Reagan at Westminster

The Origins of Anti-Communist Idealism

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On June 8, 1982, Ronald Reagan spoke to the British Parliament about the bold hope that an onward march of democracy could leave Soviet communism smoldering on "the ash-heap of history." In a single speech, Reagan had cast out every traditional Cold War norm which imposed caution on Western rhetoric and implied that peaceful coexistence fraught with perpetual anxiety was the best the West could hope for in dealing with the Soviet Union. At Westminster, Reagan launched a comprehensive rhetorical assault on the Soviet Union which would be sustained throughout his Administration. It is these later efforts—the "evil empire" speech, the Strategic Defense Initiative, the Reagan Doctrine—upon which most scholars focus their attention. But their beginnings can all be traced to Westminster.

The Westminster speech was Reagan's first formal and extended address as President laying out his vision for American foreign policy. Reagan summarized its importance thus:

> This speech before the British Parliament examined the West's concepts of democracy and its attitude towards Communism and is probably one of the most important speeches I gave as president. What eventually flowed from it became known as the Reagan Doctrine, which was our often controversial policy of supporting those fighting for freedom and against communism wherever we found them.[1]

At the time, Reagan's idea that the democratic West would transcend the regressive and incompetent totalitarianism of the Soviet Union was greeted with approval, but sparked little controversy. Yet these supposedly benign ideas provided the intellectual foundations for the infamous anti-Soviet assault that was the "evil empire" speech and the Reagan Doctrine's policy of fighting communist insurgency with guns, not just high hopes.

The eventual course of Reagan's rhetorical campaign against the Soviet Union is just one indicator that there was a method and a purpose behind Reagan's hopeful oratory at Westminster. Reagan's close relationship with Margaret Thatcher, Britain's fiercely ideological prime minister, made Westminster the perfect stage from which to launch a campaign for democracy with a particular emphasis on the ideals these two leaders held dear—free market economies and opposition to totalitarianism. Having spent the first year and a half of his Administration grappling with domestic recovery, Reagan's Westminster speech, part of a ten day European swing, seemed at last to provide the perfect opportunity to strike out into the realm of foreign policy. Conscious of this newfound direction, Reagan later noted, "I think the real story of 1982 is that we began applying conservatism to foreign affairs." Reagan further summarized his purposes as follows:

> This address also fit into my plan of speaking my mind about communism. In retrospect, I am amazed that our national leaders had not philosophically and intellectually taken on the principles of Marxism-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.[2]

For the first time in his presidency, Reagan afforded himself the opportunity to define the struggle with the communist adversary exclusively on his own terms and in a formal setting. What emerged was a message unique even in its differences with the anti-communist appeals of the past. For Reagan, the West no longer stood helpless, fending off an encroaching Red Menace. Rather, Reagan's speech brimmed with optimism and confidence that the collapse of communism was only a matter of time and this result could be greatly expedited by a simple reaffirmation of the democratic values that the West had recently been shy about proclaiming in its pursuit of détente. Reagan's accurate prediction of Marxism-Leninism lying on the "ash-heap of history" and his prescient analysis of the gathering momentum behind democratic movements

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[1] Reagan, *Speaking My Mind*, pp. 107-108
[2] Reagan, *Speaking My Mind*, p. 108

in Eastern Europe and elsewhere make the Westminster speech perhaps the most relevant statement of Reagan's anti-communism as President.

Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Western Revival

Reagan's peculiar challenge to Soviet communism at Westminster was not a new idea in 1982, but was firmly rooted in the more enterprising currents of conservative ideology dating back to the 1964 Goldwater candidacy in the United States and Margaret Thatcher's rise to power in Great Britain. At their inception, these ideas were characterized by impatience with an international order in which the free West was accorded a status equal to that of the totalitarian Soviet Union. Using the political, economic and diplomatic frustrations of the 1970s as a backdrop, Reagan and Thatcher developed a comprehensive critique of Soviet communism which argued unabashedly for the superiority of the West's free market economy and pluralist political system. The rise of Soviet power as exhibited by the fall of South Vietnam, Afghanistan and other countries that fell into the communist orbit was a trend that could be easily reversed if the West regained its nerve. They made the then-explosive argument that the Soviet system was inherently weak because it ran athwart the forces of history and human nature. The West needed to regain the initiative by reversing—not just containing—communist victories around the world.

Reagan and Thatcher's bold ideas about communism were nourished in political opposition and were thus insensitive to restraining diplomatic influences. Their rhetoric often scandalized the political establishment. Yet by 1981, both Reagan and Thatcher were firmly installed in power and enjoyed a fortuitous opportunity to re-shape the Western alliance's Soviet policy in their image. The story of their rise to power is critical to the story of the Westminster speech.

In early 1975, Margaret Thatcher ousted the recently defeated prime minister Edward Heath to become the new leader of the Conservative Party. Thatcher's victory represented a victory for a new right which advocated liberal economic policies and a tougher stance towards the Soviets; it represented a decisive defeat for the old Tory values of state paternalism and gradual acquiescence to socialism.[3] Thatcher was a staunch believer in capitalism and private ownership. She sought to reverse statist policies such as the nationalization of industry undertaken by Labour governments, not merely to contain them as the old Tories would do.

Thatcher's speech to the Zurich Economic Society in 1977 is illustrative of this renewed defense of private enterprise and foreshadows many of the elements of Reagan's message of Western ascendancy at Westminster. Coming off the British financial crisis of 1976, Thatcher expresses confidence that the forces of history were just beginning to favor of the free, capitalist West:

> Had I spoken to you to you last year, I should have expressed faith in our nation and civilization, and its capacity for survival. But today, I can offer you much more than faith, I bring you optimism rooted in present-day experience. I have reason to believe that the tide is beginning to turn against collectivism, socialism, statism, dirigism, whatever you call it.[4]

Tracing the origins and the theory of liberal economic thought, Thatcher meticulously debunked socialist arguments against capitalism and emerged with blunt conclusions such as "the free society is morally better." A major subtext of the speech is that the socialist world has sold out: it has come to embody the very shortcomings alleged of capitalism in the *Communist Manifesto*: the exploitation of the weak by the strong and an inefficient, inequitable distribution of wealth and power which impeded progress. Reagan agreed wholeheartedly and would turn the intellectual tables against Marxism in similar fashion at Westminster.

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[3] Krieger, *Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Decline,* pp. 59-71

During their years in opposition, Reagan and Thatcher became ideological kindred spirits. They first met in April 1975 shortly after Thatcher became Leader of the Opposition, and their scheduled forty five minute meeting blossomed into a one and a half hour exchange. Reagan recalled, "We found that we were really akin with regard to our views of government and economics and government's place in people's lives and all that sort of thing."[5] From the start, Thatcher's rise provided a powerful example for Reagan and seemed to offer valuable lessons for America's languishing conservative movement. Once Thatcher won power in May 1979, Reagan was among the first to phone with his congratulations. Hoping to follow the Thatcher example, Republican campaign managers in 1980 fashioned a Thatcherite formula for victory, even airing on American television two British Conservative campaign spots unedited.[6] In those early years, there emerged a remarkable synergy between Reagan and Thatcher which would find its highest expression at Westminster.

For Reagan, practical opposition to communism was not a conviction recently arrived at but a theme he developed relentlessly throughout his public career. In his famous 1964 "A Time for Choosing" speech, Reagan linked the Soviet threat to American troubles at home:

> If all of this seems like a great deal of trouble, think what's at stake. We are faced with the most evil enemy mankind has known in his long climb from the swamp to the stars. There can be no security anywhere in the free world if there is no fiscal and economic stability within the United States. Those who ask us to trade our freedom for the soup kitchen of the welfare state are architects of a policy of accommodation.[7]

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[4] "Speech to the Zurich Economic Society," *The Collected Speeches of Margaret Thatcher*, p. 49
[5] Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, p. 1
[6] Ibid, p. 20
[7] Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing," http://www.reagan.com/plate_main/ronald/rrspeech01.html

Reagan in 1964 described the Soviets as evil, the very word which would stir up so much controversy in 1983. Once Reagan entered the presidency, some believed that would abandon his confrontational tone. He proved them wrong a few days after being inaugurated.

On January 29, 1981 Reagan held a press conference in which Sam Donaldson of ABC News asked him to assess the long range goals and intentions of the Soviet Union. Reagan had this to say:

> I know of no leader of the Soviet Union since the revolution, and including the present leadership, that has not more than once repeated in the various Communist congresses that they hold their determination that their goal must be the promotion of world revolution and a one-world socialist or Communist state, whichever word you want to use.
>
> Now as long as they do that and as long as they, at the same time, have openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve the unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat, in order to attain that.[8]

Reagan would spend a year defending this statement to a shocked press corps. For his part, Reagan maintained that this view was not really his own but was grounded in a literal interpretation of Marxist revolutionary ideology. Significantly, Reagan took pains to define it as nothing more than an off-the-cuff remark given in response to a reporter's question, as distinguished from a formal address setting out his policies. Reagan was not exactly backing away from his remark, but he was not yet ready to embrace its logical consequence: a rhetorical crusade against communism.

