagan’s aspirations for his record as president.”²⁴ Beth Fischer argues that “the Reagan administration pursued a hard-line policy only during its first three years in office. By January 1984, President Reagan was ardently pursuing a rapprochement with Moscow.”²⁵ Fischer labeled American policy in 1981-1983 as “Zero-Sum Competition,” which became a “Combination of Common Interests and Rivalry” in 1984-1985.²⁶ She claims that the new approach was first presented by Reagan in a January 16, 1984 speech containing a call “for cooperation and understanding [that] was a significant change in U.S. Soviet policy. For one thing, it reversed the administration’s earlier confrontational posture toward the Kremlin.”²⁷

The shift in policy and rhetoric created a situation according to James Mann that “During Regan’s final three years as president, frustrated conservatives regularly [argued]. . . that he had become the tool of a cabal of ‘moderates inside his administration” and that these policies “overcame the resistance of the political right, effectively marginalizing it.”²⁸ In fact, conservatives were quite sharp in their criticism that Reagan had turned away from the hard line he advocated early in his administration,

particularly after the Moscow summit, which included Reagan's famed speech at Moscow State University. William F. Buckley wrote at the time that "to greet [the Soviet Union] as if it were no longer evil is on the order of changing our entire position toward Adolf Hitler"²⁹ George Will was equally harsh:

But how wildly wrong he is about what is happening in Moscow. Reagan has accelerated the moral disarmament of the West—actual disarmament will follow—by elevating wishful thinking to the status of political philosophy... Reagan blandly says that Gorbachev has just "come along." How is it that the Soviet Union suddenly fell into the hands of such a pleasant fellow? Hey, good things happen to nice people.³⁰

This created a situation in which "Many neocons were glad to see Reagan retire to California while they awaited their next chance to advise a president on deploying power and bringing America's enemies to their knees."³¹ Conservatives were so unhappy that Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation got into a "shouting match" with the president about the new Soviet policy.³² The leader of the conservative National Defense Council Foundation concluded that Reagan was no longer "the Ronald Reagan of 1980."³³

The view that Reagan turned toward a more moderate Soviet policy beginning in 2004 remains controversial, with contemporary liberals praising Reagan and contemporary conservatives largely ignoring his commitment to arms control. However, just as with the conservative case that Reagan "won" the Cold War with militant rhetoric and policy, the contrasting view also won't do. The difficulty with this argument is that the strident attacks on the Soviets continued after 1983, notably in the Brandenburg Gate

speech where Reagan famously called on Gorbachev to “tear down this wall” and “open this gate,” and Reagan’s early speeches included both the attacks on the Soviet Union and arguments for the necessity of achieving real arms control.³⁴

The debate over the Brandenburg Gate speech within the administration was particularly sharp and is quite revealing. In this internal battle the advocates of a pragmatic policy aimed at achieving arms control agreements and lessening tension sharply critiqued the speech draft containing the famous phrases. Many in the administration felt that the line calling on Gorbachev to “tear down this wall” and “open this gate” was provocative and should come out. Secretary of State George Schultz argued that the line would “be an affront to Mr. Gorbachev” and Chief of Staff Howard Baker told Communications Director Tom Griscom, “this line here about Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall—that ought to come out...it is so unlikely that it is unpresidential.”³⁵ James Mann notes and that “Shultz and others at the State Department and National Security Council tried repeatedly but in vain to persuade Regan to change the Berlin Wall speech and to remove its core sentence” and concludes that the “‘moderate’ faction did not own Regan either.”³⁶ According to Rodman, the passage remained in the speech for one main reason, “Reagan wanted to say that line.”³⁷ He notes that Reagan recognized that the message would make “Gorbachev uncomfortable, but the whole world knew that the Berlin Wall was an obscenity. It was dramatic because governments usually didn’t speak that way.”³⁸ After being told about objections to the tone of the speech by Ken Duberstein, Reagan simply overruled those who wanted to remove the harsh words, reminding his aides that “I’m the president, aren’t I?”³⁹ Reagan reportedly said, “the boys

at State are going to kill me, but it's [keeping the line in the draft] the right thing to do."⁴⁰

The words stayed in because Reagan wanted to say them.

Even at the very end of his presidency in the May 1988 Moscow State Address, Reagan presented a firm if indirect indictment of totalitarian regimes in general and by implication the Soviet Union. Early in the speech, Reagan said:

Freedom is the right to question and change established ways of doing things. It is the continuing revolution of the marketplace. It is the understanding that allows us to recognize shortcomings and seek solutions. It is the right to put forth an idea, scoffed at by the experts and watch it catch fire among the people. It is the right to dream—to follow your dream or stick to your conscience even if you are the only one in a sea of doubters. Freedom is the recognition that no single person, no single authority or government, has a monopoly on the truth, but that every individual life is infinitely precious, that every one of us put on this world has been put here for a reason and has something to offer. (3)

He added that democracy was “less a system of government than it is a system to keep government limited, unintrusive” (3). It was “a system of constraints on power to keep politics and government secondary to the important things in life” (3). In these and other passages, Reagan avoided directly condemning the Soviets. He also went out of his way to create a sense of identification between Russians and Americans.⁴¹ At the same time, the obvious implication of his remarks was that the Soviet Union still lacked the freedoms and democratic rights found in the West. For example, after defending the free market, Reagan noted that the absence of opportunity to learn by failure was “why it

[was] so hard for government planners, no matter how sophisticated, to ever substitute for millions of individuals working night and day to make their dreams come true” (2).

Reagan also called upon the Soviets to “institutionalize change—to put guarantees on reform” into effect since “reform that is not institutionalized will always be insecure” (4). Moreover, Reagan focused on “reforms” that would protect basic liberties. For example, he expressed the hope that “it won’t be long before all are allowed to [visit relatives in the West] and Ukrainian Americans, Baltic Americans, Armenian Americans, can freely visit their homelands, just as this Irish American visits his” (3). His point was that those in the Soviet bloc should have the same right to travel as citizens in the West. Reagan understood that truly free association would doom the Soviet system. Even at the very end of his presidency, at a moment when a commitment to a moderate Soviet policy was supposedly most dominant, Reagan continued to indict the underlying principles defining the Soviet system.

Principle and Pragmatism in Soviet Rhetoric

Neither the conservative nor the revisionist liberal view of Reagan’s rhetoric and policies relating to the Soviet Union is adequate. Reagan consistently argued for real arms control, but he also consistently attacked the totalitarian nature of the Soviet system and argued for the importance of a defense buildup. Rather than change, there was great continuity in his rhetoric and policies. This continuity was based in three underlying principles:

- Reagan viewed the Soviet Union as the most powerful and dangerous totalitarian government in the world and therefore saw it as a force for evil. Consequently, he believed that the West should fight to free its people.
- Reagan supported a strong defense policy, but one that avoided any directly provocative acts. The fundamental purpose of this policy was rhetorical, to convince the Soviets that they could not win the Cold War and could not bully the United States or the West. He viewed this policy as the best way to deter the Soviets, create an environment in which real arms control would be possible, and prevent war.
- Reagan believed that the Cold War was ultimately about ideas and that the ideals of the Enlightenment were universal and much more powerful than the underlying ideas behind the Soviet or any totalitarian system.

At the same time, Reagan combined these principles with a commitment to pragmatically adapting policies and rhetoric to the moment, as long as that policy/rhetorical adaptation did not involve violation of the fundamental principles. To develop this view, I first show that the principles were present at all points during his two terms and then describe pragmatic rhetorical and policy adaptation that occurred within the limits of those principles.

It is widely known that Reagan used very strong words to attack the Soviets in the early years of his administration. Only a few days after the inauguration, Reagan said at a press conference that the Soviets were willing “to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat” in support of their ideology.⁴² Even in speeches early in the presidency which focused on arms control such as his November 18, 1981 speech at the National Press Club, Reagan

strongly criticized the Soviets for a “relentless buildup of Soviet military power” that he said posed a “growing threat to Western Europe.”⁴³ Later in the speech he directly attacked the Soviet system saying that “terms like ‘peace’ and ‘security’ . . . have little meaning for the oppressed and destitute,” adding “Nowhere has this fundamental truth been more boldly and clearly stated than in the Helsinki Accords of 1975. These accords have not yet been translated into living reality” (6). He also clearly announced that it was U.S. policy to support oppressed peoples, saying “The American concept of peace goes well beyond the absence of war. We foresee a flowering of economic growth and individual liberty in a world at peace” (6). The point is that even in an early speech focused on arms control Reagan strongly attacked the Soviets both for an arms buildup, but also for oppressing the peoples of the Soviet bloc.

