

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXIV-6

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Introduction by Timothy Sayle, University of Toronto

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E. H. Carr argued that scholars of contemporary history suffer from a “principal embarrassment.” This was the challenge of looking on the recent past solely through a historical lens – of “divest[ing] ourselves of other capacities which might justify us in passing judgment.”<sup>1</sup> Studying any recent president or presidential administration requires a significant effort at this divestment. But Ronald Reagan seems to have represented a particular challenge here. Too many historians of American foreign relations have known the gnawing fear that their study of the Reagan administration will be misinterpreted as a political rather than scholarly act.

And yet *The Reagan Moment* might represent a new scholarly moment of its own: Aaron Bateman, Grant Golub, and Elizabeth Ingleson all see this edited collection as opening a new era in historical scholarship on the Reagan administration. The edited collection offers, as Ingleson writes, a “starting point” for “future histories of this era.” That such a moment arrived when it did may be the result of the natural rhythms of access to both records and memories: Jonathan Hunt and Simon Miles, the editors of the volume, along with their lengthy list of authors, have arrived at what Michelle Paranzino calls the “sweet spot.” There is, presently, both a significant quantity of declassified archival material available and a number of former officials who are still alive and willing to give oral history accounts.

Each of the reviewers below praises the breadth and range of the chapters assembled by Hunt and Miles, although Paranzino is critical of omissions in the human rights section. The reviews themselves describe the chapters in sufficient detail that there is no need to describe them again here. Ingleson observes the obvious editorial and authorial effort that successfully put the chapters into conversation with each other. But does this mean that the book, itself (as opposed to the individual authors) offers an agreed interpretation of the Reagan era? Note the intriguing assessments of the reviewers: For Bateman, who praises the quality of the chapters, there is no “overarching narrative” guiding the collection. Golub, for his part, argues that Hunt and Miles have captured “core sentiments that Reagan tried to convey.” Paranzino identifies a “diversity of viewpoints” among the authors, and Ingleson writes, similarly, about the differing interpretive visions presented in the book.

The quality of the research and writing in *The Reagan Moment* is not in doubt – the reviews are uniformly positive. This allows for the reviewers to engage in a broader discussion of the ideas presented in Hunt and Miles’ collection. Both Bateman and Golub subscribe to the editors’ claim that the 1980s was a critical decade: a transformational period in history and a crucial era for understanding today’s world. The other two reviewers question this assertion. Paranzino offers a thoughtful challenge, suggesting that perhaps consistencies in American relations with the world outweigh the changes of the Reagan years. Ingleson questions whether there was, indeed, a “Reagan moment,” offering a thoughtful alternative of several moments – some of Reagan’s, some belonging to others. Her warning of the consequences of organizing historical study along the lines of “president-decade pairings” is an important one.

That the roundtable discussion below features such a rich discussion of ideas and interpretations is, of course, a testament to the reviewers. Equally, however, it suggests that Hunt and Miles have indeed assembled a group of authors whose talents as historians allowed them to rise above Carr’s “principal embarrassment.” There need be no end to debate about this era, but the debate can be scholarly, based on deep research and analysis. Ronald Reagan, the Reagan administration, and America and the world in the 1980s, are history.

**Participants:**

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<sup>1</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?: The George Macaulay Trevelyan lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge, January-March 1961*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (London: Penguin, 1990), 78.

**Jonathan R. Hunt** is Assistant Professor of Strategy at the US Air War College and a visiting scholar at the University of Southampton. He is the co-editor with Dr. Simon Miles of *The Reagan Moment: America and the World in the 1980s* (Cornell University Press, 2021) and the author of *The Nuclear Club: How America and the World Governed the Atom from Hiroshima to Vietnam* (Stanford University Press, 2022). He is at work on a dual biography of George Wallace and Curtis Lemay and a congressional history of US-People's Republic of China relations since 1979.

**Simon Miles** is assistant professor in the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. He is the author of *Engaging the Evil Empire: Washington, Moscow, and the Beginning of the End of the Cold War*; of articles in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, *Diplomatic History*, the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, and *Slavic Review*; and commentary in *Foreign Policy*, the *Globe and Mail*, *War on the Rocks*, and the *Washington Post*. Simon's current project, *On Guard for Peace and Socialism*, is an international history of the Warsaw Pact.

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**Aaron Bateman** (Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University) is an assistant professor of history and international affairs at George Washington University. His research has appeared in *Intelligence and National Security*, the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, *Science and Diplomacy*, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, and *War on the Rocks* (among others). Prior to graduate school, he served as a US Air Force intelligence officer.

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**Elizabeth Ingleson** is an Assistant Professor in the International History department at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Prior to her appointment she held positions at Yale University, Southern Methodist University, and the University of Virginia and earned her Ph.D. in History from the University of Sydney. Her first book, *Making Made in China: The Transformation of U.S.-China Trade in the 1970s* (under contract with Harvard University Press), explores how the United States and China rebuilt trade ties in the 1970s after over twenty years of isolation and in the process unwittingly reshaped global capitalism. She has written a number of articles and chapters on various aspects of US-China relations and US capitalism and is additionally writing a book under contract with Bloomsbury Academic, *China and the United States since 1949: An International History*.

**Michelle D. Paranzino** is an assistant professor in the Strategy & Policy department at the US Naval War College. She is the author of *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War: A Short History with Documents* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2018) and is currently working on a book about Ronald Reagan and the War on Drugs.

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 Review by Aaron Bateman, George Washington University
 

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Over 30 years after leaving the White House, Ronald Reagan remains a controversial figure. He is both revered and reviled; many people identify as “Reagan Republicans” and view him as the spiritual leader of modern American conservatism. Hagiographic accounts portray Reagan as a staunch Cold Warrior who delivered the United States out from a period of malaise, built up American defenses, challenged Moscow militarily, ideologically, and economically, and forced the Soviet Union into the reforms that ultimately led to its demise. Other more recent evaluations cast Reagan as having been less consequential for the tumultuous changes in Europe and the Soviet Union, and claim that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was the more important figure in the transformations that are oftentimes associated with the ending of the Cold War. Fundamentally, Reagan is an enigmatic figure.<sup>2</sup>

Studying Reagan’s presidency and reevaluating his legacy take on even greater importance as the United States moves into a period of what many analysts are calling a return to great power competition. Some see in Reagan’s actions a replicable model for competing with China and Russia today. Former Secretary of State Michael Pompeo recently advocated a new Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) because he claims that the former one “drove the Soviet Union into a technological race that helped ensure its demise.”<sup>3</sup> This and similar appraisals of Reagan’s policies overlook his complexities, especially the nuclear abolitionism that so captivated him and substantially influenced his approach to SDI and arms control. As the arms control regime that Reagan so powerfully helped set into motion is increasingly challenged, security experts are scrambling to better understand the conditions that led to these agreements in the first place.

Despite the many changes since Reagan’s time in the Oval Office, Jonathan Hunt is quite correct in asserting that “we are still living through this [Reagan] moment” (18).<sup>4</sup> This excellent volume edited by Hunt and Simon Miles is an essential step towards better understanding Reagan, the manner in which he shaped the world, and the ways in which the world shaped his presidency. The volume is organized into six sections: Global and Domestic Issues, Western and Eastern Europe, Human Rights and Domestic Politics, Latin America, The Middle East and Africa, and South and East Asia.