In 1981 and early 1982, Reagan offered only fleeting glimpses of his view of communism or his vision for American foreign policy. More than likely, he did not want it to detract from the primary goal of passing his economic agenda. Belying this domestic emphasis was a remarkably light foreign travel schedule: the only two foreign trips Reagan took in 1981 were to economic summits in Ottawa and Cancun. The outburst shortly after his inauguration was one exception to this trend, and he acted consciously to contain its fallout. A second exception came in the presence of Prime Minister Thatcher, a loyal friend and partner in the anti-communist renaissance. Thatcher was the first foreign leader to visit Reagan as President. (This was no coincidence: Reagan insisted that she have this honor.) The night after the White House state dinner honoring her, Reagan broke with protocol and attended the return dinner at the British Embassy.[9] Standing on British territory, Reagan gave a toast which wandered into new rhetorical terrain. In it, he expressed not revulsion at communist methods but bewilderment at their seeming irrationality and backwardness. Foreshadowing Westminster, Reagan said:

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[8] January 29, 1981 Press Conference, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1981,* p. 57

> Prime Minister, everywhere one looks these days the cult of the state is dying, and I wonder if you and I and other leaders of the West should now be looking towards bright, sunlit uplands and begin planning for a world where our adversaries are remembered only for their role in a sad and rather bizarre chapter in human history.[10]

Two months later in a commencement address at Notre Dame University he would repeat his idealist vision of a world without communism. In a speech dedicated largely to economic recovery, Reagan offered this brief but critical passage articulating an optimistic assessment of the Cold War struggle and a uniquely dismissive view of Soviet power:

> The West won't contain communism, it will transcend communism. It won't bother to dismiss or denounce it, it will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.[11]

The selection of Notre Dame for these words was reminiscent of Reagan's practice of "returning to the scene of the crime" of his predecessor. Just four months after his inauguration in 1977,

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[9] Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, p. 41

[10] "Toasts of the President and Prime Minister Thatcher," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan 1981*, p. 173

[11] "Address at Commencement Exercises at Notre Dame University," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan 1981*, p. 434

Jimmy Carter gave a commencement address at Notre Dame in which he asked Americans to shed their "inordinate fear of communism."

In Reagan's toast and at Notre Dame is the essence of the Westminster speech—a confident vision of Western ascendancy which almost totally disregarded the Soviet Union as a relevant force in the modern world despite the fact that it was a totalitarian superpower with nuclear weapons.

From January 1981 to June 1982, Reagan introduced his anti-communist ideas in stages and from an ever ascending platform. First came the accidental revelation at a press conference which Reagan tried hard to disclaim. Then, it was couched as part of a toast at a private embassy dinner. Two months later came the short passage tucked into a commencement address. On June 8, 1982, Reagan's vision would become clear to all in a formal address to the oldest legislative body in the world, televised live on American national television.

An official decision made by the Reagan White House in May 1982 also suggests that there was a method and a purpose behind Reagan's effort at Westminster. National Security Decision Directive 32, released in the middle of May 1982, set forth American strategies against the Soviet Union. These new policies included expanded military spending by the U.S. and her allies, economic pressure, and finally, a renewed propaganda campaign defending Western ideals. Part of this was certainly exhibited at Westminster the next month. Practically, this part of NSDD 32 also led to covert American funding for Poland's Solidarity labor union and for underground newspapers.[12]

The Reagan administration's mounting ideological battle with the Soviet Union would reach a new plateau at Westminster. In itself, the very fact that such a campaign not only existed but was gathering strength well into the first Reagan term signaled a truly remarkable break with precedent. Anatoly Dobrynin, Soviet ambassador to the United States at the time, watched with dismay:

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[12] Simpson, *National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations*, pp. 63-64

> We came to realize that in contrast to most presidents who shift from their electoral rhetoric to more centrist, pragmatic positions by the middle of their presidential term, Reagan displayed an immunity to the traditional forces, both internal and external, that normally produce a classic adjustment. After two years in power Reagan showed no signs of moving beyond the bellicose ideological approach that had characterized his career long before he entered electoral politics and dominated his 1980 campaign. The Soviet Union remained his number one enemy.[13]

Why a Westminster Speech?

Having passed the major elements of his economic agenda, Ronald Reagan was ready to advance his global vision in 1982. Prior to the speech at Westminster, Reagan had given no extended address about broad U.S. foreign policy goals or about communism. His remarks about the nature of communism were limited to the fragments presented above, and his discussions about Soviet power related mostly to specific crises in countries like Poland and El Salvador. A planned trip to Europe for the Versailles G-7 summit and the Bonn NATO summit in June 1982 afforded him the perfect opportunity to articulate his vision in foreign policy and to pay a visit to the United Kingdom.

Months before the speech, Michael Deaver visited London to begin choreographing a visit rich with photo opportunities, including Reagan's planned horseback ride with the Queen. Furthermore, Thatcher extended Reagan a momentous invitation to speak before a joint session of both Houses of Parliament. It was truly a symbol of their unique friendship: the last such foreign leader to address Parliament was Charles De Gaulle in 1960; no American President had ever had this honor.

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[13] Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 499

This move was bound to be controversial. This epic invitation seemed entirely the result of Thatcher's personal affection for Reagan rather than the British people's reverence. As Geoffrey Smith points out, "[Reagan] was still regarded as the wild man from the West, who might be a danger to the peace."[14] The opposition Labour Party strenuously objected when word of the speech was prematurely leaked before it was even consulted. To avoid an ignominious boycott or worse, cancellation, the legal standing of the Parliamentary gathering was downgraded from a joint session to a meeting of members and the speech was moved from the formal Westminster Hall to the slightly less ceremonious but still regal Royal Gallery.[15]

As chance would have it, Reagan's visit would come at a critical time in Britain. On April 2, 1982, Argentine amphibious forces overwhelmed the small British garrison in the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic. The invaders declared the British colony they knew as the Malvinas a part of Argentina. Britain did not waver; a task force was promptly dispatched to make a six-thousand mile journey to restore the islands and their two thousand residents to British rule. What was the American role in this dispute?

Before the invasion, Reagan tried to prevail on the Argentine military junta not to use force and to seek a negotiated settlement to the territorial dispute. Once fighting broke out, the U.S. continued to play the role of an impartial mediator.[16] Internally, the Administration was divided in its loyalties. Secretary of State Alexander Haig favored the British but favored the U.S.'s neutral stance. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, on the other hand, believed that Administration policy was too solicitous of our sentimental alliance with Britain. She emphasized the strategic benefits of friendship with authoritarian Argentina so as to preserve it as a bulwark against totalitarian communism in Latin America. The British looked to Reagan for the final word on the Falklands and awaited any such pronouncement in his speech with bated breath.

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[14] Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, p. 97
[15] Ibid.
[16] Haig, *Caveat*, p. 266

The Westminster speech came at a time of deep conflict in Reagan administration ranks. Haig's tentative moves to seize control of administration foreign policy backfired badly and he became the target of bitter attacks by other advisers who sought to isolate him from the President. As the President's entourage traveled to Europe, it seemed clear that Haig's days as Secretary of State were numbered, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon the same week as Westminster created new opportunities for internal Administration sniping. By the end of June, Haig had resigned in frustration over the growing discord in the American foreign policy apparatus. Things seemed to be falling apart. Except they weren't. Reagan's words about a campaign for democracy at Westminster towered above the bickering of his underlings and charted the course for a rejuvenated American presence on the world stage beginning in June 1982.

The Speech as Drafted: May-June 1982

In the spring of 1982, the Reagan White House had a clear idea that the spread of democracy in the world would be the central theme of the Westminster speech. This did not change in the drafting of the speech. But what did change the dramatically was the way Reagan would articulate this broad theme.

The first available drafts of the speech were written in early-to-mid May and were authored primarily by chief speechwriter Aram Bakshian. Bakshian tried to weave together a speech from the content provided by the State Department and National Security Council, all the while staying loyal to “the mother tongue”[17]—Reagan’s unique style. In this respect, he was not very successful. The heavy diplomatic baggage Bakshian carried into the speech made his task all but impossible. Though these drafts spoke stirringly about the need for democracy, they did not reflect Reagan’s style.

To begin with, long passages indulged in relatively heavy intellectual meditations about democratic theory, certainly a style better suited to Thatcher than to Reagan. Seeking to prove democracy right through critical analysis of its precepts, Bakshian posed often awkward-sounding questions such as “Is it really possible to bring freedom to all nations?” or “Can freedom complement other important human needs such as economic growth and peace?”[18] Another major flaw in these drafts is an excessive use of bulleted lists of itemized democratic successes and future goals. One example was the banal declaration that “Slavery, the most odious form of oppression throughout history, has been largely eradicated.”[19]

What is most striking about these drafts is how little they concerned communism when compared to the final version. If these drafts announced anything approaching a sweeping tide of history, it was nothing like Reagan’s vow to leave communism on the “ash-heap of history” but was rather the spread of democratic elections in countries like Nigeria, India and Venezuela. Compared to Reagan’s sweeping vision of a good versus evil crusade against communism, the diplomats’ perspective was rather limited. But it was still legitimate. One of the great maxims of international relations states that democratic countries do not go to war with one another. Creating “a world of democracies,” as the speech was titled in one of the very early drafts, seemed an unfailing expedient for promoting peace. Curiously, the future of communist ideology seemed only incidental and was of secondary concern to the diplomats.