Reagan’s strong attacks on the Soviet system in his commencement address at Eureka College, the Westminster Address, and of course the “evil empire” speech are well known, but the same attacks were also present in later speeches focused on arms control. Reagan’s January 16, 1984 address on United States-Soviet relations is often cited as the place where a shift in tone occurred. And the focus of the address was on the need for real arms control. Even here, however, Reagan attacked the Soviets for an arms buildup:

Over the last 10 years, the Soviets devoted twice as much of their gross national product to military expenditures as the United States, produced six times as many ICBM’s, four times as many tanks, twice as many combat aircraft. And they began deploying the SS-20 intermediate-range missile at a time when the United States had no comparable weapon. (1)

He then labeled the Soviets a “potential aggressor” and attacked them for “strident rhetoric” (1). Later in the speech Reagan made clear that his focus on arms control did not mean that he was unconcerned with human rights. He said “Cooperation and understanding are built on deeds, not words. Complying with agreements helps; violating them hurts. Respecting the rights of individual citizens bolsters the relationship; denying those rights harms it” (3). He added that:

Realism means we must start with a clear-eyed understanding of the world we live in. We must recognize that we are in a long-term competition with a government that does not share our notions of individual liberties at home and peaceful change abroad. We must be frank in acknowledging our differences and un-afraid to promote our values. (3)

He then made it absolutely clear that while his words were not as harsh as in earlier speeches that his view of the Soviet system had not changed, stating “I have openly expressed my view of the Soviet system. I don’t know why this should come as a surprise to the Soviet leaders” (4). Later, he spoke of “human rights” in the Soviet Union as a “major problem in our relationship” (5).

There is no doubt that over time Reagan’s tone softened as he shifted his focus from attacking the Soviet system and calling for an American defense buildup to arguing for the necessity of real arms control. But the shift in tone did not reflect a shift in substance. He made that point quite clear in the January 1984 address. Even after the arms control negotiations began to bear fruit, Reagan maintained the critique of the Soviets to make it clear that he had not softened and that there was therefore no alternative, but real negotiation. On this point, the internal administration debate over the

harsh language in the Brandenburg Gate speech that I cited earlier is instructive. It is quite clear that the lines calling for Gorbachev to “tear down this wall” and “open this gate” remained in the speech because Reagan wanted to send a message. Why did Reagan continue to attack the Soviets even after the arms control process was moving forward and his aides worried that harsh words could undercut the negotiations? One answer is that Reagan despised the Soviet system and would not budge on the principle of critiquing that system. Another is that Reagan wanted to make it crystal clear to Gorbachev that his commitment to the arms control process did not represent a weakening of American resolve. But Reagan understood the power of words and the very real risk that harsh language could undercut the arms negotiations. At Moscow State as I’ve noted, he presented the critique in a more muted way. The more complete answer to why Reagan continued to critique the Soviet Union even when arms control talks were beginning to bear fruit is that he viewed the sharp critique of the Soviets as one part of his Soviet strategy. When the time called for it as in the November 1981 speech to the press club, the January 1984 speech to the nation and the Moscow State address, he foregrounded support for arms control and placed the critique in the background. At other points, notably the major Soviet speeches in 1982 and 1983 and the Brandenburg Gate speech, he foregrounded the critique while still emphasizing the need for arms control. Reagan shifted the balance of his quite consistent message as part of his larger strategy.

The second principle in that strategy was support for a strong defense policy to deter aggression and send a message to the Soviets that they could not bully the United States and therefore should engage in meaningful arms control negotiations. Reagan saw

the defense buildup not as an alternative to arms negotiations, but as a necessary precursor to it. As I've already noted, this policy was fundamentally rhetorical focused on persuading the Soviets that they could not win the Cold War and was combined with a quite risk averse approach to actually deploying American forces. Reagan was quite consistent and not very subtle in sending this message. In the November 18, 1981 address, Reagan defended his plan to "strengthen all three legs of the strategic triad," deploy intermediate range missiles in Europe, and strengthen conventional forces by arguing "Deterring war depends on the perceived ability of our forces to perform effectively. The more effective our forces are, the less likely it is that we'll have to use them" (3). He explicitly made that point in relation to the quite controversial decision to place Pershing II missiles in Europe, saying, "Deployment of these systems will demonstrate to the Soviet Union that this link cannot be broken" (3).

It is unsurprising that Reagan made similar arguments in the Eureka College, Westminster, and "evil empire," speeches. The sharp tone and strong support for an arms buildup in those speeches are well known. But the same theme was also evident in the January 16, 1984 speech in which Reagan supposedly shifted his tone and policy toward the Soviets. In fact, Reagan explained quite clearly why there were now not only "challenges to peace, but also opportunities" (1) for it. After describing a Soviet arms buildup, Reagan made clear his underlying strategy when he said:

history teaches that wars begin when governments believe the price of aggression is cheap. To keep the peace, we and our allies must be strong enough to convince any potential aggressor that war could bring no benefit, only disaster. So, when we neglected our defenses, the risk of serious confrontation grew. (1)

But times had changed because “we halted America’s decline. Our economy is now in the midst of the best recovery since the sixties. Our defenses are being rebuilt, our alliances are solid and our commitment to defend our values has never been more clear” (1). He added “America’s deterrence is more credible, and it is making the world a safer place—safer because now there is less danger that the Soviet leadership will underestimate our strength or question our resolve” (1-2). It was the strengthened deterrence and the statement of resolve that in Reagan’s view made it possible to “engage the Soviets in a dialog” and pursue “constructive cooperation” in a policy of “credible deterrence and peaceful competition” (2).

As I’ve already argued, Reagan did not “turn” toward arms control in 1984. He argued for real arms control from the beginning of his administration and he discussed the need for real reductions in nuclear weapons in not only the November 18, 1981 address that focused on arms reduction, but also in the speech at Eureka College where he called for “agreements which are verifiable, equitable, and militarily significant,” (5) and in the Westminster speech where he defended the START strategic arms talks as aimed at “reducing the risk of war by reducing the means of waging war on both sides” (2). Even in speeches containing the harshest language, Reagan still called for arms control.

Consider his comments in the “evil empire” speech:

This doesn’t mean we should isolate ourselves and refuse to seek an understanding with them. I intend to do everything I can to persuade them of our peaceful intent, to remind them that it was the West that refused to use its nuclear monopoly in the forties and fifties for territorial gain and which now proposes a

50-percent cut in strategic ballistic missiles and the elimination of an entire class of land-based, intermediate range nuclear missiles. (4)

Reagan himself wrote the first sentence and revised the second to emphasize his commitment to peace.⁴⁴ Reagan also added the sentence “And we will never stop searching for a genuine peace.”⁴⁵ Even in the “evil empire” speech Reagan made it clear that it was his goal “to keep America strong and free, while we negotiate real and verifiable reductions in the world’s nuclear arsenals and one day, with God’s help, their total elimination” (5). Reagan’s references to the need for significant limitations on nuclear arms and an ultimate goal of nuclear abolition in this and other speeches were either ignored or discounted as mere posturing by the media, but we now know they reflected his own strong personal views.

Reagan was willing to push the arms control process more strongly after he had sent the messages at the core of the first two principles of his Soviet policy. At that point, he believed that negotiations were much more likely to work than previously because he had made it clear that he understood the nature of the Soviet system and had strengthened American deterrence. He continued to attack the Soviets in later speeches, notably the Brandenburg Gate speech in order to reinforce the message that the Soviets had no alternative except real negotiations. This point is is evident in the words immediately preceding his famous call to “open this gate!” and “tear down this wall!” (2). Reagan concluded the previous paragraph by referencing Gorbachev’s efforts to change the Soviet system, “We welcome change and openness; for we believe that freedom and security go together, that the advance of human liberty can only strengthen the cause of world peace.” Prior to the two famous phrases, he then said, “There is one sign that the

Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace” (2). Reagan recognized that there was a risk that the focus on arms control could be perceived as weakness, that the Soviets might conclude that he had changed and was no longer the forceful anti-Soviet leader of 1981-1983. With his famous lines at the Brandenburg Gate he made it clear that he had not changed, that he still opposed the Soviet system and that he still believed in deterrence.

Reagan’s optimistic worldview so defined his rhetoric and presidency that major news organizations such as *The New York Times* focused on it in editorial commentary following his death. It is important to consider how he could have been optimistic in 1981 and 1982, in the depths of a major recession and at a time of substantial tension with the Soviets. The answer to this puzzle is found in the third principle of Reagan’s Soviet rhetoric, his faith in democracy and the values of the Enlightenment. Reagan stated this faith most eloquently at Westminster when he admitted early in the speech that “Optimism comes less easily today” than it did in the 19th century, but then went on to argue that “democracy is not a fragile flower,” that all peoples of the world wanted to live in a society that was free, that “we live now at a turning point,” and that as long as we were “shy no longer” in speaking for democracy and the values of the Enlightenment, “a new age is not only possible but probably” (2, 3, 4, 5, 7).

Reagan was optimistic because he believed that democracy and capitalism would win out in the battle of ideas with any other system. In more or less developed form, a similar faith in democracy is found in all of the major Soviet speeches. For example at the Brandenburg Gate he said “there stands before the entire world one great and inescapable conclusion: Freedom leads to prosperity. Freedom replaces the ancient

hatreds among the nations with comity and peace. Freedom is the victor” (2).