One of the central, and most divisive, debates surrounding Reagan is the nature of his foreign policy. As Melvyn Leffler points out, many Reagan contemporaries still view SDI and his military buildup as having been decisive factors in forcing the collapse of the USSR.<sup>5</sup> Reagan did not, however, view military power as a tool for bringing about the end of the Soviet Union and winning the Cold War. In characterizing Reagan’s approach to the Soviet Union, Leffler compellingly argues that “negotiation was more important than intimidation. Reagan’s emotional intelligence was more important than his military buildup” (37). Elizabeth Charles and James Graham Wilson similarly point towards the singular significance of Reagan’s optimism and his ability to translate that optimism into policy action with the assistance of key partners like Secretary of State George Schultz.<sup>6</sup> Reagan, nevertheless, had competing impulses that entailed confrontational and

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<sup>2</sup> For differing accounts of the Reagan era, see: Peter Schweizer, *Reagan’s War: The Epic Story of His Forty-Year Struggle and Final Triumph Over Communism* (New York: Anchor, 2003); John Lewis Gaddis’ *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Archie Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2017); and Beth Fischer, *The Myth of Triumphalism: Rethinking President Reagan’s Cold War Legacy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Pompeo, “Nuclear Weapons, China, and a Strategic Defense Initiative for this Century,” *National Interest*, January 18, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/nuclear-weapons-china-and-strategic-defense-initiative-century-199549>.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan R. Hunt, “Introduction: The Man or the Moment?” in Hunt and Simon Miles, eds., *The Reagan Moment: America and the World in the 1980s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021): 1-22. Hereafter Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*.

<sup>5</sup> Melvyn Leffler, “Ronald Reagan and the Cold War,” Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 25-42.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth C. Charles and James Graham Wilson, “Confronting the Soviet Threat: Reagan’s Approach to Policymaking,” Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 105-122.

cooperative attitudes towards the Soviet Union. Charles and Wilson highlight one of Reagan's "greatest paradoxes": while "remaining tough with the Soviets, he simultaneously reached out to Soviet leaders" (114).

SDI certainly embodied Reagan's competing impulses and remains one of the most controversial aspects of his presidency. Even though the president characterized SDI as a necessary response to Soviet space and missile defense programs, he aspired to share the benefits of SDI with the USSR (118). In contrast to accounts from the immediate post-Cold War time period, Leffler rightfully pushes back against the argument that SDI was decisive in shaping Gorbachev's behavior. But even if SDI was not the *decisive* factor in the reforms that Gorbachev ultimately adopted, we are still left wondering what its significance was? When leaving office, Reagan certainly viewed his establishment of SDI as having been an essential step forward towards achieving the nuclear-free world that both he and Gorbachev desired.

Leffler and Stephanie Freeman both highlight the significance of Reagan's nuclear abolitionism. SDI was certainly motivated in large part by Reagan's abhorrence of Mutually Assured Destruction; Freeman importantly identifies the fact that the president's "nuclear abolitionism made him an outlier among Republicans" (157).<sup>7</sup> SDI was, however, more than a nuclear abolitionist dream or fantasy, it had tangible consequences for international relations in the 1980s. As Susan Colbourn and Mathias Haeussler point out, SDI contributed to the chronic tensions found within the transatlantic alliance.<sup>8</sup> At this same time, SDI was a vehicle, from Reagan's perspective, for the seemingly contradictory tasks of more effectively competing with the Soviet Union while also serving as a mechanism for cooperation.

Colbourn and Haeussler provide an excellent snapshot of transatlantic relations in the Reagan era, and reveal that there was more continuity with prior years than has oftentimes been appreciated. Importantly, they articulate how Reagan's aggressive diplomatic tone was "far from the root cause of transatlantic difficulties" (123). Instead, tensions in the 1980s were the product of a set of larger issues that went back to the earliest years of NATO. Disagreements between Reagan and his Canadian and European counterparts about economic policy, nuclear strategy, and arms control (among other issues) were only reminders of chronic tensions rather than attributes of fundamentally new problems. These authors remind us that the seeming contradictions in Reagan's rhetoric and actions – Reagan the alleged warmonger was the same man who pushed for the elimination of all nuclear weapons – did much to shape the nature of transatlantic relations in this period.

A theme that comes out in multiple places in the volume is the gulf between rhetoric and action. Mark Atwood Lawrence analyzes Reagan's desire to vanquish the 'Vietnam syndrome.'<sup>9</sup> The surge in military spending that was a core part of the president's 'peace through strength' agenda was central to overcoming the Vietnam syndrome. As Lawrence points out, however, rhetoric about an emboldened foreign policy contrasted with a recognition of the limits of military power and a "persistent anxiety about becoming embroiled in new 'Vietnams'." (166). Reagan's rhetorical gifts convinced Americans of the need for overwhelming military power, even as the president understood the limitations of U.S. hard power abroad.

Lawrence makes a compelling argument that Reagan's effective political rhetoric enabled him to bolster support for giving "the military everything it needed to get the job done" (183). The military buildup during Reagan's tenure in the White House is oftentimes viewed as one of the clear points of divergence between him and President Jimmy Carter, and is used to present Reagan as a 'hawk' and Carter as a 'dove.' Christopher Fuller points out that Reagan had portrayed Carter as weak and incompetent.<sup>10</sup> Closer examination of Jimmy Carter's presidency reveals, however, that the gulf between Carter and Reagan on defense was not *quite* as large as Reagan might have wanted people to believe. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates wrote in 1997 that the "conventional wisdom" that Carter pursued "an essential antidefense policy that weakened the

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<sup>7</sup> Stephanie Freeman, "Ronald Reagan and the Nuclear Freeze Movement," Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 144-162.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Colbourn and Mathias Haeussler, "Once More, with Feeling: Transatlantic Relations in the Reagan Years," Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 123-143.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, "Rhetoric and Restraint: Ronald Reagan and the Vietnam Syndrome," Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 165-187.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher J. Fuller, "Reagan and the Evolution of US Counterterrorism," Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 64-83.

country” was ‘wrong.’<sup>11</sup> For example, Carter pushed important defense programs, like the B-2 stealth bomber, that matured during Reagan’s presidency.

Although conventional and nuclear military matters played a defining role in Reagan’s defense strategy, he also oversaw important changes in counter-terrorism policy that have shaped American national security up through the present time. Fuller unpacks the tension between Reagan’s tough talk on combatting terrorism and the complexities surrounding the president’s attempt to formulate effective counter-terrorism policy. In doing so, his article also makes an important contribution to our understanding of the organization of U.S. counter-terrorism, the establishment of the CIA’s Counterterrorism Center (CTC) in particular, and the actions that ultimately contributed to the emergence of the Global War on Terror in the twenty-first century.