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[17] Memo, Aram Bakshian to Ronald Reagan, May 14, 1982
[18] Speech Draft, Aram Bakshian, May 12, 1982
[19] Ibid.

Because of this, these drafts seem very conflicted on the question of communism. On one hand was a stirring defense of liberal democracy, the spread of which could not augur well for the fortunes of the communist bloc. But on the other hand, the drafts always returned to the cautious rhetoric which was the hallmark of past U.S. Cold War diplomacy. One such rhetorical norm was that the United States must speak responsibly and cautiously in the face of wild and confrontational Soviet rhetoric designed to preserve the atmosphere of crisis so essential to its' internal stability. This meant that the United States never challenged the Soviet Union to replace communism, but instead insisted that the Soviets make the best of things by living up to Marxism-Leninism's stated ideals. Nowhere is this conventional approach more evident than in the following passage from an early draft:

> As for the Soviet view let us consult communist leaders themselves. Reflecting the approach of his predecessors and presumably his successors as well, Chairman Brezhnev repeatedly has stressed the competition of ideas and systems must continue and that this is entirely consistent with relaxation of tensions and peace. We ask only that these systems begin by living up to their own constitutions, abiding by their own laws, and complying with the international obligations they have undertaken. We ask only for a process, a direction, a basic code of decency – not for an instant transformation.[20]

This call to preserve the international status quo seemed completely out of place in a speech whose central premise was a revision of the international order favoring the democracies. These were the types of passages that the Reaganite true believers in the Administration wished to banish permanently from the President's vocabulary. To them, these diplomatic reassurances were stale and banal and broke no new ground rhetorically. Over and over again in the drafting of the speech, diplomacy would but heads with anti-communist idealism.

On May 19, speechwriter Anthony Dolan entered the fray by preparing his own draft which took the speech in a fundamentally different direction than where the diplomatic drafts were taking it. Dolan's draft was the point of departure for the speech that Reagan actually delivered on June 8. Other people's ideas (including Reagan's) were inserted into the speech, but mostly, they worked off Dolan's draft.

The fact that Dolan's draft was used over Bakshian's is considered very unusual by Reagan archivists. At the time, Dolan was considered an ideological loose cannon and was Bakshian's subordinate. Why did his draft survive when Bakshian's did not?

In his memorandum to Reagan, Dolan stated that he had been working on his draft for two months and that it was based on research into Reagan's anti-communist statements dating back to 1966. Furthermore, he wrote to Reagan:

> The draft also includes all of the State Department initiatives but, as you can see, the language and the rhetoric and the structure of the speech is different – it is an attempt to bring together your past thoughts on these issues.[21]

While Dolan's draft was largely original work, he was keenly aware of the diplomatic drafts and even adopted a few of their ideas. Not surprisingly, these surviving remnants of the old drafts—the proposals for conferences and studies about democracy—are the weakest parts of the speech Reagan actually delivered.

In retrospect, Dolan's draft probably survived despite the nature of White House office politics in 1982 because it was obviously a far better fit for Reagan. Gone from the speech are the professorial ruminations on the relative merits of democracy and the laundry lists of democratic developments in third world nations. Dolan also corrects some notable omissions from the original drafts by adding jokes and light anecdotes and by paying extensive homage to Parliament

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[20] Ibid.

and to shared Anglo-American traditions—a dimension the early drafts lacked. Most importantly, Dolan zeroes in on communism and makes it the villain in the democratic drama. Fundamentally, the speech ceases to be about democratization and instead becomes about opposing communism.

Dolan begins the discussion of communism with a line sure to grab the audience's attention:

> As one Soviet scholar has recently pointed out, Marx was right – we are witnessing today a great revolutionary crisis – a crisis where the demands of the economic order are colliding directly with those of the political order.[22]

"But," the draft continues, "this crisis is not happening in those countries with democratic forms of government or free market systems; it is happening in the home of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union." Such bold rhetoric indicated that the tables had turned on communism and that the tide of history had been reversed. Directing Soviet prophecies of doom right back at them sent a powerful message: the West no longer needed to pay heed to the lingering fear that the *Communist Manifesto* may have been right all along and that Marxism's triumph, warranted or not, was inevitable. Such a fear was illegitimate because the Soviet Union was actually very weak. According to this draft, "a country which employs one-fourth of its population in [agriculture] cannot feed its own people." Anecdotes and statistics about Soviet failures abound: the rate of alcohol poisoning is one hundred times the average in Western nations; a cardiac unit in a Leningrad hospital is located on the fifth floor—and there is no elevator.[23] Meanwhile, the Soviet leaders give their people bread and circuses in the form of elaborate military parades and jingoistic boasting. But in the end, this didn't amount to very much if, as the draft pointed out, the Soviet economy was in collapse.

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[21] Memo, Anthony Dolan to Ronald Reagan, May 19, 1982

[22] Speech Draft. Anthony Dolan, May 19, 1982

[23] Ibid.

From this characterization, the reader could be forgiven for drawing the conclusion that a bungling and incompetent Soviet Union really was no threat to Western freedom at all. But in fact, Dolan's draft combined this picture of a dying Soviet Union with the proposition that it was still a very dangerous entity. Nowhere is this clearer than in Dolan's embellished resurrection of one of Reagan's favorite sayings about communism, which he calls "a sad, bizarre, dreadfully evil episode in history, but an episode that is dying, a chapter whose last pages even now are being written."[24] Dolan adds the word "evil" to this penetrating observation Reagan had made before Thatcher in February 1981 and at Notre Dame that May. Thus, an entirely new and controversial dimension is added to Reagan's anti-communist rhetoric, a dimension which defines his legacy to this day. This is the birth of the "evil empire" phenomenon.

On March 8, 1983, Reagan uttered that famous phrase in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals drafted by Dolan. But Dolan claimed that he had tried to insert the term "evil empire" into the Westminster speech, Reagan's first extended attack on the Soviet Union. As Dolan recalled, "The phrase, 'evil empire,' had originally been in the British Parliament speech, and it was there to the last minute when some of the boys took it out."[25] But Dolan's explanation is problematic: the words "evil empire" do not appear in any draft from May 19 to the actual delivery of the speech. It is possible that the phrase was submerged sometime before the first available Dolan draft, as he did claim to have cleared the draft with the State Department and the NSC[26] who might have removed the objectionable words. But this is not plausible because several other equally pointed references to evil survived this initial scrutiny. More than likely, Dolan was confused in his recollection. But he was not really that far off the mark. Those references to evil that were in the Westminster drafts *were* in fact removed at the last minute. And even without the words "evil empire," these critical passages bore a striking resemblance to the actual "evil empire" speech delivered in March 1983.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ker Muir, *The Bully Pulpit*, p. 77

[26] Memo, Anthony Dolan to Ronald Reagan, May 19, 1982

In the 1983 speech, Reagan called the Soviets the "focus of evil in the modern world." In Dolan's original draft of the Westminster speech, Reagan would have said,

> Surely those historians will find in the councils of those who preached the supremacy of the state, who declared its omnipotence over individual man, who predicted its eventual domination of all peoples of the earth, surely historians will see there… the focus of evil.[27]

In the "evil empire" speech, Reagan quoted from C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*. The same quote admonishing against "the danger of the police state" appeared in Dolan's Westminster draft:

> The greatest evil is not now done in those sordid 'dens of crime' that Dickens loved to paint. It is not done even in concentration camps and labour camps. In those we see its final result. But is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried and minuted) in clean, carpeted, warmed and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voice.[28]

The picture of evil as practiced in the Soviet Union this paints is fascinating. It is worth exploring further.

In 1960, Hannah Arendt covered the trial of Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann and was perturbed by how Eichmann, a seemingly ordinary petty bureaucrat, could become one of the masterminds of the Holocaust. What was the nature of evil if ordinary people without demented or psychopathic abilities could be capable of it?

Arendt concluded that in a totalitarian state where the rights of the individual were submerged to the collective will, ordinary people became capable of extraordinary evil. Where tyrannical ideologies held sway, mass murder became not a conscious demonstration of malice but a simple act of getting by for those who pulled the trigger or gassed hundreds of innocents. People like Eichmann defended themselves not with fanatical hatred for their victims but with the simple excuse that they were just "following orders."