Underlying all of Reagan’s Soviet rhetoric (and policy) was both a profound realism, a willingness to speak candidly about the nature of the Soviet system, but also an idealistic faith in what he labeled the “not a fragile flower” that is democracy. At the time, Reagan “was ridiculed by scholars who believed he was fooling himself about the weaknesses of communism.”⁴⁶ In actuality, Reagan was quite right about the underlying weakness in the Soviet regime. James Mann notes that “Above all, Reagan recognized that the Cold War was not a permanent state of affairs; that it could, one day or another, draw to a close.”⁴⁷ It was that faith in democratic ideals that made him optimistic at a time when pessimism and fear were the order of the day.

To this point, I have focused on Reagan’s commitment to three basic principles in his Soviet rhetoric. As I’ve noted there were differences in tone among these speeches, notably a muting of the criticism of the Soviets beginning in 1984. This change in tone was reflected in most of the Soviet speeches until the end of his administration, with the Brandenburg Gate speech as the most important exception. The administration also pushed for and succeeded in negotiating significant arms control agreements. Conservatives had been afraid of this potential development from the beginning. Quite early in his administration, fellow conservatives became fearful that Reagan was betraying conservative principles in pushing for arms control. James Reston noted that by 1982 there were “mutterings among his old buddies on the right” that he had “Europeanized, and even worse, almost Carterized American foreign policy.”⁴⁸ By the end of second term after groundbreaking agreements including one to eliminate all intermediate range nuclear weapons in Europe, most opposition to Reagan’s defense

policy came from the right, not the left. Diggins observes “Many of those who later credited Reagan with defeating communism had first claimed that he had lost the cold war.”⁴⁹ For example, George Will concluded in a column about the Washington summit in 1987 that the Reagan “administration may be opening that window [of nuclear vulnerability] wider and jamming it open permanently with the coming agreement.”⁵⁰ Will also argued that “the lesson of this summit is that the Soviets can have détente whenever it suits them, cost-free, not even paying a rhetorical price.”⁵¹ Conservatives were never comfortable with arms negotiations with the Soviets. Peggy Noonan admits that she “thought he [Reagan] was wrong to gamble on Gorbachev” and concludes that the president was simply lucky in the way that things turned out, stating “Sometimes the shrewdest thing is to not be too skeptical, not be too ‘wise.’”⁵² Richard Reeves explains that “as his Presidency ended they [conservatives] had accused him of adopting liberal-style détente.”⁵³

Early in his administration, liberals worried that Reagan’s aggressive policies might lead to nuclear war. At the end of his administration, conservatives worried that Reagan had lost the Cold War by “Carterizing” American defense policy. What neither group understood was that Reagan was a pragmatist who was willing to make concessions to lessen the risk of war as long as those pragmatic concessions were consistent with the basic principles undergirding his Soviet policy and rhetoric. After harshly labeling the Soviet system as evil and initiating a defense buildup that he felt both strengthened deterrence and demonstrated American resolve, Reagan was much more willing to negotiate than he had been in the early days of his presidency. Reagan was a

pragmatist, but only within the boundaries set by the three basic principles that guided his Soviet policy and rhetoric.

Together, Reagan's commitment to principle and pragmatism enacted a rhetorical theory of the Cold War.⁵⁴ Unlike other presidents, Reagan was focused not merely on managing the conflict, but on ending it. He famously said that his ultimate strategy was —“We win, they lose.”⁵⁵ In Reagan's rhetorical theory of how the Cold War could be managed and ultimately ended, harsh language was needed to get the attention of the Soviets and demonstrate his credibility. Reagan explained the rationale for this harsh language in comments introducing the Westminister speech in a book containing texts of a number of his most important speeches:

In retrospect, I am amazed that our national leaders had not philosophically and intellectually taken on the principles of Marxist-Leninism. We were always too worried we would offend the Soviets if we struck at anything so basic. Well so what? Marxist-Leninist thought is an empty cupboard. Everyone knew it by the 1980s, but no one was saying it. I decided to articulate a few of these things.⁵⁶

The furious reaction from *Tass* and other Soviet sources to the “evil empire,” Westminister and other speeches indicates that the speeches succeeded. *Tass* stated following the Westminister speech that Reagan had “slandered the Soviet Union,” with “Crude anti-Sovietism,” and was backing “fascist regimes.”⁵⁷ According to Richard Pipes, a Harvard Professor and Soviet expert working on the National Security Council staff, Reagan commented after being told of the Russian reaction to the speech, “So we touched a nerve.”⁵⁸ The Soviet response to the “evil empire” speech was even stronger.⁵⁹

Reagan understood that he needed to convince the Soviets that he meant what he

said and could not be bullied. And so he again and again made clear his view of the Soviet regime. In reemphasizing that point in the Brandenburg Gate speech, Reagan did more than utter an applause line. He was making clear to Gorbachev and the world that the turn toward arms control did not represent weakening resolve. As R.W. Apple observed following Reagan's death, "After that [the Brandenburg gate speech], it would have been hard for Mikhail S. Gorbachev to believe that Americans had lost their will to resist Soviet power and he joined with Mr. Reagan to bring the long struggle to a conclusion."⁶⁰ Reagan's harsh language toward the Soviets was not gratuitous; it was both what Reagan believed and a coldly calculated strategy to send a message. From the reaction of the Soviets, it is clear that the message was received.

Similarly, the defense buildup was more important as a rhetorical device than it was as a military policy since Reagan had no intention of actually using the weapons. As I've argued, Reagan was desperately afraid of nuclear war and was quite risk averse about putting American forces in harm's way. Rather, the arms buildup was a rhetorical device designed to persuade the Soviets that they could not win the Cold War and that real arms control was in their self interest. Jack Matlock, concludes that "Without the military and economic pressure from the United States it is most unlikely that Gorbachev could have persuaded his generals to acquiesce to the arms cuts the Soviet Union itself desperately needed, and without which internal reform would have been unthinkable."⁶¹ Reagan not only used words as a kind of weapon, but of equal importance used weapons to send a message demonstrating the credibility of his words.

Finally, Reagan believed that ultimately, the power of the democratic ideal would lead to the demise of the Soviet Union. Larry Diamond's comment that in the

Westminster Address “Reagan grasped the deepening crisis and impending demise of Soviet communism [and] . . . understood the possibilities—and the moral imperative—for the United States to lead the way in promoting freedom” applies to all of his Soviet rhetoric.⁶² As John Lewis Gaddis, perhaps the most distinguished historian of the Cold War, notes, Reagan “saw that the Soviet Union had lost its ideological appeal, that it was losing whatever economic strength it once had, and that its survival as a superpower could no long be taken for granted” and asked “Why not hasten the disintegration?”⁶³

Reagan advisor Martin Anderson claims that Reagan had “a grand strategy” which was “never fully articulated that he relentlessly pursued. The strategy was simple and elegant, and quite radical.”⁶⁴ Anderson adds that “Reagan was convinced they [the Soviets] would act in their own best interests, that the Soviets would always do the right thing if they had to. He believed the trick was in getting them to recognize what was in their best interests, and demonstrating clearly to them that they had no other alternatives.”⁶⁵ Anderson cites a conversation with Reagan during the 1980 presidential campaign,

The only way the Soviets will stop their drive for military superiority is when they realized that we are willing to go all out in an arms race. Right now people say there is an arms race, but the Soviets are the only ones racing. If we release the forces of our economy to produce the weapons we need the Soviets will never be able to keep up. And then, and only then, will they become reasonable and willing to seriously consider reductions in nuclear weapons.⁶⁶

Reagan made a similar point in his autobiography, stating “I wanted to go to the negotiating table and end the madness of the MAD policy, but to do that, I knew America

first had to upgrade its military capabilities so that we would be able to negotiate with the Soviets from a position of *strength*, not weakness.” Reagan then recalled his comment to Gorbachev in Geneva, “We can agree to reduce arms---or we can continue the arms race, *which I think you know you can’t win*. We won’t stand by and let you maintain weapon superiority over us. But together we can try to do something about ending the arms race.”⁶⁷ Matlock describes Reagan’s strategy:

But in Reagan’s mind his policy was consistent throughout. He wanted to reduce the threat of war, to convince the Soviet leaders that cooperation could serve the Soviet people better than confrontation, and to encourage openness and democracy in the Soviet Union. He was convinced that a free people with a say in their government’s policies would be no threat to their neighbors or to the United States. Unlike many of his advisers, he believed that, if given the chance, he could convince the Soviet leaders that these goals were in the Soviet Union’s interest—provided, and only provided, they came to understand that military competition with the United States was a losing strategy.⁶⁸

Matlock concludes that Reagan “had no secret strategy, but described every element of his policy to the public” including “telling the truth about the Soviet Union, restoring U.S. and allied strength, deterring aggression, and establishing reciprocity.”⁶⁹