By detailing the process for creating the CTC, Fuller’s essay sheds light on the significant transformations in the American intelligence apparatus under Reagan. CTC’s push for more comprehensive surveillance capabilities and an unmanned drone program for neutralizing terrorists presaged attributes of American counter-terrorism that would become ubiquitous in the post-9/11 era. Most significantly, Fuller observes that the short-term gains achieved through supporting the Afghan insurgency against the Soviet Union would be overshadowed by the longer-term consequences of “forging a vast cohort of [radical Islamist] individuals in the intoxicating ideology flames the Reagan administration stoked” (80). Elisabeth Leake amplifies Fuller’s points about U.S. shortsightedness in Central Asia with her observation that Reagan’s focus on the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and not planning to support a stable, functioning state, allowed the country to “succumb to civil war, and later the Taliban” (382).<sup>12</sup> Robert Rakove similarly observes in his chapter that the Reagan administration’s interest in Afghanistan “proved historically fleeting” after the Soviets withdrew their forces (340).<sup>13</sup>

Deep contradictions in Reagan’s ideology and foreign policy were borne out especially prominently in Latin America. Sarah Snyder explores how Reagan’s anti-Communism and commitment to human rights placed him in an especially difficult position.<sup>14</sup> He saw Pope John Paul II as a kindred spirit in light of the pontiff’s anti-Communism and vocal support for religious freedom, especially for people living behind the Iron Curtain. As the United States prepared for the inaugural meeting of the Nuclear and Space Talks with the Soviet Union in 1985, Reagan sought to ensure that the human rights question would receive its due attention alongside technical issues associated with the military balance and strategic stability. Despite the president’s stated commitment to human rights, he was, Snyder points out, willing to justify “devastating human rights violations in the name of preventing the spread of communism” (189). This willingness to overlook heinous acts by anti-Communists, in order to stave off what Reagan saw as the greater evil, did not prevent him from making the promotion of human rights an important element in his foreign policy. Yet, inconsistency in the defense of human rights was not unique to Reagan, as Snyder highlights. Carter too overlooked human rights violations when a confrontation of them did not align with broader American political objectives.

Economic change characterized the final decade of the Cold War along with substantial geopolitical transformation; nowhere was this more evident than in East Asia. The 1980s witnessed Japan’s emergence as an economic powerhouse that Jennifer Miller contends “offered a new test to American capabilities and upended American conceptions of global power” (389).<sup>15</sup> An ascendant Japan only exacerbated anxieties about U.S. decline and America’s relative standing in the world. Tokyo was gaining strength in key high-technology sectors that concerned American and Western European observers who feared that a technology gap was expanding in favor of Japan. Miller insightfully explains that American worries about

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Gates, “Defense and Arms Control in the Carter Administration,” *Studies in Intelligence*, January 1, 1997, CIA-CREST: DOC\_0000872643.

<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth Leake, “Reagan and the Crisis of Southwest Asia,” Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 367-386.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Rakove, “The Central Front of Reagan’s Cold War: The United States and Afghanistan,” Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 324-344.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah B. Snyder, “Compartmentalizing US Foreign Policy: Human Rights in the Reagan Years,” Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 188-211.

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer M. Miller, “Adam’s Smith Arthritis: Japan and the Fears of American Decline,” Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 387-413.

Japan's success concerned more than economic prosperity and competitiveness, entailing a feeling that "the American people were being taken advantage of, that the United States had lost control over the global system it had created ... and even capitalism itself [was] on trial" (406).

Protectionist attitudes towards American economic competitiveness and prosperity were not, of course, confined to Japan. European allies similarly expressed frustration and concern with what they saw as the Reagan administration's attempts to preserve U.S. technological advantages through at times through coercive use of the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls. Miller compellingly shows that, "first articulated with Japan in mind," ideas about America's "rightful position in the global economy," combined with a "willingness to safeguard American hegemony" would continue to resurface with "far-reaching consequences" (408).

Within the East Asian context, Jonathan Hunt adds significant nuance to our understanding of how Reagan's policies towards China "planted the seeds of a rising power ... whose liberalization would stop far short of the values of human rights and democracy" that Reagan professed (416).<sup>16</sup> As other contributors of this volume show, however, Reagan was able to look aside when human rights issues conflicted with larger geopolitical and economic imperatives. At the same time that there were growing concerns about Japan's rising clout in the international market, Reagan was increasingly optimistic that a prosperous China would be a net positive for the United States. While the Reagan administration investigated pursuing more stringent technology-transfer policies that could negatively impact traditionally close allies in Europe, Hunt shows how "technology and knowledge transfers ... became the new hallmarks of US-PRC affairs" (426). This chapter is especially salient as historians, scholars of international relations, economists, and security studies experts are attempting to better understand why the present competition with China emerged, and how American policies contributed to this situation.

This volume certainly makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of just how much, as Simon Miles writes in the conclusion, "we live in a world shaped to an extraordinary degree by the events" of the 1980s (442).<sup>17</sup> Many of the chapters show how Reagan's policies, most often in ways that were unforeseen and unanticipated in the 1980s, helped to create the world as we know it today. The authors did not subscribe to an overarching narrative of the Reagan era; rather, they provided a balanced, thoroughly researched reappraisal of the Reagan administration that transcends a bi-polar and Western-centric perspective of the final years of the Cold War. As Miles suggests, this volume represents a great step forward towards more comprehensive histories of Reagan and the 1980s that use archival materials that are only now becoming available. This volume successfully recasts a global Ronald Reagan and the transformational years in which he served as president.

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<sup>16</sup> Hunt, "One World, Two Chinas: Dreams of Capitalist Convergence in East Asia," Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 414-436.

<sup>17</sup> Miles, "Conclusion: Reagan Reconsidered," Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 437-444.

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 Review by Grant Golub, The London School of Economics and Political Science
 

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On the evening of January 11, 1989, Ronald Reagan appeared as president for the final time on the television screens of millions of Americans from behind the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office. His speech teemed with a confident vulnerability, a reflective jubilation. Reagan's words reminded his viewers what made him such a widely popular president: his radical optimism and overwhelming ability to cut through complexity and communicate with Americans in a simple, but decisive, way.

Two points in Reagan's address have always stood out to me as part of the fundamental ethos of his presidency. The first is his story of a refugee from Indochina who, upon his rescue by the US Navy, spots an American sailor on the deck of an aircraft carrier and yells to him, "Hello, American sailor. Hello, freedom man." Reagan goes on to say that that story represented "what it was to be an American in the 1980's. We stood, again, for freedom."<sup>18</sup>

The second is his reflection that "as we long as remember our first principles, and believe in ourselves, the future will always be ours. And something else we learned: Once you begin a great movement, there's no telling where it will end. We meant to change a nation, and instead, we changed the world."<sup>19</sup> In putting together *The Reagan Moment: America and the World in the 1980s*, Jonathan Hunt and Simon Miles have wonderfully captured these core sentiments that Reagan tried to convey that January evening. The result is a fabulous collection of essays written by a rising generation of historians who seek to temper the partisan rancor that has often defined conversations about the Reagan administration; instead, they begin a thoughtful historical reflection on its (influence in world affairs during the 1980s and its enduring legacies.

As William Inboden rightfully points out in his foreword, it seems that we are entering a fertile era of scholarship on Reagan and his administration.<sup>20</sup> With over three decades having passed since Reagan left the White House, mountains of records have been freshly declassified and are now available to researchers who are striving to understand his administration and its policies. While dozens of books have been published on Reagan and his presidency, many with a strongly partisan tint, only in recent years has enough time passed that genuine scholarly assessments have become plausible.<sup>21</sup> *The Reagan Moment* goes a long way in moving us toward that direction and establishing a sturdy base for future scholars to critically examine the US role in the world under Reagan's stewardship.

One of the many strengths of this book is both its breathtaking scope and its impressive attention to detail. While it is impossible to capture every presidential policy or action in a single book, even a large one, *The Reagan Moment* is awe-

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation," January 11, 1989, The American Presidency Project (available at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/farewell-address-the-nation>, accessed January 7, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation."