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[27] Speech Draft, Anthony Dolan, May 19, 1982

C.S. Lewis also talked about this banality of evil in the passage which Dolan was fond of quoting. This was exactly the point they wanted to make about the Soviet Union, a place where evil was systemic because ordinary bureaucrats were held in the thrall of a murderous ideology in the same way that the Nazis were. For Reagan, Nazism and communism were basically the same thing: at the root of Nazi ideology was hatred on the basis of race and at the root of communist ideology was hatred on the basis of class. For them, all other principles of morality were secondary to this hatred. This was one point Reagan would drive home in the "evil empire" speech.[29]

Reagan always had a dual purpose in exposing communist ideology. The first was that it was essentially an "evil empire." The second was that it was foolish and inept. (Certainly this can be seen in Dolan's anecdote about the Leningrad hospital.) This second quality was always evident in Reagan's anecdotes about communism's absurdities. As Dinesh D'Souza writes:

> What is striking … is that Reagan's jokes are not about the *evil* of communism so much as they are about its *incompetence*. Reagan agreed with the conservatives that the Soviet experiment that sought to transform nature and create a "new man" was immoral. At the same time, he saw that it was also basically stupid.[30]

For Reagan, communism was not only evil in the malicious sense but also in the sense that its incompetence perversely deprived the Soviet people of a significantly better quality of life. The reason for actively exposing both sides of the communist coin was expressed by longtime Reagan adviser Edwin Meese:

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ker Muir, *The Bully Pulpit*, p. 75

> In addition to stressing the *evils* of communism, Reagan stressed its inherent *weakness*. In his view, the two were related, since in denying freedom the communists not only engaged in tyranny, they also crippled the creative potential of the human spirit.[31]

Different approaches to attacking communism were used in different forums. The advantage to stressing Soviet incompetence more than stressing Soviet evil was that Reagan could illustrate the twisted consequences of Soviet action without arousing the criticism that he was little more than a moralizing firebrand. By using light anecdotes about Soviet incompetence that affronted plain common sense, Reagan was better able to insinuate anti-communist ideas into the minds of a skeptical audience. This was the effect of Reagan's effort at Westminster, in large part because Dolan's words about evil were eventually removed and saved for another day. One typical consequence of this is illustrated by Reagan biographer Lou Cannon's assessment, which praises the Westminster address for its upbeat message that the West would eventually prevail over its deeply flawed adversary. Conversely, he portrays the "evil empire" speech as a regress from the powerful example of positive thinking set at Westminster.[32]

Reagan did not have the luxury or the inclination to be perfectly consistent in his portrayal of communism. As D'Souza and Meese noted, Reagan's view of the Soviet Union was that it was *both* evil and incompetent. An assessment of only one aspect of Reagan's view yields an incomplete picture. If the Soviet Union was purely evil, this meant that it was amoral and ruthless in the pursuit of its devious objectives. Reagan was willing to accept this but he was not willing to accept the implication that Soviet communism would exist indefinitely by virtue of its ruthless tenacity, as many of Reagan's conservative backers believed.[33] In rejecting this

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[30] D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader*, p. 139
[31] Meese, *With Reagan*, p. 165
[32] Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, p. 316
[33] D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader*, pp. 138-139

presumption, he rejected the received wisdom of both hawks and doves that the Cold War was an intractable stalemate resolvable only by nuclear war. As a Dolan-authored passage that Reagan highlighted in his autobiography put it: “Must civilization perish in a hail of fiery atoms? Must freedom wither in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil?” Reagan’s answer was no.[34] According to Reagan, the anti-nuclear protesters and their “predictions of doomsday” were wrong because the Soviet Union was decaying and it was the democracies that would soon triumph—and, quoting Winston Churchill, “without war.”

This dismissive attitude towards the Soviet Union was a central part of the Westminster speech, yet it is important to remember that this approach too had its limitations. Reagan’s idealism alone could not completely explain his worldview anymore than his notions of Soviet evil could. If the logical consequence of confronting an immutable evil was permanent stalemate, the logical consequence of Reagan’s idealistic assumption that communism would wither away under the weight of its folly was simply packing up our military arsenal and going home. But this was folly to Reagan: just because the Soviet Union was fundamentally weak, that did not mean that its leaders could not launch one last desperate bid for world domination. This possibility is highlighted in the Westminster speech: “It has happened in the past: a small ruling elite either mistakenly attempts to easy domestic unrest through greater repression and foreign adventure or it chooses a wiser course—it begins to allow its people a voice in their own destiny.”[35]

Reagan was no hard-headed Realist, but he did sometimes qualify his optimism because the Soviet military threat was still there. Jumping back to 1981, the night before Reagan delivered those words about life after communism at the British embassy, he uttered these at the Thatcher state dinner: “Survival in this era requires us to … take freedom in the palm of our hands and never to cower behind a veil of unrealistic optimism."[36] The wrong kind of optimism could send the wrong signals. For instance, on August 21, 1983 James Reston wrote "I think we've won the cold war and don't know it."[37] What, Reston asked, was the sense of deploying new weapons systems or overblowing the Soviet threat with "evil empire"-type rhetoric? The Westminster speech was triumphal, something many observers at the time saw as an abatement—not a re-ignition—of Reagan's anti-communism. In Reagan's other speeches from the "evil empire" to the Reagan Doctrine, this optimism was bolstered by stern vigilance.

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[34] Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 555

That Westminster was a mostly triumphal speech was an example of Reagan deploying his rhetoric strategically. At Westminster, he was only beginning his anti-communist crusade and sought to build a basis around which the democratic countries of the world could be united against Soviet communism. And while he was on very friendly terms with his host, Prime Minister Thatcher, Reagan spoke to a British and European audience that was wary of his anti-communist pronouncements as a threat to détente and nuclear peace. Put simply, in stressing a positive rather than a negative message, Reagan made it more likely that skeptics would find common ground with him. Several newspaper accounts of the speech bear this out, even asking if Reagan's idealistic tone meant that he had turned away from his early bluster about Soviet godlessness and immorality. Appropriately, Reagan chose to introduce his crusade with great fanfare and a positive hope, not jarring invective.

At about the same time Dolan was drafting his version of the Westminster speech, Reagan apparently solicited the help of George F. Will, a respected conservative journalist and personal friend. The parts of Will's draft that survive become the opening passages of the speech

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[35] "Address to Members of the British Parliament." *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan 1982*, p. 747

[36] "Toasts of the President and Prime Minister Thatcher." *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan 1981*, p. 168

in which Reagan pays homage to Parliament and speaks eloquently to the Soviet crackdown in Poland. It is here that Will provides a key catchphrase, “Regimes planted by bayonets do not take root.” Will also provides this important passage:

> We are approaching the end of a bloody century plagued by a terrible political invention—totalitarianism. Optimism comes less easily today … not because democracy is less vigorous, but because democracy’s enemies have refined their instruments of repression.[38]

Will had a rather schizophrenic relationship with Reagan. He was one of Reagan’s only friends inside the Washington establishment but was also an intellectual who was frustrated by the fact that Reagan clearly was not.[39] Will was also a Cold War hawk who thought of Soviet communism as immutable and was often perplexed when Reagan suggested otherwise. If Will’s contribution stands out in a speech which is otherwise dismissive of Soviet power, this is probably why.

Will’s insights in his letter to Reagan on May 18 and Reagan’s response to them offer valuable insights into the process of drafting of the speech. Like Dolan, Will also saw that the diplomatic drafts of the speech went nowhere. As he wrote to Reagan,

> I disregarded the State Department draft of your speech. It called to mind the old axiom: A camel is a horse designed by a committee. It reflected the State Department, where everyone has interests and no one has ideas.[40]

Will subsequently advised Reagan to drop the State Department initiatives which Dolan had also criticized. He feared they would command the media’s attention and that Reagan’s real message

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[37] Reston, “All Quiet on the Potomac,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1983-
[38] Speech Draft, Ronald Reagan, May 24, 1982
[39] Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, p. 133
[40] Letter, George F. Will to Ronald Reagan, May 18, 1982

would be lost. As Will noted, “Lincoln had no new government initiative to announce when he dedicated the cemetery at Gettysburg.”[41]

Thanking Will for his help, Reagan also explained “Some of the ‘speech by committee’ efforts have to be used to meet diplomatic requirements so I can’t (I regret to say) stick completely to your script in the one speech.”[42] The complete draft Will sent to Reagan is not available, but the parts of it that were selected by Reagan for inclusion into speech are still distinguishable.

By May 19, Reagan had three versions of the speech before him—the State Department’s, Dolan’s, and Will’s. In an extensive rewrite which was completed by May 24, he would decide which version he wanted to use and where in the speech he wanted to use it. Where these three versions did not suffice, he would put pen to paper and would produce what would become some of the most important rhetoric in the speech.

Though Reagan seldom wrote his speeches in their entirety, he was far more engaged in crafting speeches than he was in almost any other aspect of his Presidency. Those who see the drafts of the Westminster speech will recognize the importance of Reagan’s contribution. Even his simple edits almost invariably improved the flow and structure of the speech. Indeed, the very passages in the speech that seemed most forcefully delivered, those that garnered applause, or those that observers even today look back upon are those that Reagan himself wrote.

In editing the speech, Reagan decided to discard the State Department’s version and worked mostly off of Dolan’s, with snippets from Will interspersed at the beginning and the end. The marked up version shows how Reagan cleaned up the speech by checking some of the liberties Dolan took and removing superfluous anecdotes. In one case, he replaced it with his own joke:

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Letter, Ronald Reagan to George F. Will, June 4, 1982

> The strength of the Solidarity movement in Poland demonstrates the truth told in an underground joke in the Soviet Union. It is that the Soviet Union would be a one-party nation even if an opposition party were permitted—because everyone would join that party.[43]

In other cases, Reagan removed grimmer passages which called attention to the shadow of nuclear war or to the strength of the Soviet Union. Thus, we begin to see how the Westminster speech took on a more self-confident tone.