In his rhetorical theory of the Cold War, Reagan combined an intense “mistrust of Soviet intentions,” with the understanding “that the Soviet Union was not ten feet tall.”⁷⁰ Based on this understanding, Reagan “accurately assessed the weakness of the Soviet Union and exploited it” with both words and deeds.⁷¹ This allowed him to be both a hard-line realist and an optimist at the same time. Reagan’s optimism, notably at

Westminster, was quite different from the worldview of both liberals and especially conservatives who “thought it impossible” to defeat the Soviet Union.⁷² Reagan did not foresee “the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989,”⁷³ but he understood that the balance of power and more importantly ideas was against it. Matlock explains “It was the Communist system and the ideology that inspired it that lost the competition with liberal democracy and capitalism.”⁷⁴

Rhetoric was at the core of this effort. Gaddis notes that Reagan “used his theatrical skills to build confidence at home, to spook senescent Kremlin leaders, and after a young and vigorous one had replaced them, to win his trust and enlist his cooperation in the task of changing the Soviet Union.” Gaddis adds that this approach was not merely good politics, but was based on real understanding of the situation, concluding that “Reagan was as skillful a politician as the nation had seen for many years, and one of its sharpest grand strategists ever. His strength lay in his ability to see beyond complexity to simplicity. And what he saw was simply this: that because détente perpetuated---and had been meant to perpetuate—the Cold War, only killing détente could end the Cold War.”⁷⁵ Reagan’s “grand strategy” did not win the Cold War, but as Mann concludes, it “helped create the climate in which the Cold War could end.”⁷⁶ Diggins draws a similar conclusion, emphasizing the key role that rhetoric played in the endgame: “Reagan was an idealist who put more trust in words than in weapons” and consequently “The cold war, having begun in fear, ended in trust.”⁷⁷ Gaddis echoes this point, concluding that the Cold War “began with a return of fear and ended in a triumph of hope, an unusual trajectory for great historical upheavals. It could easily have been otherwise.”⁷⁸ He adds, “It was Reagan more than anyone else, who made that happen.”⁷⁹

It was with his words and with policies that he used to back up the message in his words that Reagan played a key role in ending the Cold War peacefully.

Principle and Pragmatism in Domestic Rhetoric

A commitment to principle and pragmatism similar to that found in Reagan's Soviet rhetoric and policies is also evident in Reagan's domestic policies and rhetoric. The best starting place for illustrating this point is the First Inaugural. Effective inaugurations enunciate the political principles on which the administration intends to govern, but are not too specific about policy, leaving room for pragmatic modification.⁸⁰ Reagan enacted both the principle and the pragmatism in the address.

The enactment of principle in the inaugural was obvious at the time and is now universally recognized. The address is remembered primarily for its statement of small government principles including a call to reduce regulation, cut the size of the Federal Government, and reduce taxes, a set of policies Reagan neatly summarized with the phrase "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."⁸¹ Immediate reaction to the speech focused on these basic principles in Reagan's agenda, with commentators labeling the address "a conservative counterpoint to Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'New Deal.'"⁸² Academic commentators and Reagan biographers continue to support the view that in the address Reagan presented small-government views that had been at the core of his domestic policy since his entry into public life.⁸³ For example, Diggins argues that in the first inaugural, "Reagan exhorted Americans not to look to government for answers to their problems, because government itself was the problem."⁸⁴

Given the statement of small-government principles in the inaugural, it is unsurprising that even to this day Reagan critics often reference Reagan's attack on government in the first inaugural as the ideological core of his administration. For example, Alan Wolfe suggests that that Reagan was essentially "engaged in a direct dialogue with [Franklin] Roosevelt," when he argued that government was the problem, not the solution, to the economic crisis facing the nation in 1981.⁸⁵ The view that Reagan saw government as the problem rather than the solution is so common that writing of Barack Obama's inaugural address, Peter Baker argues that Obama "seemed at times to be having a virtual dialogue with his predecessors," and that in particular Obama "seemed to take issue with Ronald Reagan, who declared when he took office in 1981 that 'government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.'"⁸⁶

There is no question that the inaugural defined the basic principles of Reagan's domestic policy. Reagan's commitment to small government ideology throughout his two terms in office should be obvious. The president was particularly successful in cutting taxes, especially in his first year in office, and limiting Federal regulation, especially environmental regulation. The influence of Reagan's general principles in relation to domestic policy on conservative thought is so great that those principles arguably became the default condition for political discussion for conservatives for the next twenty-plus years. For example, former Republican Congressman Mickey Edwards summarized the conservative "operating philosophy . . . [as based on] two essentials: First, government is bad (it's 'the problem'); second big government is the worst."⁸⁷ Reagan's influence is obvious.

However, labeling Reagan as simply an opponent of government is far too simple. As with Soviet policy and rhetoric, Reagan combined a commitment to principle with pragmatic adaptation of policies and rhetoric to the circumstances of the moment. It was the combination of the commitment to principle with the pragmatic adaptation that made him so successful in selling his agenda to the general public. One sign of the pragmatic adaptation is that Reagan's domestic policies were a major disappointment to many conservatives. In their view, Reagan did not follow through on eliminating large portions of the Federal Government, did not substantially reduce the size of Federal programs, and worst of all, agreed to support significant tax increases after the cuts of 1981. Reagan disappointed some conservatives because while he constantly stated a commitment to small-government principles, he also made pragmatic compromises when needed because of political or policy needs.

It is important not to overstate Reagan's pragmatism. Reagan reduced the growth of government and cut regulations, especially in the environment and health and safety, but he did not fundamentally reduce government itself. Larry Schwab notes that "most of the major sections of the budget remained at about the same level as a percentage of the total federal budget and GNP" and "all the major social programs survived and compared to 1979, their budgets were many billions of dollars larger in 1988."⁸⁸ Sean Wilentz summarizes the argument that the "Reagan Revolution" wasn't really very revolutionary: "Reagan utterly failed in pursuit of his greatest stated initial goal, reducing the size of the federal government, and in modifying the basic structures of the New Deal's social benefits. The number of government workers actually increased during Reagan's administration faster than it had during Jimmy Carter's." He adds that "total

expenditures on social welfare programs, including Social Security and Medicare, rose between 1981 and 1989” and observes that total Federal taxes consumed 19.4 percent of national income in 1981 and 19.3 percent in 1989.⁸⁹

It was his failure to reduce the size of government that made conservatives particularly unhappy with the arc of the “Reagan Revolution,” leading some to question whether Reagan himself was a Reaganite. Wilentz quotes William A. Niskanen, a member of the Council of Economic Advisors during the Reagan administration and later Chair of the very conservative think tank, the Cato Institute, as arguing simply “there was no Reagan revolution.”⁹⁰ Niskanen’s statement echoes the judgment of many conservative activists, a conclusion reflected in the title of Schwab’s book, *The Illusion of a Conservative Reagan Revolution*. Reagan was committed to small government principles, but unlike many of his supporters, who saw themselves as true Reaganites committed to dramatically cutting government, Reagan recognized the importance of pragmatically adapting his rhetoric and policies to the situation. Reagan “was practiced in political compromise,”⁹¹ and willing to work with Democrats to enact the core principles of his domestic agenda, even if that required tax increases or protecting programs that he favored curtailing.

Reagan’s mixture of principle and pragmatism on domestic policy should not have come as a surprise to anyone. In addition to the clear statement of principle in the First Inaugural, Reagan forecast a willingness to pragmatically adapt his administration’s policies to circumstances.⁹² Initially, it is important to note that Reagan’s call to reduce government, taxes, and regulation was based in pragmatism, not a libertarian rejection of government. In paragraph eleven, he said:

Well, this administration's objective will be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy that provides equal opportunities for all Americans with no barriers born of bigotry or discrimination. Putting America back to work means putting all Americans back to work. Ending inflation means freeing all Americans from the terror of runaway living costs. All must share in the productive work of this "new beginning," and all must share in the bounty of a revived economy. With the idealism and fair play which are at the core of our system and our strength, we can have a strong and prosperous America, at peace with itself and the world.

Here, Reagan justified less government, not because government action was by its nature wrong, but because he believed that cutting back on regulation and taxes would help all Americans.

Reagan also made it quite clear that American society must provide opportunity for all:

We shall reflect the compassion that is so much a part of your [the American people's] makeup. How can we love our country and not love our countrymen; and loving them, reach out a hand when they fall, heal them when they're sick, and provide opportunity to make them self-sufficient so they will be equal in fact and not just in theory. (19)

Reagan's inclusive focus on all Americans is notable. The phrase "provide opportunity to make them self-sufficient so they will be equal in fact and not just in theory" is particularly revealing. Reagan obviously thought that some government welfare programs had harmed the poor, but he also believed that society must "provide opportunity" so that all could be both "self-sufficient" and "equal."