<sup>20</sup> William Inboden, "Foreword: Reagan in the World," in Jonathan R. Hunt and Simon Miles, eds., *The Reagan Moment: America and the World in the 1980s* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2021): ix-x, here ix. Hereafter Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*.

<sup>21</sup> For some recent examples, see James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Viking, 2009); James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Jeffrey L. Chidester and Paul Kengor, eds., *Reagan's Legacy in a World Transformed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); H.W. Brands, *Reagan: The Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 2016); Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: US Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Bradley Lynn Coleman and Kyle Longley, eds., *Reagan and the World: Leadership and National Security, 1981-1989* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017); Beth A. Fischer, *The Myth of Triumphalism: Rethinking President Reagan's Cold War Legacy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019); Simon Miles, *Engaging the Evil Empire: Washington, Moscow, and the Beginning of the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights: Contesting Morality in US Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

inspiring in part because it manages to accomplish such breadth while not sacrificing the sufficient levels of depth needed for critical analysis and evaluation.

In the book's many chapters, we see a blend of US domestic politics, American foreign policy, and international history, seeing how all three consistently interacted and shaped one another as Reagan and his advisers wrestled with the many challenges they faced. Readers witness a range of topics, including, for example, how senior Reagan administration officials clashed with each other in Washington as they struggled to craft US policies as well as how those policies impacted the Afghan mujahideen's war against the Soviet Union or Israel's relations with its Arab neighbors in the Middle East. The chapters' authors have done an excellent job weaving together how both the domestic and foreign, the local and global, all influenced how the Reagan administration viewed international politics and subsequently tried to mold and shape it.

Whenever one reads international history, or history of any kind for that matter, it often feels like the decade that history is taking place is a unique and transformative one. While there is a lot of merit to that impression, *The Reagan Moment* demonstrably shows how truly earth-shattering the 1980s were. At the beginning of that decade, the United States and the Soviet Union were locked into a bitter struggle as it seemed the Cold War was entering a dangerous new phase. By the end of it, the Berlin Wall had fallen, Germany was moving toward reunification, and the Cold War was coming to a stunningly peaceful finale. The book explains how so many strands came together to make this happen during the interlude.

In one fashion or another, Reagan stood at the center of it all. To borrow a line from Hunt: "The relationship between the United States and the world transformed itself over the course of the 'long 1980s,' and over these developments towered the figure of Ronald Reagan" (3). Indeed, his administration had helped shift the very foundations of the United States: "From January 20, 1981 to January 20, 1989, they remodeled American power, purpose, and prosperity by tapping the prodigious energies of an increasingly integrated, interdependent world economy with West Coast technologists, Texas wildcatters, Sunbelt entrepreneurs, Hollywood producers, Wall Street bankers, and Rustbelt laborers at its beating heart."<sup>22</sup> No wonder Reagan triumphantly claimed that he and his team set out to change a nation, but instead helped change the world.

*The Reagan Moment* guides us toward comprehending how the fortieth American president and his administration helped enact these monumental shifts. As Miles reminds us in the book's concluding chapter, while they were not responsible for every change, and many events were outside Reagan's control, fundamentally scholars of the 1980s or US foreign relations must grapple with the contradictions and inconsistencies of the Reagan presidency to understand this pivotal decade of the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> I came away from reading this book feeling like I started to do that for myself, the mark of any truly great or stimulating work of scholarship.

In particular, I was especially fascinated with Robert Rakove's chapter on the United States and the Soviet-Afghan war.<sup>24</sup> Given its topical nature, with the US exiting its own bloody Afghanistan quagmire in 2021, I read it with anticipation. Rakove argues that Afghanistan should be understood as the "central front" of Reagan's Cold War not because "it received the most detailed attention from Reagan's national security team," but because of the "expectations and hopes" Reagan and his advisers placed on accomplishing victory there (325). He masterfully elucidates his argument by showing the myriad methods Reagan employed to isolate the Soviets over their adventurism in Afghanistan while explaining that the war-torn Southwest Asian nation was crucial for Reagan's grand strategy by demonstrating to the Kremlin the costs of its "unacceptable behavior" in the world (339). With a wave of fresh scholarship on the US war in Afghanistan now arriving, one would be wise to read Rakove's chapter before diving into those works.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hunt, "Introduction: The Man, or the Moment?" Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 1-23, here 3.

<sup>23</sup> Miles, "Conclusion: Reagan Reconsidered," Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 437-445, here, 438.

<sup>24</sup> Robert B. Rakove, "The Central Front of Reagan's Cold War: The United States and Afghanistan", Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 324-344.

<sup>25</sup> For example, see Carter Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Craig Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021); Wesley Morgan, *The*

*The Reagan Moment* is international history at its finest. After finishing this book, one feels that they have gained a comprehensive overview of Ronald Reagan's policies across the world during his two eventful terms in office. Each of this volume's authors deserve enormous credit for their intellectually rigorous and stimulating contributions. Above all, Hunt and Miles have put together a marvelous collection of essays that will be the undeniable starting point for all future scholarship on US foreign policy during the final decade of the Cold War. *The Reagan Moment* is destined to become an authoritative classic.

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*Hardest Place: The American Military Adrift in Afghanistan's Pech Valley* (New York: Random House, 2021); David Loyn, *The Long War: The Inside Story of America and Afghanistan Since 9/11* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2021).

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 Review by Elizabeth Ingleson, The London School of Economics and Political Science
 

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For some time now, histories of the United States in the 1980s have been deeply entwined with histories of the presidency of Ronald Reagan. As with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the 1930s (and 1940s) or President Dwight Eisenhower and the 1950s, such president-decade pairings do much to give meaning to the otherwise arbitrary nature of the decade as a period of time.<sup>26</sup> Because they are grounded in the comings and goings of presidents, these pairings tend to emphasise change rather than continuity over the ten-year span. In the case of Reagan, he is so connected to the 1980s that his very name has become shorthand for the cultural, economic, and political transformations of the decade—Reaganland, Reaganomics, and the Reagan Revolution.

Now, a group of scholars of US foreign relations offer us the Reagan Moment. The essays in this book offer fresh analysis into wide-ranging topics: from Brazil's economic crisis to Japan's economic boom; from Reagan's counterterrorism policies in the Middle East to his perception of the Soviet threat; and from nuclear arms reduction to human rights. With nineteen chapters grouped into six larger themes, this is a rich and engaging book that will likely serve as the starting point for many different kinds of future histories of this era.

To my mind, three key questions stand out from the volume as a whole. What, exactly, did this Reagan Moment entail? Was it really Reagan's moment? And was it change or continuity that defined US foreign policy in the 1980s?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we can find different answers to these questions depending on the chapters we read. Indeed, one of the strengths of this volume is that the essays within it provide us with different interpretative visions about what was significant about the 1980s and Reagan's place within it. Even with this multiplicity, however, there isn't major disagreement in these pages. An earlier debate about whether Reagan held a cohesive grand strategy to not only *end* the Cold War but also *win* it seems, in this book, to be settled.<sup>27</sup> A number of contributors note their agreement with contributor Melvyn Leffler that just "because things worked out does not mean there was a strategy" to win the Cold War (29). This agreement has opened the way for layered—rather than contentious—interpretations of the era. In fact, one of the things I particularly appreciated about reading the chapters was the way the authors linked their analysis to ideas explored by other contributors.