Reagan also added significantly to the speech with his own lengthy insertions. In one particularly striking passage from the markup, he explicitly connected the struggle against communism to a larger purpose.

> Since the exodus from Egypt historians have written of those who sacrifice and struggle for freedom: the stand at Thermopylae, the revolt of Spartacus, the storming of the Bastille, the Warsaw uprising in World War II.[44]

He uses this to launch a stirring page-long sermon on the elections in El Salvador which rejected communist leadership. In his own handwriting, Reagan related this story: "A grandmother who had been told by the guerillas she would be killed when she returned from the polls told the guerillas, 'you can kill me, kill my family, kill my neighbors, but you can't kill us all.'"[45] These were powerful words intended the illustrate the struggle of man against the totalitarian state. Reagan delivered them with unique passion when he actually gave the speech.

Interestingly, Reagan used the tale of the El Salvadoran freedom fighters to segue into what his primary audience *really* wanted to hear about: the crisis in the Falklands. The important talk on the Falklands is personally inserted by Reagan after it was completely missed by the previous versions. This is what Reagan wrote, and his words are preserved in the speech mostly intact:

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[43] Speech Draft, Ronald Reagan, May 24, 1982

[44] Ibid.

> Young Englishmen are fighting on some tiny islands in the South Atlantic. And, yes, voices have been raised protesting their sacrifice for lumps of rocks and earth so far away. But those men aren't fighting for mere real estate. They fight for a cause, for the belief that armed aggression must never be allowed to succeed.
>
> If there had been firmer support for that cause some 45 years ago, perhaps our generation wouldn't have suffered the blood letting of World War II.[46]

These strong words greatly pleased the British and largely assuaged any lingering distrust of the United States' ambiguous role in the conflict. Yet, by the time Reagan uttered these words on June 8, Britain had all but won the war. Six days later, the Argentines surrendered.

Reagan's single most important contribution to the speech came two days after his original markup when Reagan again revised the speech. This revision came in the section announcing a renewed Western "campaign" for democracy consisting of the crusading rhetoric Reagan exhibited at Westminster and some benign but futile State Department-sponsored conferences on democratization. Reagan struck out one paragraph describing the West's goals in this crusade and replaced it with a different one entirely:

> What I am describing now is a policy and a hope for the long term – the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history as it has left other totalitarian ideologies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of citizens.[47]

The "ash heap of history" is the Westminster speech's unique contribution to the lexicon of Western popular culture. Throughout the 1980s, observers used the phrase as a convenient label for Reagan's anti-communism. When the Soviet Union fell, people referred to Reagan's prediction as accomplished fact without even thinking that Reagan had said it. And today, the

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Speech Draft, Ronald Reagan, May 26, 1982

phrase is occasionally used to describe any kind of extinguished tradition, from the decline of moral standards to the retirement of a favorite ride at Disney World.[48]

But Reagan did not coin the expression “the ash heap of history.” He borrowed it from the communists themselves, in yet another one of his curious reversals of Marxist rhetoric. The phrase was first used by Leon Trotsky who issued this warning to the opponents of the Bolshevik Revolution before the Petrograd Soviet on October 25, 1917: “You are miserable bankrupts, your role is played out: Go where you belong—to the ash heap of history.”[49] This was exactly Reagan’s message to the successors of that Revolution. Their act was worn out. It was time to get off the stage.

Years later, Thatcher remarked how stunning the phrase sounded at the time. As she noted, when one thought of consignment to the ash heap of history, one thought of characters like Hitler, not Brezhnev or Andropov. Hardly anybody in 1982 could even conceive of the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. And given the sacrifices required to relegate Hitler to the ash heap, the idea that this could be accomplished through entirely peaceful means was still more fantastic. Reagan believed this and expressed it almost prophetically at Westminster.

These uncompromising words and the editing choices Reagan made demonstrated that he was averse to the diplomatic language that seemed to stifle his ability to genuinely speak his mind. Yet protocol dictated that agencies such as the NSC and the State Department have a leading role in shaping major international policy speeches such as the Westminster address. Immediately after Reagan wove together his version of the speech, it was once again forwarded to the NSC for review.[50] The later versions of the speech indicate a diplomatic reaction which was responsible for reintroducing some passages from the rejected State Department and NSC drafts and also for excising the some of Dolan's most strident rhetoric.

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[48] “Fans are Hopping Mad as Toad’s Wild Ride Ends.” *The Washington Post*, September 3, 1998

[49] Salisbury, Harrison. “A Reagan Antecedent in Revolution.” *The New York Times* Letters to the Editor, June 30, 1985, Sec. 4, p. 22.

One particular speech draft illustrates how the diplomats re-insinuated themselves into the speechwriting process. First, it included a two and a half page insert which reasserted more gradualist approaches and reemphasized democracy, the original theme of the speech which had largely been lost to the call for an anti-communist crusade. Most importantly, it reintroduced the old-school diplomat's call for both countries to live up to their constitutions and existing international obligations.[51] This would survive into the final speech.

Incidentally, Dolan's discussion of Soviet evil was removed without fanfare on June 4 in a draft with diplomatic fingerprints all over it. At the time, the President's party was in Paris for the G-7 economic summit. One imagines that this foreign trip must have given Reagan's foreign policy advisers and his more moderate personal staff, which included Richard Darman and David Gergen, disproportionate influence over drafting the final speech. As a consequence, Dolan's critical passage about C.S. Lewis and "the focus of evil" was deleted without objections. These were the words that would be part of the "evil empire" speech delivered exactly nine months after Westminster.

With these and other changes, Reagan's address to the British Parliament was finally ready for delivery. Taken as a whole, the speech Reagan delivered was a rallying cry for the Western democracies. Reagan hoped they would awaken to the fact that history was on their side and realize the possibilities of the forthcoming collapse of communism. But as in most important speeches, the drafting process evinced numerous tensions and contradictions—between stern vigilance of Soviet communism and the self-confident hope it would self-destruct, between the conflicting exigencies of diplomacy and ideology. These contradictions were not entirely resolved by a speech influenced by many authors. But what transcends these tensions is the voice of the speech's most important author, Ronald Reagan. Almost invariably, Reagan's words were the ones to inspire the newspaper headlines and the brief passages in the history books about the Westminster speech.

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[50] Memo, Richard Darman to Ronald Reagan, May 25, 1982

The Speech as Delivered: June 8, 1982

At approximately one o'clock in the afternoon on June 8, President Reagan arrived at the Palace of Westminster to give the first address to the British Parliament by a foreign leader since Charles De Gaulle in 1960. He followed the same route into the building that the Queen used every year before opening Parliament.

Prime Minister Thatcher and Mrs. Reagan were seated in the front row of the Royal Gallery, which was filled to capacity with dignitaries who used their printed copies of the speech as fans to relieve the sweltering heat in the hall. Reagan was introduced by Lord Hailsham, the Lord Chancellor, who embodied the Anglo-American bond in that he, like Churchill, had an American mother.

Reagan seemed very sedate delivering the first third or so of his speech. This included his extended introduction, where he spoke of his trip to the capitals of Europe and of the Anglo-American special relationship. His obligatory quip about the American rebellion against Britain in 1776 went over well, but for the most part, Reagan seemed to be doing little more than reading

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[51] See page 13

off his speech off the Teleprompter. As Geoffrey Smith correctly observed about the speech, “Most unusually for a Reagan speech, it reads better today than it sounded then.”[52]

To a large extent, this all changed when Reagan started talking about communism. He hit his stride when he uttered the phrase, “In an ironic sense, Karl Marx was right” and used Marx’s own prophecies to predict the downfall of the Soviet Union. Also effective were the parts of the speech were he spoke what he considered to be simple truths about communism. If communism was really the better system, Reagan asked, why did the communists erect walls to keep their people from escaping to the West?

The parts of the speech that Reagan delivered most forcefully were those extended passages he personally authored, including his anecdotes about the defeat of communism in El Salvador and his defense of Britain in the Falklands dispute. Reagan’s anxiously awaited endorsement of British interests earned him an extended applause, the first of two he would receive during the speech. (Normally, joint meetings of both houses of Parliament don’t inspire spirited audience reactions. For instance, members are expected to stay silent during the Queen’s Speech during the state opening of Parliament.) The second applause came later in the speech when Reagan launched a not-quite-provocative but still concrete proposal to swap television time with Brezhnev in both their respective countries. The most memorable passage, when Reagan talks about throwing Marxism on the “ash heap of history” was greeted with no applause. In total, the speech lasted thirty two minutes.

Rather unusually for a presidential address to a foreign audience, the speech was covered live on American network television during its morning shows. This was the immediate reaction that Americans who watched the speech on ABC television heard.

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[52] Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher,* p. 92

Of the ABC reporters on the spot in London, Sam Donaldson called it "classic Reagan" and Peter Jennings described it as "Thatcherite." Professor Kendall Myers of Johns Hopkins University believed Reagan pulled no punches in what he considered to be an effective speech. Adam Rafael of the British publication *The Observer* was probably the first to hit on something truly significant. To Rafael, Reagan's speech seemed to be a departure in that he was willing to engage the Soviets in a war of ideas, rather than what Rafael saw as Reagan's early fixation with military rollbacks of third world communism.