Reagan did not hide his pragmatism. It is important to remember that Reagan did not attack government per se. He said “In this present crisis” government was not the solution, but in fact the problem. But his phrasing left open the possibility that in a different circumstance government action might be needed. A few paragraphs after his attack on government action, Reagan made this point clear:

Now, so there will be no misunderstanding, it’s not my intention to do away with government. It is rather to make it work—work with us, not over us; to stand by our side, not ride on our back. Government can and must provide opportunity, not smother it; foster productivity, not stifle it. (14)

In this passage, Reagan did not sound like an anti-government activist bent on “starving the beast.” Rather, he implied that in some circumstances activist government could be defended in order to “provide opportunity,” “foster productivity,” or “make it [government] work.” Reagan then amplified his point two paragraphs later when he referenced “unnecessary and excessive growth of government,” a phrasing that suggested that there could be cases in which growth of government would be neither “unnecessary” nor “excessive.” A few paragraphs later, he referred to “restoring the balance between the various levels of government” in order to achieve “Progress” that “may be slow, measured in inches and feet, not miles, but” that would occur (21).

The key point is that Reagan announced from the very beginning both the conservative principles that defined his domestic policy and also a commitment to pragmatic adaption of those principles to circumstance. Both liberals and conservatives clearly heard the commitment to principle, cheering conservatives and angering liberals. Neither heard the commitment to pragmatism, creating a situation in which many

conservatives would become quite discontented with Reagan's domestic policies and liberals would be surprised that they were able to sometimes find common ground with the president.

The scope of this essay does not allow a comprehensive analysis of Reagan's domestic rhetoric to demonstrate the presence of both small government principles and pragmatic adaption throughout his two terms. Fortunately, a complete analysis of Reagan's radio speeches from both terms in office can be used to test the claim developed here. The radio speeches provide a snapshot of the rhetorical trajectory of Reagan's presidency. Because they were presented every week from 1982 to the end of his second term, they constitute a good sample of his rhetorical practice. The analysis of these speeches reveals that Reagan supported domestic policies based in small government principles, but also defended them as both moderate and reformative with almost no "explicitly anti-government rhetoric."⁹³ Reagan's rhetoric in these speeches enacted both principle and pragmatism. This pattern is also present in his post-presidential rhetoric.⁹⁴ The Reagan that is evident in the arc of his rhetoric and policies was committed to both small government principles and also pragmatic policy adaptation and when necessary compromise, even on a core concern such as taxes.

The presence of both principle and pragmatism in Reagan's rhetoric is quite important. A great deal of Reagan's appeal in domestic affairs can be traced to this combination. He obviously appealed to those who thought that government had gotten too big and become too intrusive. But Reagan did not treat politics as a war on government. He defended his administration's policies as fundamentally reformative, an

approach that appealed to moderates and independents who thought that government had gotten too big, but were not opposed to government per se.

Reagan's commitment to both pragmatism and principle was also a key source of his famous optimism. Conservative rhetoric attacking government is often quite negative. The phrase "starve the beast" is a good example of this approach. While appealing to true believers, such language does not lend itself to presenting an optimistic message to moderates and others, many of whom are neither actively involved in politics nor especially interested in or informed about public policy. Reagan's commitment to both principle and pragmatism in domestic policy allowed him to appeal to both groups. By consistently defending small government principle, he engaged the conservative movement, but by presenting the principles as fundamentally reformative and embracing policy adaptation, he was able to present an optimistic worldview to moderates in both parties, independents, and others who were not especially involved in the ideological struggles of the time.

Reagan's commitment to small government principles also gave him the credibility that he needed to make practical concessions when necessary. Mickey Edwards, who "directed the joint House-Senate policy advisory committees for the Reagan presidential campaign," argued recently that Reagan "was not rejecting government, he was calling . . . for better management of government, for wiser decisions."⁹⁵ Reagan was able to sell this approach to conservatives because his commitment to small-government principles gave him the credibility he needed to convince them that any given compromise was needed to serve the larger small-government agenda..

Overall, Reagan's commitment to principle and pragmatism in both rhetoric and governance made him a very appealing figure to many. Alan Wolfe got at Reagan's appeal when he noted, "Disenchanted with liberalism, Americans voted for Ronald Reagan and then continued to love him because he never took the conservatism that he preached all that seriously."⁹⁶ Diggins comment that Reagan was "a political romantic impatient with the status quo" who "did not rescue America from liberalism . . . [but] reaffirmed it"⁹⁷ is directly on point. Diggins means that by cutting the growth of government and limiting regulation, Reagan actually ended up protecting the core of the liberal approach, especially the key social programs from the New Deal and the Great Society. Lee Edwards, a Distinguished Fellow in Conservative Thought at the Heritage Foundation, makes a similar argument, claiming that Reagan "was no radical libertarian with a copy of *Atlas Shrugged* on his desk, but a traditional conservative guided by the prudential reasoning of *The Federalist*. Reagan was, in fact a modern federalist, echoing James Madison's call for a balance between the authority of the national and state governments."⁹⁸

Edwards reference to Madison is particularly apt. Like Madison, Reagan had great faith in both the American people and in the democratic process itself. This faith was at the core of his famous optimism. Reagan was a practical politician who recognized that pragmatic compromise was sometimes necessary to carry forward his agenda. His willingness to compromise frustrated true believers within the conservative movement, but it also made him a very effective political leader.

Misunderstanding Reagan

Reagan did not hide his commitment to principle and pragmatism in both foreign and domestic policy. In major speeches he made clear both strains in his thought. Nowhere is this more evident than in the inaugural where only four paragraphs separate his statement that “government is the problem,” from his explanation that he intended to “make it [government] work.” As I demonstrated at greater length earlier in this essay, both the principle and the pragmatism were also on display in the Soviet speeches. And yet in both domestic and Soviet policy, that is not what partisans heard. In the coverage of the inaugural at the time, for example, there were many references to the attack on government, but none that I have been able to find about his aim at reforming government to make it work.

When Reagan made pragmatic statements in both domestic and foreign policy, both supporters and opponents viewed the statements as something he had to say politically, but did not in fact mean. It is for this reason that many of his supporters became so unhappy when he did not fundamentally reduce government and when he did exactly what he had promised to do in conducting arms control negotiations with the Soviets. They had viewed those comments as “mere” rhetoric, not reflecting the real Reagan. Liberals, in contrast, were always both delighted and surprised when Reagan compromised on domestic policy or followed through on his commitment to reduce tensions with the Soviet Union. Neither group had believed that Reagan really meant it when he endorsed those actions. In both his foreign and domestic policy rhetoric, Reagan’s supporters and opponents heard what they expected to hear and then were surprised or angered, when Reagan in fact did what he said he would do. They shouldn’t

have been surprised; he had made his commitment to principle and pragmatism quite clear from the beginning.

It could be argued at least relative to domestic policy that the compromises were forced on Reagan. In relation to the Soviets, the record simply makes that claim untenable. While it is certainly plausible that Democrats in Congress pushed Reagan to make pragmatic concessions on various domestic policies, it is important to recognize that he in fact governed exactly as his rhetoric said he would. Reagan argued for a smaller government not based on libertarian principles, but in order to pursue reformative ends and strengthen the economy. That was precisely what he said he would do in the inaugural and that balance of principle and pragmatism defines the domestic policies of the administration. It is a supreme irony that despite the agreement of partisans on the left and right, commentators, and academics that Reagan was the “Great Communicator” of his age, none of these groups really listened to what he had to say.

Authenticity

Authenticity also played a key role in Reagan’s appeal. One of the most obvious characteristics defining Reagan’s rhetoric from the Goldwater campaign in 1964 through the post-presidential years is that Reagan always sounded like Reagan. In more than twenty-five years of studying Reagan, I’ve been struck again and again by the continuity in tone and content of his rhetoric, particularly after he became a national leader and no longer was focused exclusively on partisans on the right. Such continuity in style and content is certainly not common among politicians, including presidents. I argue that this

continuity in substance and style played a key role in creating a sense of rhetorical authenticity that was at the core of his relationship with the American people.

While it is widely recognized that “Political authenticity is . . . central to contemporary American political campaigns,”⁹⁹ it is difficult to provide a precise definition of the concept. What is clear is that candidates who present what the public comes to believe is a “‘real’ or genuine political image”¹⁰⁰ are perceived to be authentic, while those who do not create that sense of who they really are lack that sense of authenticity. When any politician lacks a consistent voice, it is inevitable that many will doubt their authenticity. That was never a problem for Reagan. How did he do this? A story about his successor provides a hint. Peter Robinson, the primary author of the Brandenburg Gate and other important speeches, writes of riding with then Vice President Bush on Air Force Two to a major speech and watching as the Vice President read through a speech text that was on note cards, taking out some and reordering others, in the minutes before a speech.¹⁰¹ The result was unfortunate from Robinson’s perspective. It is no wonder that Bush lacked a consistent rhetorical persona and had trouble connecting with the American people.

In contrast, Reagan always sounded like Reagan. The explanation for this consistency is that Reagan was closely involved in the speechwriting process. To this day, despite an avalanche of evidence to the contrary, many continue to view Reagan as a mere actor, a presenter of the ideas and words of others, “a detached figurehead, a cipher for his advisers.”¹⁰² In the words of Clark Clifford, he was “an amiable dunce.”¹⁰³ This view was still more common during his presidency when he was labeled *The Acting President*.¹⁰⁴ The perspective that Michael Deaver and other aides “deployed . . .