What was this moment? The picture that emerges from these chapters is not one moment but several moments. The Soviet Union and its eventual collapse are the central focus of many of the essays. Many others feature human rights and democracy promotion in their analysis. Elsewhere we read of military flashpoints in the Middle East and Southern Africa and debates over the nuclear freeze movement and counterterrorism policies. And economic transformations of the era are given considerable attention, too, with chapters exploring growth in China, boom in Japan, crisis in Brazil, and financialization in the United States.

Many familiar ideas underpinned these moments: anti-Communism, democracy promotion, human rights, and support for liberal trade. As several chapters highlight, these ideas were riven with complexities and contradictions when put into practice. In fact, tensions and paradoxes animate many of the policies and moments under analysis here. Multiple authors

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<sup>26</sup> For a fascinating analysis of the emergence of the decade as a method of conceptualising the past, see Jason Scott Smith, "The Strange History of the Decade: Modernity, Nostalgia, and the Perils of Periodization," *Journal of Social History*, 32: 2 (Winter, 1998): 263-285.

<sup>27</sup> See Melvyn P. Leffler, "Ronald Reagan and the Cold War," in Jonathan R. Hunt and Simon Miles, eds., *The Reagan Moment: America and the World in the 1980s* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2021): 25-42. Hereafter Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*. Leffler directly engages this debate, citing the works of Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); William Inboden, "Grand Strategy and Petty Squabbles: The Paradox and Lessons of the Reagan NSC," in Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri, eds., *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016): 151-180.

argue that it was, in fact, these very distinctions between Reagan’s rhetoric and his policy realities that help explain how change occurred in this decade. If the Wilsonian moment was underpinned by the ideal of self-determination, then perhaps the Reagan moment was driven by something far less lofty: inconsistency.

Was this, however, Reagan’s moment? The extent to which these moments are best understood as the consequence of Reagan and his administration’s actions differs among the essays. On Reagan’s role in the ending of the Cold War, Leffler leaves little ambiguity, writing that Reagan was important but he was “Gorbachev’s minor” (37). David Painter makes a similar point in his piece on the role that oil played in the ending of the Cold War, arguing that “analysis of US efforts to undermine the Soviet energy sector reveals the limits of US influence and undermines the claims that aggressive US policies caused the collapse of the Soviet system.”<sup>28</sup>

Stephanie Freeman, in her chapter on nuclear policy, shows how Reagan’s nuclear policies were shaped in tandem with grassroots antinuclear activists – despite both groups seeing things very differently. They were, she argues, an “unlikely coalition.”<sup>29</sup> In economics and trade, Reagan’s influence appears much stronger. Michael De Groot’s focus is on what he calls “global Reaganomics.” In his analysis, Reagan’s economic policies helped capitalist economies recover, which “enhanced the West’s ideological authority” in the wider fight against Communism.<sup>30</sup>

Some essays are focused specifically on the Reagan administration’s policies regarding particular issues or events. Elisabeth Leake, for example, takes us into Reagan’s approach towards Southwest Asia, showing how his administration sought to preserve political states in the face of threats from ethnonationalism and political Islam.<sup>31</sup> Seth Anziska analyses Reagan’s policies in the Middle East, arguing that they exacerbated tensions but also faced significant limitations due to the actions of local leaders.<sup>32</sup> And Robert Rakove makes the case for Afghanistan as the “central front” in the Reagan administration’s overseas battles, in the process reminding us just how popular US support for the mujahideen was amongst the American public at the time.<sup>33</sup>

Cumulatively, the essays demonstrate that understanding US power in the world means looking at a wide range of people within and beyond the United States in addition to the president. But the evidence within the essays suggest that this was as much the Federal Reserve’s moment, the CIA’s moment, the IMF’s moment, or even Gorbachev’s moment—to take just a few examples—as it was Reagan’s moment.

Finally, did this moment represent change or continuity? Perhaps the most significant challenge that comes with pairing the 1980s with Reagan is thinking about the larger continuities of which this decade was a part. On the whole, this is a book that emphasises change over continuity, although a good number of essays go some way towards blurring these distinctions. Some explore Reagan’s reckoning with legacies of previous decades. Mark Lawrence explores the ways he grappled with the memory and narrative of the war in Vietnam, in the process reorienting it as a war not of defeat but of patriotism.<sup>34</sup> Flavia

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<sup>28</sup> David Painter, “Energy and the End of the Evil Empire,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*, 46-63, here, 56.

<sup>29</sup> Stephanie Freeman, “Ronald Reagan and the Nuclear Freeze Movement,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 144-162, here, 145.

<sup>30</sup> Michael De Groot, “Global Reaganomics: Budget Deficits, Capital Flows, and the International Economy,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 84-102, here 85.

<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Leake, “Reagan and the Crisis of Southwest Asia,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 367-386.

<sup>32</sup> Seth Anziska, “The Limits of Triumphalism in the Middle East: Israel, the Palestinian Question, and Lebanon in the Age of Reagan,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 303-323.

<sup>33</sup> Robert B. Rakove, “The Central Front of Reagan’s Cold War: The United States and Afghanistan,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 324-344, here, 325.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, “Rhetoric and Restraint: Ronald Reagan and the Vietnam Syndrome,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 165-187.

Gasbarri shows how Reagan's policies in Southern Africa were shaped by the lessons he saw in the failure of détente in the 1970s.<sup>35</sup>

Others situate their analysis in a larger sweep of time. Susan Colbourn and Mathias Haeussler, for example, argue that “rather than a sharp break from the past,” the problems Reagan faced in his relationship with Atlantic partners “emerged out of larger questions that had plagued the West’s approach to the Cold War since the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949.”<sup>36</sup> Lauren Turek, Sarah Snyder, and William Michael Schmidli all show the importance of earlier human rights efforts—particularly under President Jimmy Carter—to the changes that occurred during Reagan’s tenure.<sup>37</sup> And Jennifer Miller shows how the fearful rhetoric regarding Japan’s economy built on earlier dynamics in the 1970s and even echoed early Cold War fears of foreigners turning American capitalism against itself.<sup>38</sup>

But because the book’s focus remains on Reagan, the overall impression is that this was a decade marked by change rather than continuity. President-decade pairings can make it easier to emphasize rupture and change. Yet many of the larger systems and processes that shaped the Reagan era—such as financialization, globalization, the human rights revolution, the end of détente, or debates over North-South development—had their origins in preceding decades, particularly the 1970s. While these earlier developments are noted in individual essays, they get lost amidst the volume’s larger focus on Reagan and his presidency.

Should we, then, be connecting the 1980s and Reagan? Does this particular president-decade pairing work and what gets lost in the process? The richness and diversity of the essays in this volume point us to the historian’s hedge: yes and no. If the core focus of analysis is the Reagan administration and its policies, then the pairing simply provides a useful time marker. But if, as the subtitle suggests, the focus is on “America and the world,” then many of the developments in the decade operated well beyond Reagan himself. When we place the era in this larger frame, it seems the 1980s did not, in fact, mark a decisive break from the 1970s.<sup>39</sup>

Together, this volume takes us towards a more wholistic analysis of the United States and the world in the 1980s precisely because it does not lead us to a singular end point. Reagan himself was contradictory and disjunctions between his words and deeds arise again and again in these essays. Ultimately, the authors therefore provide us with an era best thought of in the plural: as series of moments—some, more than others, belonging to Reagan.