The next day, the British opened up their newspapers to find headlines like "US to launch freedom crusade" and "Reagan backs British aim to preserve Falklands freedom" in the center-left Manchester *Guardian* and "Reagan praised for crusading freedom speech" in the conservative *Times* of London.[53] The editorial reactions from these papers were nuanced and mostly fell short of a ringing endorsement of Reagan's message. To the *Guardian*, Reagan proved that he was a "wonderful old smoothie" but lamented his seeming lack of engagement in developing constructive policies towards the Soviet Union, particularly on arms control.[54]

The *Times* called Reagan's words on the ash heap "noble and stirring," noting that "Without some moral content the foreign policy of the United States makes little sense. … President Reagan is right to emphasize it." At the same time, the editorial lamented the conflicting signals Reagan was sending. Like Rafael, they contrasted Reagan's earlier policies with the ideals he espoused before Parliament. Prior to Westminster,

> President Reagan seemed anxious to move away from the idealism of his predecessor. He had less faith in the intrinsic strength of freedom. He stressed the global military threat of the Soviet Union and the need for a military response to it. Friends would be supported without too close a look at their democratic

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[53] *Guardian* and *The Times*, June 9, 1982

[54] "America sweet and sour," *The Guardian*, June 9, 1982

> credentials. Mrs. Kirkpatrick made her famous distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.[55]

To them, Reagan's idealism at Westminster seemed an odd departure from this line of thought and they wondered whether or not Reagan's "crusade" would eventually come to mean destabilizing communist regimes militarily. As it turns out, it did, if one believes Reagan's claim that Westminster was the precursor to the Reagan Doctrine.

Probably the most piercing of any of the commentaries of the day came from Frank Johnson writing in the *Times*. It may be true, Johnson granted, that the intelligensia was right when they called Reagan's rhetoric simplistic, too determined to paint communism in black and white terms, overly indulgent of quaint anecdotes supplied by *Reader's Digest* and not well reasoned out. But the intelligensia seemed completely oblivious to the one simple truth that Reagan understood—that the Soviet system did not work while the West's did. He wrote,

> The speech was a sophisticate's nightmare. But, then, so is everything about Mr Reagan. This is his great virtue. He knows that there is something fundamentally wrong about the Soviet Union and something fundamentally right about his own country and ours. Most people start out their adult lives with this understanding and most people retain it. But a number of peopled have it bludgeoned out them by years of watching and making rotten television documentaries, or reading and writing rotten journalism.[56]

Coming from an Englishman, these were remarkable observations. Having long since conceded their dominant role in world affairs, the British had fashioned a new role for themselves as mediators in the Cold War conflict and instructors to their less refined American cousins. In Britain, both polite society and public opinion viewed moralizing crusades against communism with great skepticism. Ideological anti-communism came less easily to Europeans who were in the firing line of the Red Army.

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[55] "Mr Reagan calls for a crusade," *The Times*, June 9, 1982

[56] Johnson, "'Reader's Digest' supplies quotes." *The Times*, June 9, 1982.

There was another deeper dimension to British wariness. Beginning in 1945, the very year World War II ended, successive British governments dramatically expanded the social welfare state and nationalized major industries—coal, steel, automobiles, shipbuilding, aerospace, and others. Implicitly, these steps towards socialism were almost always couched in terms of arresting the appeal of totalitarian communism to the working classes. After World War II, the British did not believe that an unfettered free market economy could overcome the centralized Soviet system which had taken Berlin and conquered half a continent. As they saw it, communism was on the march and capitalism was on the retreat. Thus, the only sensible alternative to social upheaval was compromise in the form of a mixed economy.

When Thatcher ascended to power in 1979, she set out to systematically undo this socialist legacy. She believed that statism in all its forms was ideologically bankrupt and that it would fail while free markets flourished. She asked Britons to shed their irrational fear that *laissez-faire* capitalism would generate chaos, paving the way for a totalitarian triumph. In a broader sense, this is what Reagan was also saying at Westminster. He urged the Western world to have confidence in its own institutions, and to have faith that the intrinsic power of their ideas could singlehandedly defeat communism.

In a sense, Reagan's encouragement to the people on the other side of the Atlantic echoed the other famous Westminster speech in the twentieth century—the one Winston Churchill gave at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri in 1946 in which he awakened the United States to the threat of a rising Soviet Union. In 1982, Reagan was sounding the clarion call for the Soviet Union's demise. *National Review*, the American journal most ideologically in synch with Reagan, made this vital connection.[57]

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[57] "Return to Westminster." *National Review*, June 25, 1982, p. 739

Reaction to the speech in the American press was largely favorable. The *Christian Science Monitor* quoted Mark Twain as saying “Loyalty to petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul” and commended Reagan for speaking unambiguously against such opinions. Moreover, Reagan convinced the *Monitor*’s editors that his words were not those of a “a lonely cowboy, finger on trigger against a hostile world” but “more like a man looking around him and seeing that just maybe people can be brought together in peace and freedom, if petrified opinions are subjected to debate.” In the speech, the paper saw a new, more hopeful Reagan, distinct from the old Reagan who would use the CIA to undermine communist regimes.[58]

The *New York Times* echoed the theme of a new Reagan, and praised the speech. Its editorial read,

> Truly, as President Reagan said so well in Parliament yesterday, Americans want only one kind of global conflict. A “crusade” for the open society, as he called it, employing the only tolerable weapons: the powerful ideas and economies of democracy. His crusade would aim not to destroy other societies but to help them recognize the inhumanity and inefficiency of totalitarianism. What a tonic the President’s faith and optimism has become for the pugnacity so often heard from his Administration.[59]

Reagan’s only mistake, the *Times* argued, was that he did not go beyond fine rhetoric and propose tangible incentives to undermine communism, such as the withdrawal of Western capital from Poland.

The *Washington Post* also appreciated the distinction between boosting democracy and American military intervention in third world nations, but worried that this distinction might eventually become blurred. They wrote,

> It is only right, even necessary, that Europeans—and not only Europeans—ask if Mr. Reagan’s ideological muscularity masks a rededication to the excesses of military and political interventionism that many people on both sides of the

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[58] “Getting to know Reagan.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 9, 1982

[59] “Ronald Reagan’s Flower Power.” *The New York Times*, June 9, 1982

> Atlantic associated with the worst days of the Cold War. It would not be the first time that a decent pride in one's own values and institutions produced a skewed foreign policy.

In addition, the *Post* noted that Reagan's unique talent for shocking his audience was back in full force with phrases such as "Must freedom wither—in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil?"[60]

To be sure, there were some who decidedly disliked the speech. British Labour Party leaders were outraged at this grand occasion and wrote an open letter denouncing Reagan's policies, "Labour's approach to East-West relations means that we utterly reject an ideological crusade against the Soviet Union and its identification as the sole or even prime source of conflict in the world."[61]

Not surprisingly, the Soviet reaction bordered on apoplectic. The Soviets simply could not believe than an American President could say such things: "Crude anti-Sovietism has long been characteristic of Reagan and his immediate entourage. But there is a limit to everything, especially when a person is vested with the powers of a head of state."[62] If they expected Reagan would cease speaking this way about communism, then they did not know the man they were dealing with.

Conclusion

Because of its prophetic nature, the Westminster speech has an enduring impact. As Lou Cannon notes,

> Reagan did, in fact, have a vision for what he wanted the world to be like. It was the vision expressed in the Westminster speech: the Berlin Wall torn down,

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[60] "Campaign for Democracy." *The Washington Post*, June 9, 1982

[61] Scott MacLeod, Untitled, United Press International, June 8, 1982

[62] Burns, "Soviet Says Crusade by Reagan May Risk Global Catastrophe," *New York Times*, June 10, 1982

> pluralism and human rights in the Soviet Union, free elections in Poland and in every Communist country in the world. Above all, it was a vision of a world safe from the threat of nuclear Armageddon that he had referred to in the Westminster speech as “predictions of doomsday.”[63]

By the end of the decade, Reagan’s vision as laid out at Westminster seemed to be coming true. Many have argued, very plausibly, that this was no coincidence. By directly challenging the Soviet Union with initiatives like the Reagan Doctrine and SDI, Reagan pushed a tottering empire over the brink. At Westminster, Reagan set the stage for these offenses. The speech was the culmination of a conservative intellectual challenge to détente with Reagan had led, and proof that Reagan refused to be bound by rhetorical traditions which had prevented other presidents from speaking truth to Soviet power. With his optimism in full display, Reagan at Westminster spoke of an idealistic vision that few before him were willing to embrace: a world without communism.

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[63] Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, pp. 318-319

Text of President Ronald Reagan’s Speech to the British Parliament, June 8, 1982

Sections authored originally by Reagan are in boldface

The journey of which this visit forms a part is a long one. Already it has taken me to two great cities of the West - Rome and Paris - and to the Economic Summit at Versailles. There, once again, our sister democracies have proved that, even in a time of severe economic strain, free peoples can work together freely and voluntarily to address problems as serious as inflation, unemployment, trade and economic development in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity.