[Reagan's] sunny aloofness with a P.R. man's acumen, thereby elevating the former 'Grade B movie actor' to Great Communicator status" is still common.¹⁰⁵

In reality, there is a great deal of evidence that Reagan was a gifted writer and particularly in relation to Soviet policy quite knowledgeable and involved in the policy-making process. The view of Reagan as an empty suit has been discredited as Reagan's own writings have been published, including scripts for radio addresses, stories, handwritten letters to ordinary citizens and the famous, and an extensive diary.¹⁰⁶ In his introduction to *The Reagan Diaries*, Douglas Brinkley notes that the diary reveals that "Reagan worked hard, coming fully prepared to each difficult decision. His executive ability, and the work habits that went along with it, are evident throughout the diaries."¹⁰⁷

In particular, Reagan was quite involved in the drafting of major speeches. In a way Reagan's involvement began even before he saw the first draft of a speech or otherwise gave guidance to the speechwriting office. Reagan's speechwriters routinely began the process of drafting significant speeches, by researching Reagan's old speeches for material. For example, the primary author of the Westminster Address, Tony Dolan explained in a memo to the President that his first draft of the speech was "based on my own research into what you have been saying about these issues—some of it going back as far as your 1966 televised debate with Robert Kennedy—your point about our nuclear monopoly in the fifties, for example."¹⁰⁸ Thus, even before he had seen a page, given direction to an aide, or reviewed a memo, Reagan played a role in shaping the final project.

Memoirs and other material from important members of the speechwriting staff verify that that Reagan was significantly involved in the speechwriting process. For

example, Robinson, recalled that “the president edited every draft the speech-writers sent to him, condensing materials, enlivening flat passages and firming up arguments.”¹⁰⁹ It is notable that Reagan’s speechwriters generally viewed Reagan as his own best speechwriter and saw their own role as channeling his views.¹¹⁰

The speechwriting files at the Reagan Library, especially the Handwriting Files, which contain drafts with Reagan’s handwriting on them, verify the president’s involvement in drafting significant speeches from his presidency, especially in the first term.¹¹¹ In particular, Reagan was quite involved in the drafting of the most significant Soviet speeches. For instance, he played a key role in the drafting of the Westminster Address. He wrote eight of the fifty-six paragraphs of the speech and edited, sometimes quite heavily, another 26 paragraphs.¹¹² In this case, Reagan either edited or wrote almost 60% of the speech.

While much of Reagan’s editing of the Westminster drafts was stylistic, to make the speech read better, he was more than a stylist. For example, in a paragraph where the Dolan draft had referred to the Soviets as “our adversary,” Reagan marked out the phrase and replaced it with “totalitarianism,” thus shifting the message from one of great power rivalry to principled opposition to totalitarian governments. Reagan also focused the ideological message when he added to what became paragraph 49 of the address, a reference to “a plan and a hope for the long term—the march of freedom and democracy will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history.” Here, Reagan alluded to and subverted Trotsky’s comment that capitalism and democracy were destined for the “dustbin” as part of his argument that in fact the eventual victory of democracy over totalitarianism was inevitable.¹¹³

Reagan continued to play a role in drafting and revising major speeches till the end of his administration. For example, as I noted earlier Reagan was quite involved in the editing process for the Brandenburg Gates speech, intervening on several occasions to keep the sharp critique of the Soviet Union in the speech.¹¹⁴ Reagan also played a key role in the drafting of the “evil empire” speech.¹¹⁵ It is important to note that Reagan was involved in more than the major speeches. This point is quite evident in the files on the radio speeches at the Reagan library. Reagan wrote five of the first ten radio speeches himself. Of the 28 radio speeches in 1982, Reagan either wrote or edited 17 of them. This pattern continued throughout his administration with Reagan writing or substantially editing 54 speeches and making stylistic edits in another 104 speeches. The Handwriting Files only contain drafts of 178 of the 330 total radio speeches. It is notable that Reagan in one way or another edited 158 of those 178 speeches. It is possible that he was involved in the writing process for other speeches as well and the records did not survive.¹¹⁶

The key point is that Reagan always sounded like Reagan because he shaped the speechwriting process. He shaped the process both with his direction and edits as president, but perhaps more importantly because the entire corpus of his public rhetoric provided models for speechwriters to copy. The material in the Handwriting Files makes it clear that Reagan was a gifted writer, an even better editor, and in contrast to his image, a person who was involved with ideas. Citing the judgment of someone seemingly unlikely to praise Reagan, Senator Edward Kennedy, Sean Wilentz concludes that “Reagan was an effective president because he took ideas seriously.”¹¹⁷ The

speechwriting files demonstrate this seriousness and also explain how he was able to project authenticity. He did that by always speaking with the same voice.

Conclusion

News coverage of any president tends to focus on tactical political decisions and questions of short-term gain or loss. Much of the early scholarship on Reagan's rhetoric took this perspective and focused on the rhetorical strategies and tactics the president used to transform himself into the "Great Communicator." The best of this research identified Reagan's capacity to tap into American myth, especially stories about ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things within the American Dream and stories linking the contemporary era to American Exceptionalism.

In this essay, in contrast, my focus has not been on tactics or strategy, but on the underlying principles that Reagan advocated, along with his commitment to pragmatic compromise on policy. Understanding the tactics and strategies that he used to support those principles is important, but it is still more important to understand the substance of what he said. As I have demonstrated, the substance of what he said, the combination of commitment to principle and pragmatic adaptation to the moment, was a major part of Reagan's appeal. He consistently supported a set of principles in both foreign and domestic policy. On those principles, he didn't compromise. But on the details of policy and where principle was not involved, he was quite willing to compromise. Thus, he came across as principled, but also pragmatic, reasonable and realistic. The balance of principle and pragmatism in Reagan's rhetoric and policies reflected his understanding

that politics did not have to be a zero-sum game, a death match between conservatism and liberalism. This was another source of his famous optimism.

Reagan was able to maintain the balance between principle and pragmatism because of his perceived authenticity. The people came to trust that Reagan would always be Reagan. That perceived authenticity came in large part from his own involvement in crafting the words that he spoke. Although there is no way to know for certain, it is certainly plausible that the scandals and other problems of his second term, occurred in part because he was less involved in creating policy and rhetoric than in the first. There was a notable fall off in his participation in the drafting process evident in the Speechwriting and Handwriting files in the second term, with the exception of the most important speeches, such as the address at the Brandenburg Gate. He was no longer taking “ideas seriously” to the same degree as earlier and problems multiplied.

All presidents have political principles and all presidents are pushed by the politics and events of the moment to make compromise. Stubbornness in sticking to principle and rejecting compromise can destroy a presidency. Yet, there is a danger associated with valuing pragmatism more highly than principle as well. A fundamentally pragmatic president such as Bill Clinton can shift topics and tactics almost instantly to focus on issues of the moment. It was this capacity that allowed Clinton to so successfully use “triangulation” after the 1994 mid-term election to salvage his presidency. A commitment to pragmatism first gives the president a great many options for maintaining public support at any moment and provides a certain rhetorical nimbleness.

In contrast, a president like Reagan who puts principle first, but is willing to compromise within the bounds of principle, has less room to adapt. Reagan would not stray from his small government principles, nor from the principles guiding his Soviet policy. A president who puts principles first will have a consistent agenda and little choice but to fight for that agenda using the same themes and strategies again and again. He or she will stick to those themes because they represent core beliefs. Adaptation is possible at the margins, but only at the margins. The choice to put principles first provides much less room for adaptation than for a president who emphasizes pragmatism more than principle, but the focus on principle may allow them to accomplish real substantive change. That certainly was true for Reagan.

In the short term, there are significant limits to a rhetorical approach that puts principle ahead of pragmatic adaptation. Reagan ran up against those limits in the 1982 midterm elections at the height of the economic downturn. In that election, the “great communicator” wasn’t very great. Writing shortly before the election, Haynes Johnson noted that “Ronald Reagan has alienated just about every significant bloc of voters necessary to form an American political majority.” Johnson added that “Even those who remain solidly for him, mainly more affluent whites, business executives and other professionals, widely agree that his views on defense spending are out of line. They want to see a better balance struck between domestic and military spending and often express concern that he seems extreme and too inflexible.” Johnson claimed the American people were “disappointed or disenchanted” with Reagan and said that “fear and frustration are the emotions most encountered” among people dealing with the recession.¹¹⁸ In this situation, most Republican candidates for Congress were “keeping a

studied distance from Reagan and his policies” and when the president spoke “the response to Reagan was lukewarm at best.”¹¹⁹ In this context, Reagan’s approval rating fell to 41 percent, with “erosion of support for Reagan and the Republicans . . . in almost all demographic groups,” a development tied to the “decline in economic confidence.”¹²⁰ In the fall of 1982, the public didn’t much like Reagan’s rhetoric or his policies, but Reagan’s commitment to principle first gave him little option but to continue defending his administration’s policies and calling for the nation to “stay the course.”¹²¹ In 1982, that didn’t work very well, but Reagan’s commitment to principle gave him no other option.