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<sup>35</sup> Flavia Gasbarri, “The Reagan Administration and the Cold War Endgame in the Periphery: The Case of Southern Africa,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 345-363.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Colbourn and Matthias Haeussler, “Once More, with Feeling: Transatlantic Relations in the Reagan Years,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 123-143, here, 123.

<sup>37</sup> Lauren F. Turek, “Between Values and Action: Religious Rhetoric, Human Rights, and Reagan’s Foreign Policy,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 212-233; Sarah B. Snyder, “Compartmentalizing US Foreign Policy: Human Rights in the Reagan Years,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 188-211; William Michael Schmidli, “Reframing Human Rights: Reagan’s ‘Project Democracy’ and the US Intervention in Nicaragua,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 237-259.

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer M. Miller, “Adam Smith’s Arthritis: Japan and the Fears of American Decline,” in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 387-413.

<sup>39</sup> On the continuities between the 1970s and 1980s in understanding the US and the world, see, for example, Andrew McKeivitt *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017), 9-10. See also, Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 3-4.

I owe my career as a historian to Ronald Reagan and his presidential library in Simi Valley, California. After completing a BA in history at UC Santa Cruz, I decided to earn an MA at California State University Northridge and teach high school. That plan changed when, as part of Professor Tom Maddux's research seminar on Reagan's gubernatorial years, I began delving into the 1966 campaign files and fell in love with archival research. There was something so intriguing about handling papers that Reagan himself had touched and even scrawled notes on, and the way a minor detail in one of the documents could lead me down an investigatory rabbit hole piqued my curiosity. Could I make a career out of conducting archival research? I decided to try, and even though it was touch-and-go on the academic job market for a few years, I ultimately succeeded. All this is a long-winded way of saying that I was very excited about the publication of this edited volume and eager to read and review it.

Now is the perfect moment for *The Reagan Moment* to appear. Historically, we are at a sweet spot where documents have been declassified en masse and some administration officials are still alive and available for oral interviews. The historiography on Reagan and his presidency has advanced beyond the debate over how much credit he deserves for 'winning' the Cold War to encompass a much broader array of questions about the origins and consequences of US foreign policy in the 1980s. Co-editors Jonathan R. Hunt and Simon Miles have brought together an impressive diversity of viewpoints on the global legacy of Ronald Reagan's two-term presidency and the transformative changes it wrought. As Hunt notes in the introduction, "Reagan lent his name to an age by forging a new electoral coalition, proclaiming a fresh governing creed, and transforming his country's role in the world — for better and for worse."<sup>40</sup> But just how transformative were these changes? In plumbing this volume for answers, one is tempted to conclude that the consistencies in US foreign policy, grand strategy, and outlook on the world and the role of the United States in it outweighed the changes that occurred during Reagan's presidential years, and that those changes were more frequently due to factors completely outside of Reagan's purview or control. In this interpretation, it is President Jimmy Carter who emerges as the outlier in the longue durée of US history, with Reagan's historical role being the shepherd who guided his country back to its rightful position at the top of the exceptionalist pedestal.

In a chapter on transatlantic relations, Susan Colbourn and Mathias Haeussler provide evidence for this interpretation. They argue that Reagan's approach, "rather than marking a sharp break," instead "merely revealed the existing contradictions and tensions between superpower and inner-European détente that had already been simmering within the transatlantic alliance"<sup>41</sup> Though Reagan "played a decisive role," the authors have chosen to emphasize the "structural forces and constraints" shaping the transatlantic relationship in the 1980s (124). On the other hand, evidence for a sharp break between Carter- and Reagan-era policies comes from Seth Anziska in a chapter about Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon, where "Reagan's approach...was a stark departure from that of Jimmy Carter's administration."<sup>42</sup> Reagan administration officials strengthened relations with Israel, "green lighting" (304) the June 1982 invasion of Lebanon and "empowering the government of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to build further settlements in the occupied territories" (303-4). At the same time, the administration remained willfully blind to the plight of the Palestinian people, dismissing Palestinian nationalists as Soviet agents. Yet even here, events outside of Reagan's control, including the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon and the Palestinian Intifada, "forced a return to Carter-era restraint in executing Middle East policy" (305). Two of the standout chapters in the volume examine issues and areas that continued to bedevil US policymakers long after

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan R. Hunt, "Introduction: The Man or the Moment," in Jonathan R. Hunt and Simon Miles, eds., *The Reagan Moment: America and the World in the 1980s* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2021): 1-22, here 4. Hereafter cited as Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Colbourn and Mathias Haeussler, "Once More, with Feeling: Transatlantic Relations in the Reagan Years," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 123-143, here 123.

<sup>42</sup> Seth Anziska, "The Limits of Triumphalism in the Middle East: Israel, the Palestinian Question, and Lebanon in the Age of Reagan," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 303-323, here, 303.

Reagan vacated the White House. Counterterrorism would ultimately supersede anti-Communism as the animus of US foreign policy, as Christopher J. Fuller argues,<sup>43</sup> and would prove especially salient in Southwest Asia, the focus of Elisabeth Leake's outstanding analysis.<sup>44</sup>

The section of the volume on Latin America focuses on Nicaragua, Chile, and Brazil. William Michael Schmidli argues that "competing conceptions of human rights and democracy" were "at the heart of Cold War hostility between the Reagan administration and the FSLN [Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional],"<sup>45</sup> with the former promoting civil and political rights and the latter emphasizing social and economic rights. He persuasively argues that Reagan's democracy promotion initiative encouraged "deeply *undemocratic* practices that misled the American people, violated US law, and fueled the conflicts in Central America" (251). Evan D. McCormick provides a different take on democracy promotion, examining the evolution of the Reagan administration's approach to Pinochet's Chile, which occurred surprisingly early in Reagan's first term. Drawing on archival documents from the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Relations, McCormick illuminates the views of Chilean officials frustrated by "the Reagan administration's failure to overcome domestic political opposition to normalizing relations".<sup>46</sup> James Cameron, focusing on trade, debt, and democratization, likewise suggests that "the gradual transition in Brazil was already underway by the time Reagan took office"<sup>47</sup> and that competing visions of development, autonomy, and sovereignty "were not unique to the Reagan period" and would "continue to shape Brazil's foreign policy" in subsequent decades (295).

Robert B. Rakove contributes a provocative argument that Afghanistan was "the central front of Reagan's Cold War" and that "no other battlefield held the broad, globally symbolic ramifications attached to Afghanistan."<sup>48</sup> It is a thought-provoking contention but the methodology of the chapter is unable to fully support it, given that it is not comparative. There is no attempt made to explore the 'globally symbolic ramifications' of the other fronts in Reagan's Cold War, including Eastern Europe, Southern Africa, and Central America. Flavia Gasbarri examines the case of Southern Africa, where Cuban troops were the "knot" that "tied together the regional situation and broader Cold War imperatives, as well as the local conflicts."<sup>49</sup> Gasbarri argues that the Reagan administration's approach was influenced by the lessons of the collapse of détente, but in her discussion of the 'linkage' concept does not address what was perhaps the most important lesson *not* learned — that the concept itself was fatally flawed. In conditioning improvements in US-Soviet relations on the behavior and actions of Soviet allies, US officials seriously overestimated Moscow's ability to control them.