Other milestones lie ahead later this week. In Germany, we and our NATO allies will discuss measures for our joint defense and America's latest initiatives for a more peaceful, secure world through arms reductions.

Each stop of this trip is important but, among them all, this moment occupies a special place in my heart and the hearts of my countrymen - a moment of kinship and homecoming in these hallowed halls.

Speaking for all Americans, I want to say how very much at home we feel in your house. Every American would, because this is one of democracy's shrines. Here the rights of free people and the processes of representation have been debated and refined.

It has been said that an institution is the lengthening shadow of a man. This institution is the lengthening shadow of all the men and women who have sat here and all those who have voted to send representatives here.

This is my second visit to Great Britain as President of the United States. My first opportunity to stand on British soil occurred almost a year and a half ago when your Prime Minister graciously hosted a diplomatic dinner at the British Embassy in Washington. Mrs. Thatcher said then that she hoped that I was not distressed to find staring down at me from the grand staircase a portrait of His Royal Majesty, King George III.

She suggested it was best to let bygones be bygones and - in view of our two countries' remarkable friendship in succeeding years - she added that most Englishmen today would agree with Thomas Jefferson that "a little rebellion now and then is a very good thing."

From here I will go to Bonn, and then Berlin, where there stands a grim symbol of power untamed. The Berlin Wall, that dreadful gash across the city, is in its third decade. It is the fitting signature of the regime that built it.

And a few hundred kilometers behind the Berlin Wall there is another symbol. In the center of Warsaw there is a sign that notes the distances to two capitals. In one direction it points toward Moscow. In the other it points toward Brussels, headquarters of Western Europe's tangible unity. The marker says that the distances from Warsaw to Moscow and Warsaw to Brussels are equal. The sign makes this point: Poland is not East or West. Poland is at the center of European civilization. It has contributed mightily to that civilization. It is doing so today by being magnificently unreconciled to oppression.

Poland's struggle to be Poland and to secure the basic rights we often take for granted demonstrates why we dare not take those rights for granted. Gladstone, defending the Reform Bill of 1866, declared: "You cannot fight against the future. Time is on our side." It was easier to believe in the inevitable march of democracy in Gladstone's day - in that high noon of Victorian optimism.

We are approaching the end of a bloody century plagued by a terrible political invention - totalitarianism. Optimism comes less easily today, not because democracy is less vigorous but because democracy's enemies have refined their instruments of repression. Yet optimism is in order because, day by day, democracy is proving itself to be a not-at-all fragile flower.

From Stettin on the Baltic to Varna on the Black Sea, the regimes planted by totalitarianism have had more than 30 years to establish their legitimacy. But none - not one regime -has yet been able to risk free elections. Regimes planted by bayonets do not take root.

The strength of the Solidarity movement in Poland demonstrates the truth told in an underground joke in the Soviet Union. It is that the Soviet Union would remain a one-party nation even if an opposition party were permitted - because everyone would join that party.

America's time as a player on the stage of world history has been brief. I think understanding this fact has always made you patient with your younger cousins. Well, not always patient. I do recall that on one occasion Sir Winston Churchill said in exasperation about one of our most distinguished diplomats, "He is the only case I know of a bull who carries his china shop with him."

Witty as Sir Winston was, he also had that special attribute of great statesmen: the gift of vision, the willingness to see the future based on the experience of the past.

It is this sense of history, this understanding of the past, that I want to talk with you about today, for it is in remembering what we share of the past that our two nations can make common cause for the future.

We have not inherited an easy world. If developments like the Industrial Revolution, which began here in England, and the gifts of science and technology have made life much easier for us, they have also made it more dangerous. There are threats now to our freedom, indeed, to our very existence, that other generations could never even have imagined.

There is, first, the threat of global war. No President, no Congress, no Prime Minister, no Parliament, can spend a day entirely free of this threat. And I don't have to tell you that in today's world, the existence of nuclear weapons could mean, if not the extinction of mankind, then surely the end of civilization as we know it.

That is why negotiations on intermediate range nuclear forces now under way in Europe and the Start talks - Strategic Arms Reduction Talks - which will begin later this month, are not just critical to American or Western policy; they are critical to mankind. Our commitment to early success in these negotiations is firm and unshakable and our purpose is clear: reducing the risk of war by reducing the means of waging war on both sides.

At the same time, there is a threat posed to human freedom by the enormous power of the modern state. History teaches the danger of government that overreaches: political control takes precedence over free economic growth; secret police, mindless bureaucracy - all combining to stifle individual excellence and personal freedom.

Now I am aware that among us here and throughout Europe there is legitimate disagreement over the extent to which the public sector should play a role in a nation's economy and life. But on one point all of us are united: our abhorrence of dictatorship in all its forms but most particularly totalitarianism and the terrible inhumanities it has caused in our time: the great purge, Auschwitz and Dachau, the Gulag and Cambodia.

Historians looking back at our time will note the consistent restraint and peaceful intentions of the West. They will note that it was the democracies who refused to use the threat of their nuclear monopoly in the 40's and early 50's for territorial or imperial gain. Had that nuclear monopoly been in the hands of the Communist world, the map of Europe, indeed, the world, would look very different today. And certainly they will note it was not the democracies that invaded Afghanistan or suppressed Polish Solidarity or used chemical and toxin warfare in Afghanistan or Southeast Asia.

If history teaches anything, it teaches: self-delusion in the face of unpleasant facts is folly. We see around us today the marks of our terrible dilemma - predictions of doomsday, antinuclear demonstrations, an arms race in which the West must for its own protection be an unwilling participant. At the same time, we see totalitarian forces in the world who seek subversion and conflict around the globe to further their barbarous assault on the human spirit.

What, then, is our course? Must civilization perish - in a hail of fiery atoms? Must freedom wither - in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil? **Sir Winston Churchill refused to accept the inevitability of war or even that it was imminent. He said:** "I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war. What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines. But what we have to consider here today while time remains, is the permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all countries."

This is precisely our mission today: to preserve freedom as well as peace. It may not be easy to see, but I believe we live now at a turning point.

In an ironic sense, Karl Marx was right. We are witnessing today a great revolutionary crisis - a crisis where the demands of the economic order are colliding directly with those of the political order. But the crisis is happening not in the free, non-Marxist West, but in the home of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union.

It is the Soviet Union that runs against the tide of history by denying freedom and human dignity to its citizens. It also is in deep economic difficulty. The rate of growth in the Soviet gross national product has been steadily declining since the 50's and is less than half of what it was then. The dimensions of this failure are astounding; a country which employs one-fifth of its population in agriculture is unable to feed its own people.

Were it not for the tiny private sector tolerated in Soviet agriculture, the country might be on the brink of famine. These private plots occupy a bare 3 percent of the arable land but account for nearly one-quarter of Soviet farm output and nearly one-third of meat products and vegetables.

Overcentralized, with little or no incentives, year after year the Soviet system pours its best resource into the making of instruments of destruction. The constant shrinkage of economic growth combined with the growth of military production is putting a heavy strain on the Soviet people.

What we see here is a political structure that no longer corresponds to its economic base, a society where productive forces are hampered by political ones.

The decay of the Soviet experiment should come as no surprise to us. Wherever the comparisons have been made between free and closed societies - West Germany and East

Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, Malaysia and Vietnam - it is the democratic countries that are prosperous and responsive to the needs of their people.

And one of the simple but overwhelming facts of our time is this: of all the millions of refugees we have seen in the modern world, their flight is always away from, not toward, the Communist world. **Today on the NATO line, our military forces face east to prevent a possible invasion. On the other side of the line the Soviet forces also face east - to prevent their people from leaving.**

The hard evidence of totalitarian rule has caused in mankind an uprising of the intellect and will. Whether it is the growth of the new schools of economics in America or England or the appearnce of the so-called new philosophers in France, there is one unifying thread running through the intellectual work of these groups: rejection of the arbitrary power of the state, the refusal to subordinate the rights of the individual to the superstate, the realization that collectivism stifles all the best human impulses.

Since the Exodus from Egypt, historians have written of those who sacrificed and struggled for freedom: the stand at Thermopylae, the revolt of Spartacus, the storming of the Bastille, the Warsaw uprising in World War II.

More recently we have seen evidence of this same human impulse in one of the developing nations in Central America. For months and months the world news media covered the fighting in El Salvador. Day after day, we were treated to stories and film slanted toward the brave freedom fighters battling oppressive Government forces in behalf of the silent, suffering people of that tortured country.

Then one day those silent suffering people were offered a chance to vote to choose the kind of Government they wanted. Suddenly the freedom fighters in the hills were exposed for what they really are: Cuban-backed guerrillas who want power for themselves and their backers, not democracy for the people.

They threatened death to anyone who voted and destroyed hundreds of buses and trucks to keep people from getting to the polling places. But on election day, the people of El Salvador, an unprecedented 1.4 million of them, braved ambush and gunfire, trudging miles to vote for freedom.

They stood for hours in the hot sun waiting for their turn to vote. Members of our Congress who went there as observers told me of a woman wounded by rifle fire who refused to leave the line to have her wound treated until after she had voted.