In the long-term however, the approach putting principle first, but being willing to pragmatically adapt at the policy level, can have immense value as long as events provide support. That was what happened with Reagan beginning at the end of 1983. With the economic revival, Reagan’s rhetoric again became effective and it soon became “morning again” in America.

¹ Adam Clymer, “Reagan Faces Potential Problems, But is Viewed as Holding Strength,” *The New York Times*, December 25, 1981, A1.

² Mary E. Stuckey, *Playing the Game: The Presidential Rhetoric of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 89. Conservatives view Reagan as similar to Franklin D. Roosevelt in terms of his ability to move the nation. See for example Dinesh D’Souza, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 249.

³ “Ronald Reagan,” *New York Times* 7 June 2004: A28

⁴ Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

⁵ Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), 209.

⁶ Among the most notable analyses of Reagan's ability to use narrative and myth are Craig A. Smith, "Mister Reagan's Neighborhood: Rhetoric and National Unity," *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 52 (1987): 219-239; William Lewis, "Telling America's Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 277-300. In an essay that builds on the insights of Smith and Lewis that I co-authored with John Jones, we argued that Reagan retold an individualistic variant of the American Dream and contrasted that with a more community oriented variant in the rhetoric of Barack Obama. See Robert C. Rowland and John Jones, "Recasting the American Dream and American Politics: Barack Obama's Keynote Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 93, (2007): 425-448. There also has been significant work on a number of Reagan's most important speeches. For a sample of this research see Richard J. Jensen, *Reagan at Bergen-Belsen and Bitburg* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2008); Mary Stuckey, *Slipping the Surly Bonds: Reagan's Challenger Address* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2006); Kurt Ritter, "Ronald Reagan and 'The Speech': The Rhetoric of Public Relations Politics," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 32 (1968): 50-58; Robert L. Ivie, "Speaking 'Common Sense' about the Soviet Threat: Reagan's Rhetorical Stance," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 48 (1984): 39-50; Edward Schiappa, "The Rhetoric of Nukespeak," *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 253-272; G. Thomas Goodnight, "Ronald Reagan's Re-formulation of the Rhetoric of War: Analysis of the 'Zero Option,' 'Evil Empire,' and 'Star Wars' Addresses," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 390-414; B. Wayne Howell, "Ronald Reagan's Address at Moscow State University: A Rhetoric of Conciliation and Subversion," *Southern Communication Journal* 68 (2003): 107-120; Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate: Moral clarity Tempered by Pragmatism," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9 (2006): 21-50; John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland, "Reagan at Moscow State University: Consubstantiality Underlying Conflict," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10 (2007), 77-106; Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, *Reagan at Westminster: Foreshadowing the End of the Cold War* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2010); Robert C. Rowland and John Jones, "Entelechial and Reformative Symbolic Trajectories in Contemporary Conservatism: A Case Study of Reagan and Buchanan in Houston and Beyond," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2001): 55-84; Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "'Until Next Week': The Saturday Radio Addresses of Ronald Reagan," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*

32, no. 1. (2002): 84-110; John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland, "A Covenant-Affirming Jeremiad: The Post-presidential Ideological Appeals of Ronald Wilson Reagan," *Communication Studies* 56, no. 2 (2005): 157-174.

⁷ Charles Krauthammer, "The Ash Heap of History: President Reagan's Westminster Address 20 years Later." *Heritage Foundation*, June 3, 2002, 2. http://www.reagansheritage.org/html/reagan_panel.

⁸ See Peter Schweizer, *Reagan's War: The Epic Story of his Forty-Year Struggle and Final Triumph Over Communism* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 284; John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 353, 401.

⁹ Joshua Muravchik, "Neoconservatism's Future: It's Still the Only Game in Town," *Wall Street Journal*, October 3, 2007, 1-8. <http://opinionjournal.com/federation/feature/?id110010684>.

¹⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals," March 8, 1983, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm>. All future references to this speech will be noted in the text by page number, unless otherwise specified.

¹¹ Anthony Lewis, "Onward Christian Soldiers," *New York Times*, March 10, 1983, A27.

¹² *Christian Science Monitor*, "Reagan and Communism," March 10, 1983, 24; Francis X. Clines, "Reagan Plays the Issues in More than a Single Key," *New York Times*, March 13, 1983, 1; Haynes Johnson, "A Chilling Portrait of a World Never Imagined by Tocqueville," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1983, A3; Ian Davidson, "A Casual Revolution in U.S. Nuclear Strategy," *Financial Times*, March 28, 1983, 15; Juan Williams, "Writers of Speeches for President Claim Force is with Him," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1983, A10.

¹³ Joseph Harsch, "Are Russians Human," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 26, 1983, 22. Also see Colman McCarthy, "The Real Reagan: Can He See the Forest for the Trees," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1983, G7; Tom Wicker, "Two Dangerous Doctrines," *New York Times*, March 15, 1983, A25; David Broder and Paul Taylor, "Arms Proposal Could Have Effect Opposite from Intent; Less Chance Predicted for Pact with Soviets," *Washington Post*, March 30, 1983, A8.

¹⁴ Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005), xi.

¹⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 226, 227.

¹⁶ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 292, 323.

¹⁷ Joseph Cirincione, "The Greatest Threat to Us All," *New York Review of Books*, March 8, 2008, 20.

¹⁸ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 258.

¹⁹ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 35

²⁰ Lou Cannon and Carl M. Cannon, *Reagan's Disciple: George W. Bush's Troubled Quest for a Presidential Legacy* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 54.

²¹ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 12.

²² Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 12.

²³ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 354.

²⁴ Jack F. Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004), 78.

²⁵ Beth A. Fischer, "Reagan and the Soviets: Winning the Cold War?" in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 116.

²⁶ Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 8.

²⁷ Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal*, 35; Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations." January 16, 1984

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/11684a.htm>. All future references to this speech will be noted in the text by page number, unless otherwise specified.

²⁸ James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Viking, 2009), 344.

²⁹ William F. Buckley, "So Long, Evil Empire," *National Review*, July 8, 1988, 57.

³⁰ George Will, "How Reagan Changed America," *Newsweek*, January 9, 1989, 13.

³¹ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 192-193.

³² D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan*, 185.

³³ Edward Walsh, "Conservatives Praise President for Advocacy of Rights, Democracy," *Washington Post*, June 2, 1988, A28

³⁴ Reagan's most important speeches relating to the Soviet Union included a commencement address at his alma mater, Eureka College, the Westminster address to Parliament, the "Evil Empire" speech, a January 2004 address on Soviet policy, the Brandenburg Gate address and his speech at Moscow State. There is wide agreement that these speeches were his most important on the Soviets and reflect the evolution of his administration's policies and rhetoric. The "evil empire" and the January 16, 1984 speech were cited earlier. For the other speeches see Ronald Reagan, "Address to Members of the British Parliament," June 8, 1982, <http://reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/60882a.html>; Ronald Reagan, "Address at Commencement Exercises at Eureka College, Eureka, Illinois," May 9, 1982, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/50982a.htm>; Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security," March 23, 1983, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/32383d.htm>; Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin." June 12, 1987, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/061287d.htm>; Ronald Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University." May 31, 1988, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/053188b.htm>. All future references to these speeches are noted in the text by page number, unless otherwise specified.

³⁵ Peter Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan Changed My Life* (New York: Regan Books, 2003), 102; *Fox on the Record*, June 6, 2002.

³⁶ Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 344.

³⁷ Jennifer Hickey, "A Speech Heard 'Round the World," *Insight on the News*, November 29, 1999, 14.

³⁸ Hickey, "Round the World," 14.

³⁹ Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan*, 103.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan*, 103.