Some of the authors contribute insights into Reagan's character and policies that transcend the particularities of their chapters. Jennifer M. Miller, for instance, highlights one of the central ironies in the Reagan administration's approach to Japan, which was characterized by "a constant rhetorical and ideological emphasis on the power of free trade and free enterprise, undergirded by a willingness to use state regulatory and funding power in a quest to secure the United States' triumph in this allegedly 'free' market."<sup>50</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, writing about the "Vietnam syndrome," points out the "striking divergence between the boldness of Reagan's rhetoric and his private acceptance that his administration could do

<sup>43</sup> Christopher J. Fuller, "Reagan and the Evolution of US Counterterrorism," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 64-83.

<sup>44</sup> Elisabeth Leake, "Reagan and the Crisis of Southwest Asia," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 367-386.

<sup>45</sup> William Michael Schmidli, "Reframing Human Rights: Reagan's 'Project Democracy' and the U.S. Intervention in Nicaragua," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 237-259, here, 238.

<sup>46</sup> Evan D. McCormick, "Reagan and Pinochet's Chile: The Diplomacy of Disillusion," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 260-280, here, 262.

<sup>47</sup> James Cameron, "Anticommunism, Trade, and Debt: The Reagan Administration and Brazil, 1981-1989," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 281-299, here 281-2.

<sup>48</sup> Robert B. Rakove, "The Central Front of Reagan's Cold War: The United States and Afghanistan," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 324-344, 325.

<sup>49</sup> Flavia Gasbarri, "The Reagan Administration and the Cold War Endgame in the Periphery: The Case of Southern Africa," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 345-363, here, 349.

<sup>50</sup> Jennifer M. Miller, "Adam Smith's Arthritis: Japan and the Fears of American Decline," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 387-413, here, 404.

only so much to change the debate over the war's implications."<sup>51</sup> He argues that although domestic public opinion constrained the administration's foreign policy options, notably in Grenada and Lebanon, Reagan ultimately "lent credibility to the argument that the principal lesson of Vietnam was that the United States must use power more boldly in the future and give the military everything it needed to get the job done" (183). "In the disparity between rhetoric and behavior," Lawrence concludes, "may lie a key to understanding Reagan's performance in the foreign policy arena" (184).

Reagan's role in bringing the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion and cushioning the political fallout from the collapse of the Soviet Union comes in for extended treatment. Melvin P. Leffler, drawing on oral interviews with several of Reagan's most influential advisers, concludes that Reagan's unique contribution was that he "engaged [Soviet leader Mikhail] Gorbachev in a way no American leader had ever engaged a Soviet leader in the history of the Cold War."<sup>52</sup> It obviously helped tremendously that Gorbachev was "a special, new type of Soviet leader," but "it was to Reagan's credit that he realized this" (35). Reagan's "intuition and courage" were what set him apart from his predecessors (35), and his "emotional intelligence was more important than his military buildup" (37) in closing the curtains on the Cold War. Systemic factors were of course implicated in the Soviet collapse; David Painter contributes a chapter on the role of energy prices<sup>53</sup> and Michael DeGroot examines "global Reaganomics" and the "unintended second-order effects" of "US domination of capital markets," which "worsened the emerging sovereign debt crisis in Eastern Europe."<sup>54</sup>

Related to Reagan's performance in the Cold War and vis-à-vis the USSR is his approach to human rights, both international and domestic. Sarah Snyder examines Reagan's foreign policy record on human rights, which is not particularly consistent or easy to characterize. Whereas Reagan vocally condemned human rights violations behind the "Iron Curtain," his administration's policies encouraged repression in other areas, while in places like Chile, South Africa, and the Philippines, "the Reagan administration's stance evolved."<sup>55</sup> Snyder concludes that "there was a good degree of consistency between Carter's and Reagan's policies regarding human rights" (203). Lauren F. Turek contributes an important chapter on Reagan's religious beliefs and rhetoric and their relation to his views and policies on human rights. Reagan's "extensive use of religious rhetoric to explain his foreign policy agenda — and the role of human rights within it" was "both a conscious, expedient political strategy and a reflection of sincerely held beliefs."<sup>56</sup> According to Turek, "freedom of conscience" and "the Christian belief that God created humans in his image and therefore granted all individuals dignity, equality, and freedom" (218) formed the basis of Reagan's perception of the vast gulf separating the United States from the Soviet Union.

Strangely, the volume's section on human rights has little to say about the fact that Reagan actively encouraged policies that stripped people around the world of their dignity and freedom of conscience. During Reagan's gubernatorial years, for instance, he supported prison sentences for conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War. In Reagan's view, these protestors were not exercising their freedom of conscience, but were traitorous backstabbers who gave comfort to the enemy and deserved harsh punishment. He supported harsh penalties, including lengthier prison sentences for what many consider to be 'victimless crimes' like prostitution and drug use. Whereas Carter favored the federal decriminalization of the possession of up to an ounce of marijuana, Reagan advocated severe punishment for the use of illegal substances, and his administration encouraged domestic and foreign eradication operations to destroy marijuana and coca plants, resulting in environmental damage and harm to the long-term health of local residents. Carter had done essentially everything in his power to declare a ceasefire in the War on Drugs and reorient domestic policy toward treatment and rehabilitation, but almost immediately upon entering the White House, Reagan revived the drug war, expanding it into a national security paradigm that justified

<sup>51</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, "Rhetoric and Restraint: Ronald Reagan and the Vietnam Syndrome," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 165-187, here, 166-7.

<sup>52</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, "Ronald Reagan and the Cold War," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 25-42, here, 35.

<sup>53</sup> David Painter, "Energy and the End of the Evil Empire," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 43-63.

<sup>54</sup> Michael De Groot, "Global Reaganomics: Budget Deficits, Capital Flows, and the International Economy," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 84-102, here, 85, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah B. Snyder, "Compartmentalizing U.S. Foreign Policy: Human Rights in the Reagan Years," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 188-211, here, 189.

<sup>56</sup> Lauren F. Turek, "Between Values and Action: Religious Rhetoric, Human Rights and Reagan's Foreign Policy," in Hunt and Miles, *The Reagan Moment*: 212-233, here, 214.

continued military intervention abroad and the creation of a vast internal colony of incarcerated people. That one of the most important human rights issues of “the Reagan moment” goes completely unmentioned in this volume suggests there is still much work for scholars wishing to understand the import and impact of Reagan and his legacy.

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 Response by Jonathan R. Hunt, U.S. Air War College, and Simon Miles, Duke University
 

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Edited volumes occupy a special place in our field.<sup>57</sup> At their best they assemble new work on an important topic or theme in a clean, accessible manner, a boon for those in search of that perfect chapter, neither too long nor too short—like the young bear’s porridge, just right.

They are also hard to review. We have nothing but appreciation for Aaron Bateman, Grant Golub, Elizabeth Ingleson, and Michelle Paranzino, who made the time to reflect on nineteen chapters by twenty-one authors, plus a foreword by William Inboden, an introduction by Jonathan R. Hunt, and a conclusion by Simon Miles. They grasped what we were trying to do and pointed out areas where we might have done more or done better. We hope that future students in search of dissertation topics (and future editors of volumes devoted to this consequential decade) will do just that.