A grandmother, who had been told by the guerrillas she would be killed when she returned from the polls, told the guerrillas, ''You can kill me, kill my family, kill my neighbors, but you can't kill us all.'' The real freedom fighters of El Salvador turned out to be the people of that country, the young, the old and the in-between. Strange, but there has been little if any news coverage of that war since the election.

Perhaps they'll say it's because there are newer struggles now. On distant islands in the South Atlantic, young men are fighting for Britain. And, yes, voices have been raised protesting their sacrifice for lumps of rock and earth so far away. But those young men aren't fighting for mere real estate.

They fight for a cause, for the belief that armed aggression must not be allowed to succeed, and that people must participate in the decisions of government under the rule of law. If there had been firmer support for that principle some 45 years ago, perhaps our generation wouldn't have suffered the bloodletting of World War II.

In the Middle East, the guns sound once more, this time in Lebanon, a country that for too long has had to endure the tragedy of civil war, terrorism and foreign intervention and occupation. The fighting in Lebanon on the part of all parties must stop and Israel must bring its forces home. But this is not enough. We must all work to stamp out the scourge of terrorism that in the Middle East makes war an ever-present threat.

But beyond the trouble spots lies a deeper, more positive pattern. Around the world today, the democratic revolution is gathering new strength. In India, a critical test has been passed with the peaceful change of governing political parties. In Africa, Nigeria is moving in remarkable and unmistakable ways to build and strengthen its democratic institutions. In the Caribbean and Central America, 16 of 24 countries have freely elected governments. And in the United Nations, 8 of 10 developing nations which have joined the body in the past five years are democracies.

In the Communist world as well, man's instinctive desire for freedom and self-determination surfaces again and again. To be sure, there are grim reminders of how brutally the police state attempts to snuff out this quest for self-rule: 1953 in East Germany, 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, 1981 in Poland.

But the struggle continues in Poland, and we know there are even those who strive and suffer for freedom within the confines of the Soviet Union itself. How we conduct ourselves here in the Western democracies will determine whether this trend continues.

No, democracy is not a fragile flower; still it needs cultivating. If the rest of this century is to witness the gradual growth of freedom and democratic ideals, we must take actions to assist the campaign for democracy.

Some argue that we should encourage democratic change in right-wing dictatorships, but not in Communist regimes. To accept this preposterous notion - some well-meaning people have - is to invite the argument that, once countries achieve a nuclear capability, they should be allowed an undisturbed reign of terror over their own citizens. We reject this course.

As for the Soviet view, Chairman Brezhnev repeatedly has stressed that the competition of ideas and systems must continue and that this is entirely consistent with relaxation of tensions and peace. We ask only that these systems begin by living up to their own constitutions, abiding by their own laws and complying with the international obligations they have undertaken. We ask only for a process, a direction, a basic code of decency - not for instant transformation.

We cannot ignore the fact that even without our encouragement, there have been and will continue to be repeated explosions against repression in dictatorships. The Soviet Union itself is not immune to this reality. Any system is inherently unstable that has no peaceful means to legitimize its leaders. In such cases, the very repressiveness of the state ultimately drives people to resist it - if necessary, by force.

While we must be cautious about forcing the pace of change, we must not hesitate to clear our ultimate objectives and to take concrete actions to move towards them. We must be staunch in our conviction that freedom is not the sole prerogative of a lucky few but the inalienable and universal right of all human beings. So states the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights -which, among other things, guarantees free elections.

The objective I propose is quite simple to state: To foster the infrastructure of democracy - the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities - which allows a people to choose their own way, to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means.

This is not cultural imperialism; it is providing the means for genuine self-determination and protection for diversity. Democracy already flourishes in countries with very different cultures and historical experiences. It would be cultural condescension, or worse, to say that any people prefer dictatorship to democracy.

Who would voluntarily choose not to have the right to vote; decide to purchase government propaganda handouts instead of independent newspapers; prefer government- to worker-controlled unions; opt for land to be owned by the state instead of those who till it; want government repression of religious liberty, a single political party instead of a free choice, a rigid cultural orthodoxy instead of democratic tolerance and diversity?

Since 1917, the Soviet Union has given covert political training and assistance to Marxist-Leninists in many countries. Of course, it also has promoted the use of violence and subversion by these same forces.

Over the past several decades, West European and other Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Liberals have offered open assistance to fraternal political and social institutions, to bring about peaceful and democratic progress. Appropriately for a vigorous new democracy, the Federal Republic of Germany's political foundations have become a major force in this effort.

We in America now intend to take additional steps, as many of our allies have already done, toward realizing this same goal. The chairmen and other leaders of the National Republican and Democratic Party organizations are initiating a study with the bipartisan American Political Foundation to determine how the United States can best contribute - as a nation - to the global campaign for democracy now gathering force.

They will have the cooperation of Congressional leaders of both parties, along with representatives of business, labor and other major institutions in our society. I look forward to receiving their recommendations and to working with these institutions and the Congress in the common task of strengthening democracy throughout the world.

It is time that we committed ourselves as a nation - in both the public and private sectors - to assisting democratic development. **We plan to consult with leaders of other nations as well. There is a proposal before the Council of Europe to invite parliamentarians from democratic countries to a meeting next year in Strasbourg. That prestigious gathering could consider ways to help democratic political movements.**

This November, in Washington, there will take place an international meeting on free elections, and next spring there will be a conference of world authorities on constitutionalism and selfgovernment hosted by the Chief Justice of the United States.

Authorities from a number of developing and developed countries - judges, philosophers and politicians with practical experience - have agreed to explore how to turn principle into practice and further the rule of law.

At the same time, we invite the Soviet Union to consider with us how the competition of ideas and values -which it is committed to support -can be conducted on a peaceful and reciprocal basis. For example, I am prepared to offer President Brezhnev an opportunity to speak to the American people on our television if he will allow me the same opportunity with the Soviet people. We also suggest that panels of our newsmen periodically appear on each other's television to discuss major events.

I do not wish to sound overly optimistic, yet the Soviet Union is not immune from the reality of what is going on in the world. It has happened in the past: a small ruling elite either mistakenly attempts to ease domestic unrest through greater repression and foreign adventure or it chooses a wiser course - it begins to allow its people a voice in their own destiny.

Even if this latter process is not realized soon, I believe the renewed strength of the democratic movement, complemented by a global campaign for freedom, will strengthen the prospects for arms control and a world at peace.

I have discussed on other occasions, including my address on May 9, the elements of Western policies toward the Soviet Union to safeguard our interests and protect the peace. What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term - the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history as it has left other tyrannies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people.

That is why we must continue our efforts to strengthen NATO even as we move forward with our zero-option initiative in the negotiations on intermediate range forces and our proposal for a one-third reduction in strategic ballistic missile warheads.

Our military strength is a prerequisite to peace, but let it be clear we maintain this strength in the hope it will never be used. For the ultimate determinant in the struggle now going on for the world will not be bombs and rockets but a test of wills and ideas -a trial of spiritual resolve: the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish, the ideals to which we are dedicated.

The British people know that, given strong leadership, time and a little bit of hope, the forces of good ultimately rally and triumph over evil. Here among you is the cradle of self-government, the mother of parliaments. Here is the enduring greatness of the British contribution to mankind, the great civilized ideas: individual liberty, representative government and the rule of law under God.

I have often wondered about the shyness of some of us in the West about standing for these ideals that have done so much to ease the plight of man and the hardships of our imperfect world. This reluctance to use those vast resources at our command reminds me of the elderly lady whose home was bombed in the blitz; as the rescuers moved about they found a bottle of brandy she had stored behind the staircase, which was all that was left standing. Since she was barely conscious, one of the workers pulled the cork to give her a taste of it. She came around immediately and said: "Here now, put it back. That's only for emergencies."

Well, the emergency is upon us. Let us be shy no longer - let us go to our strength. Let us offer hope. Let us tell the world that a new age is not only possible but probable.

During the dark days of the Second World War, when this island was incandescent with courage, Winston Churchill exclaimed about Britain's adversaries, ''What kind of a people do they think we are?''

Britain's adversaries found out what extraordinary people the British are. But all the democracies paid a terrible price for allowing the dictators to underestimate us. We dare not make that mistake again. So let us ask ourselves: What kind of people do we think we are? And let us answer: free people, worthy of freedom and determined not only to remain so but to help others gain their freedom as well.

Sir Winston led his people to great victory in war and then lost an election just as the fruits of victory were about to be enjoyed. But he left office honorably - and, as it turned out, temporarily - knowing that the liberty of his people was more important than the fate of any single leader.

History recalls his greatness in ways no dictator will ever know. And he left us a message of hope for the future, as timely now as when he first uttered it, as opposition leader in the

Commons nearly 27 years ago. "When we look back on all the perils through which we have passed and at the mighty foes we have laid low and all the dark and deadly designs we have frustrated, why should we fear for our future? We have," said Sir Winston, "come safely through the worst."

The task I have set forth will long outlive our own generation. But together, we, too, have come through the worst. Let us now begin a major effort to secure the best - a crusade for freedom that will engage the faith and fortitude of the next generation. For the sake of peace and justice, let us move toward a world in which all people are at last free to determine their own destiny.

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