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- ⁴¹ See Jones and Rowland, "Reagan at Moscow State University," 77-106.
- ⁴² Ronald Reagan, "The President's News Conference," January 29, 1981, <http://reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12981b.html>, 3.
- ⁴³ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks to Members of the National Press Club on Arms Reduction and Nuclear Weapons," November 18, 1981, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/111881ahtml>, p.3. All future references to this speech are noted in the text by page number, unless otherwise specified.
- ⁴⁴ The files are available at the Reagan Library. See White House Staff Member and Office Files, Speechwriting, White House Office OF: Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Box 77. Dolan and Bakshian Draft, March 5, 1983, 14.
- ⁴⁵ Dolan and Bakshian Draft, March 5, 1983, 14.
- ⁴⁶ Schweizer, *Reagan's War*, 143.
- ⁴⁷ Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 343.
- ⁴⁸ James Reston, "Reagan's Grand Tour," *The New York Times*, June 2, 1982, A27.
- ⁴⁹ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 384.
- ⁵⁰ George Will, "'Gorbachev is a Disarming Fellow,'" *Washington Post*, December 9, 1987, A21.
- ⁵¹ George Will, "Drunk on Détente," *Washington Post*, December 13, 1987, M7.
- ⁵² Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era* (New York: Random House, 1990), 343, 344.
- ⁵³ Richard Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 489.
- ⁵⁴ This idea is developed in a different form in Rowland and Jones, *Reagan at Westminster*.
- ⁵⁵ Schweizer, *Reagan's War*, 106.
- ⁵⁶ Ronald Reagan, *Speaking My Mind: Selected Speech* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 108.
- ⁵⁷ Tass is quoted in John F. Burns, "Soviet Says Crusade," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1982,

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- ⁵⁸ Richard Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 200.
- ⁵⁹ Edmund Morris, *Dutch* (New York: Modern Library Publications, 1999), 473-474; Serge Schmemmann, "Soviet Says Reagan has 'Pathological Hatred,'" *New York Times*, March 10, 1983, A12.
- ⁶⁰ R.W. Apple, Jr., "Legacy of Reagan Now Begins the Test of Time," *New York Times*, June 11, 2004: A21.
- ⁶¹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, xiii.
- ⁶² Larry Diamond, "A Quarter-Century of Promoting Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 18 (4) (2007): 118
- ⁶³ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 226.
- ⁶⁴ Martin Anderson, *Revolution*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 72.
- ⁶⁵ Anderson, *Revolution*, 74.
- ⁶⁶ Anderson, *Revolution*, 74.
- ⁶⁷ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1990), 13-14, 15. Paul Lettow draws a similar conclusion about Reagan's policy. See Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest*, 17.
- ⁶⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, xiv.
- ⁶⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 6.
- ⁷⁰ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan*, 297.
- ⁷¹ Cannon and Cannon, *Reagan's Disciple*, 51.
- ⁷² Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 1.
- ⁷³ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 6.
- ⁷⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 316.
- ⁷⁵ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 197, 217.
- ⁷⁶ Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 346.
- ⁷⁷ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, , 412.
- ⁷⁸ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 266.
- ⁷⁹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 232, 233.

⁸⁰ See Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Inaugurating the Presidency," in *Form, Genre, and the Study of Political Discourse*, ed. Herbert W. Simons and Aram A. Aghazarian, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986, 203-225.

⁸¹ See Ronald Reagan, *Inaugural Address*, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12081a.htm>, paragraph 9. Subsequent references to this speech will be in parenthetical citations by paragraph numbers.

⁸² Leonard Silk, "Economic Scene; Reagan Policy: Quick Action," *New York Times*, January 21, 1981, D2. For similar comments see "Here Comes the Reagan Administration," *Business Week*, February 2, 1981, 80; "Taking His Time," *The Economist*, February 7, 1981, 11; "New President Pledges Swift Action to Improve Economy," *Washington Post*, January 21, 1981, A1; "Reagan Team Prepares 'Jolt' for Sluggish U.S. Economy," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 22, 1981; Lou Cannon, "Inaugural Address: Evocative Version of Campaign Message; The Inaugural Address: Enunciating a Basic Creed," *The Washington Post*, January 21, 1981, A29.

⁸³ Reeves, *President Reagan*, 6.

⁸⁴ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, 293. Also see Steven Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order* (Roseville: Prima, 2001), xv; Michael Schaller, *Reckoning with Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 35; Morris, *Dutch*, 411.

⁸⁵ Alan Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 239.

⁸⁶ Peter Baker, "A Milestone in History," *The New York Times*, 21 January 2009, P3.

⁸⁷ Mickey Edwards, "Reagan's GOP," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 January 2009, A21.

⁸⁸ Larry Schwab, *The Illusion of a Conservative Reagan Revolution* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 11, 12.

⁸⁹ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 274, 275.

⁹⁰ Qtd. in Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 274.

⁹¹ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 282.

⁹² A somewhat similar argument is made in John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland, "Conflicting Rhetorical Trajectories in Ronald Reagan's First Inaugural Address," paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, Illinois, November 2009.

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- ⁹³ Rowland and Jones, ““Until Next Week,”” 100.
- ⁹⁴ John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland, “A Covenant-Affirming Jeremiad: The Post-presidential Ideological Appeals of Ronald Wilson Reagan,” *Communication Studies* 56, no. 2 (2005): 157-174.
- ⁹⁵ Edwards, “Reagan’s GOP,” A21.
- ⁹⁶ Alan Wolfe, “The Revolution that Never Was,” *The New Republic*, June 7, 1999, 35.
- ⁹⁷ Diggins, *Ronald Reagan*, xvii, 42.
- ⁹⁸ Lee Edwards, *The Essential Ronald Reagan* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 95.
- ⁹⁹ Shawn J. Parry-Giles, “Political Authenticity, Television News, and Hillary Rodham Clinton,” in *The 2008 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective*, ed. Robert E. Denton, Jr. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 213.
- ¹⁰⁰ Parry-Giles, “Political Authenticity, Television News, and Hillary Rodham Clinton,” 214.
- ¹⁰¹ Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan*, 61.
- ¹⁰² Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest*, 31. Note: Lettow does not endorse this view.
- ¹⁰³ Cited in Cannon and Cannon, *Reagan’s Disciple*, 28.
- ¹⁰⁴ Bob Schieffer and Gary Paul Gates, *The Acting President* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1989) .
- ¹⁰⁵ Robert Draper, “Obama’s BFF,” *The New York Times Magazine*, June 26, 2009, 33.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ronald Reagan, *Dear Americans: Letters from the Desk of President Ronald Reagan*, ed. Ralph E. Weber and Ralph A. Weber (New York: Doubleday, 2003); Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); Ronald Reagan, *Stories in His Own Hand: The Everyday Wisdom of Ronald Reagan*, ed. Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson (New York: The Free Press, 2001); Ronald Reagan, *Reagan In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan That Reveal His Revolutionary Vision For America*, ed. Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson (New York: The Free Press, 2001)..
- ¹⁰⁷ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, xiii.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cited in Rowland and Jones, *Reagan at Westminster*, 45.
- ¹⁰⁹ Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan*, 9.

¹¹⁰ See Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan*, 94-95. Dolan himself made this point in a memo to Deaver that is in the Dolan files concerning the Westminster Address. See Rowland and Jones, *Reagan at Westminster*, 135.

¹¹¹ I am indebted to my colleague and co-author John M. Jones, who gathered material at the Reagan library that we reported in various publications.

¹¹² Rowland and Jones, *Reagan at Westminster*, 49.

¹¹³ The files are available at the Reagan Library. See White House Staff Member and Office Files, Speechwriting, White House Office OF: Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Box 40-41; Presidential Handwriting File, Series III: Presidential Speeches, 5/13/82-8/3/82, Box 5; White House Staff Member and Office Files, Dolan, Anthony "Tony" R. Files, 1981-1989, Box 12-13. Reagan's role in the speechwriting process is reviewed in detail in Rowland and Jones, *Reagan at Westminster*, 37-53. Leon Trotsky used the phrase dustbin of history in reference to the Mensheviks in 1917. See Leon Trotsky, "Address to the Second Congress of Soviets," November 17, 1917, <http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/language/log/archives/004250.html>.

¹¹⁴ The drafting process is described in some detail in Rowland and Jones, "Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate," 21-50.

¹¹⁵ Reagan personally sharpened the attack labeling the Soviet Union an "evil empire." Reagan edited the original draft which read "surely historians will see there...the focus of evil in the modern world." [ellipsis in original text]. Reagan crossed out "surely historians will see there" and wrote "they are" so that the final draft read "they are the focus of evil in the modern world." See Dolan and Bakshian Draft, March 5, 1983. As Kurt Ritter notes, "all of this heightened the drama and portrayed the Cold War conflict in more dramatic terms. His revisions also made the indictment of communism more compelling by placing it in the present tense rather than the past tense." See Kurt Ritter, "The Making of the Great Communicator: Ronald Reagan as Speechwriter/Scriptwriter," paper presented to the Speech Communication Association Convention in New Orleans, November 19-22-1994. Also see Martin J. Medhurst, "Writing Speeches for Ronald Reagan: An Interview with Tony Dolan," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 1, no. 2(1998): 245-256.

¹¹⁶ These findings are discussed in more detail in Rowland and Jones, ““Until Next Week,”” 104-106.

¹¹⁷ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 286.

¹¹⁸ Haynes Johnson, “It’s Politics but Elementary, Watson: the Dogs Aren’t Barking,” *The Washington Post*, A3.

¹¹⁹ Mark Starr, Frank Maier, Sylvester Monroe, Eleanor Clift, and Thomas M. DeFrank, “How Does It Play in Peoria,” *Newsweek*, 24. While the article focuses on Reagan’s visit to the district of House Minority Leader Robert Michel, the conclusions are generalizable.

¹²⁰ “Danger Signs for the GOP,” *Newsweek*, October 18, 1982, 36.

¹²¹ “Democrats Appear Headed Toward a Major Comeback,” *The Miami Herald*, November 3, 1982, A1.