This volume grew out of a basic observation in 2016: while the previously unloved decade of the 1970s was the subject of a great deal of new scholarship, the 1980s, the decade many associate with the end of the Cold War and the start of a “New World Order,” was not.<sup>58</sup> What was more, a wave of exciting new work was on its way. While works by Hal Brands, Jeffrey Engel, Mary Elise Sarotte, Kristina Spohr, and Vladislav Zubok have reenergized discussion about the 1980s, they tend to focus on the earthquakes of the George H.W. Bush years rather than the tectonic shifts of what we dub “the long 1980s” (3), from the onset of the Iranian revolution in April 1979 to the lowering of the Hammer and Sickle from above the Kremlin on Christmas Day 1991 (or, more capaciously, the advent of the European Union on November 1, 1993).<sup>59</sup>

The figure—both official and symbolic—of US President Ronald Reagan loomed large over these years. In many ways this volume attempted two related historiographical tasks: to appraise Reagan’s legacy in foreign affairs and to examine the structural conditions in which his foreign policies expressed themselves. To that end, we asked readers to bear in mind the tried-and-true dialectic of historical interpretation, structure versus agency, through three themes: the US-Soviet contest, Reagan’s statecraft, and globalization.

Each reviewer wrestles with this central question and our chosen themes. While their reviews are positive, they also naturally identify gaps in our coverage and issues that the collective work may have left unresolved. Many of these lingering questions are themselves subjects of ongoing research, including by our contributors and the reviewers themselves, and these important works will doubtless be of interest to readers of *The Reagan Moment*.

We would remiss not to respond to and elaborate on the general assessment that we succeeded, as Aaron Bateman notes in his review, in providing “a balanced, thoroughly researched reappraisal of the Reagan administration that transcends a bipolar and Western-centric perspective of the final years of the Cold War.” In our classes on the history of the Cold War and international history in the 1980s, we have been struck by how our students approach the topic. The Reagan years were ripe for reinterpretation in two ways: first by multiplying the standpoints from which we narrate them; and second by reappraising US foreign relations with reference to sources and insights from beyond the main Cold War drama that had linked Washington to Moscow. In short, *The Reagan Moment* accounts for both the Reagan administration and its environment: the networks and communities that linked Washington to the wider world. We are proud of how this volume

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<sup>57</sup> The views expressed in this response are those of the authors alone and do not represent the views of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Air Force

<sup>58</sup> For a survey of avenues of research on the 1970s, see: Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: US Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Jeffrey A. Engel, *When the World Seemed New: George H. W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2017); Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Kristina Spohr, *Post Wall, Post Square: Rebuilding the World after 1989* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); Vladislav M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

explores “regions at the core and on the periphery of the Cold War, as well as off that map altogether” (6). To the extent that we lived up to Grant Golub’s kind judgment that *The Reagan Moment* represents “international history at its finest,” we have the book’s contributors to thank. Without their diverse expertise, the resulting volume would not have achieved either its breadth or its depth.

Knitting together nineteen chapters on topics as diverse as the Euromissile crisis and Japan’s export-driven growth model was no small challenge, and so it is no surprise that reviewers raise important questions over framing. Michelle Paranzino maintains “the consistencies in US foreign policy, grand strategy, and outlook ... outweighed the changes that occurred during Reagan’s presidential years.” Aaron Bateman praises the attention Mark Atwood Lawrence pays to “the gulf between rhetoric and action” in Reagan’s handling of the Vietnam Syndrome, among other crucial matters. “If the Wilsonian moment was underpinned by the ideal of self-determination,” Elizabeth Ingleson inquires, “then perhaps the Reagan moment was driven by something far less lofty: inconsistency.” To diversify a subject does have a tendency to heighten its apparent contradictions. As editors, we embraced this. For all the cacophony of the Reagan years, we nevertheless believe that they amounted to a ‘Reagan Moment.’

What was this ‘Reagan Moment?’ First, what was it not: It was not ‘Reagan’s moment,’ just as the ‘Wilsonian Moment’ was not ‘Wilson’s moment.’ We agree wholeheartedly with Elizabeth Ingleson’s observation that “this was as much the Federal Reserve’s moment, the CIA’s moment, the IMF’s moment, or even [Mikhail] Gorbachev’s moment ... as it was Reagan’s moment.” The Reagan years were the setting for a broad-based reassessment of the problem of organized societies in an ever more globalized world. We believe that the general features of a political mood that married anti-Communism, romantic (one might even say cinematic) statecraft, and neoliberal universalism gave rise to a continuing, albeit self-contradictory, faith in the ability of societies organized along lines of nationalism, markets, and traditional hierarchies to flourish with government intervention increasingly limited to military preparedness, criminal justice, and central bank management.

The themes’ interactions reveal the paradoxes of Reagan’s foreign policies. The War on Drugs, the omission of which Michelle Paranzino is not wrong to lament, was a case in point. Baked into the neoliberal fixation on individuals pursuing their self-interest were a host of value judgments, be it regarding crack and powder cocaine or home-ownership and public housing. “Greed is good,” the fictional *Wall Street* financier Gordon Gecko declared in defense of an ownership society; whereas the War on Poverty had reflected elite faith in the power of the state to uplift the toiling masses, the War on Drugs assumed that the social hierarchy, enforced by a militarized criminal justice system, was inevitable, or even desirable. We look forward to Paranzino’s work on this important topic.

We conclude with some thoughts about how we situate the Reagan years in larger narratives of US and global history. We certainly do not deny the continuities that the reviewers note between the Carter and Reagan years. But in so doing, we should not overlook what was in fact new about the 1980s. For one, the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the decade differed considerably from those of the 1970s: just ask oil producers in Texas, Saudi Arabia, and the Soviet Union, as David Painter’s chapter demonstrates, or the Germans who reduced the Berlin Wall to collectible rubble in 1989. What Michael De Groot styles “global Reaganomics,” above all the aftermath of Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker’s decision to raise discount rates to nearly 20 percent, was a major inflection point (84). Yes, President Jimmy Carter appointed Volcker, but it was Reagan who navigated the resulting turmoil of the return of international finance and market discipline (shorn of universal welfare provisions), overseeing “the mutation of the United States from the world’s biggest lender to its greatest borrower” (13). Whereas Carter had greeted these changes with trepidation, Reagan “welcomed without reservations these Promethean forces ... revising the relationship between the private and the public spheres in the United States and around the globe” (18). Carter had called in 1979 for “the moral equivalent of war” to address the oil crisis by redirecting society

from “self-indulgence and consumption” to collective action.<sup>60</sup> Reagan and his successors would demand no comparable sacrifices.

There remains much to write about the political culture and economy of the Reagan years; that, we leave to future historians, who will help us to make sense of where precisely we trace the roots of such sweeping narrative arcs as the end of the Cold War, the unipolar moment, the forever war, neoliberal globalization, and the great convergence. For our part, we simply recapitulate our volume’s concluding sentiment:

With the passage of time ... historians will have even more resources at their disposal to weigh in as archival access continues to expand in the United States and around the world. As our perspective broadens and our knowledge of the past deepens, historians will have much more to say about whether Reagan left the world better off than he found it (443).

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<sup>60</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Address to the Nation on Energy,” 18 April 1977, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/243395>; Jimmy Carter, “Address to the Nation on Energy and National Goals,” 15 July 1979, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/249458>.