

Anglo-American Discourse About the USSR, 1984-1986.

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Abstract

This thesis examines mainstream discourses about the Soviet Union in the United States and United Kingdom from 1984 to 1986. For more than 50 years, the Soviet Union presented an alternate image of modernity to that pursued by the USA and the UK. The Soviet Union was one of the great 'Others' against which the West, along with liberalism and democracy, could be defined. When commentators began to describe the Soviet Union as changing in the 1980s, this had far-reaching implications. As such, this thesis asks how the events of the 1980s, especially the rise of Gorbachev, were explained and discursively interpreted. Which discourses changed, and which ones remained the same? How were new events used to justify or disrupt traditional narratives about the USSR, which were themselves grounded in traditional narratives about Russia?

More specifically, this thesis addresses the ways in which important political figures and journalists changed or reinforced the ways that they described the world. An important part of this is understanding the place that Gorbachev occupied in Anglo-American discourse: did he challenge criticisms of the USSR or did he reinforce them, and was he reconceptualised by these discursive actors for the sake of maintaining the consistency of their discourses? It is also necessary to elaborate key narratives about the Soviet Union that had existed since the earliest meetings between the British and Russians, and demonstrate the way in which discourses about the USSR never truly departed from these frameworks. These topics have significance not just for understanding Anglo-American self-image, but also the nature of the late Cold War and the ways we attempt to make Eastern Europe explicable in the twenty-first century.

I approach these discourses through a study of political and newspaper commentary. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher are key figures whose discourse makes for strong case studies in both change and resilience. I also consider significant journalists, including foreign correspondents and political columnists like William Safire, Ian Davidson, and Martin Walker.

The sources that I use are those considered public. They were intended for widespread and open consumption. Above all, I analyse articles which discuss the USSR in several prominent newspapers: *The Times*, the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Financial Times*. I also use speeches by, and interviews with, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. As far as is practical, I approach these sources in a

systematic fashion. The purpose of this is to demonstrate the existence and evolution of certain discourses, not to present a comprehensive picture of everything that was said about the USSR in this period.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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List of Abbreviations

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDM	Critical Discourse Moment
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CL	Critical Linguistics
CPD	Committee on the Present Danger
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
<i>FT</i>	<i>Financial Times</i>
G7	Group of Seven
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (1987)
IR	International Relations
KAL 007	Korean Airlines Flight 007
MAD	Mutual Assured Destruction
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSC	National Security Council
<i>NYT</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UPI	United Press International
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
SALT II	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (1979)
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
TASS	Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union
TMI	Three Mile Island (nuclear accident)
<i>WP</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>
<i>WSJ</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>

Notes

Because most of the primary sources used in this thesis were accessed online, either through databases or on the websites of various newspapers, my citations contain many URLs. For ease of reading, I have not included URLs in footnotes. They are, however, included in the bibliography where relevant. Citations of newspaper articles accessed through databases are instead followed by the database through which they were accessed: Factiva, Periodicals Archive Online, or ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Speeches are identified by the date on which they were given and the website through which they were accessed. Other websites are identified as such by noting of the date on which they were accessed. For example: 'About the Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan', *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum*, accessed 9 June 2016.

Introduction

7 November 2017 marked 100 years since the Soviet Union (USSR) officially came into being with the October Revolution. Although the USSR ceased to exist in 1991, its presence lingers on. The legacy of the Cold War, and discourses about the USSR, continue to shape the practice of both domestic and international politics in powerful ways. Contemporary re-enactment of East-West conflict conflicts suggest that there is still much to be learned from the study of how people in the West have spoken about and narrated the USSR.

Although Russia has never been uncontroversial, it was the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and the Ukrainian crisis which erupted in 2014 that loudly heralded a return to the signifiers of Cold War. In 2014, hostile rumblings started to emerge on a weekly basis from the Russian Federation and the United States (US). Audiences began once again to read about manoeuvres in the Middle East, armed posturing in the Pacific and Eastern Europe, and the possibility of a renewed arms race. A vote in 2016 in the United Nations (UN) to start negotiations for a total ban on nuclear weapons was vigorously opposed by a small number of countries, most of which had nuclear arsenals. The US and Russia were conspicuous amongst the opponents to a ban, preferring to continue their reliance on deterrence — more than 30 years after Reagan first proposed the construction of an anti-missile system that would make them redundant forever.¹ Gorbachev himself, at the age of 85, warned that the world stood at the edge of a crisis the likes of which have not been seen for three decades or more.² Sadly, it is no surprise that each side continues to have so many harsh words for the other.

We are walking on familiar ground. Beyond political and military brinksmanship, discourse about the Russian Federation at the end of 2016 was strikingly similar to discourse about the USSR during the Cold War. Warnings, promises, and predictions about Russia's malevolent intentions filled every medium. The Western media-space was full of think-pieces, essays, documentaries, novels, monographs, and even video games that portrayed a Russia that was similar in most respects to the USSR: grey, authoritarian, savage, and always hungry for domination. Although it appeared in the *Australian*, and is thus beyond the scope of this thesis, one particularly creative headline on 22 December 2016 must be mentioned

1 Ben Doherty, 'UN Votes to Start Negotiating Treaty to Ban Nuclear Weapons', *Guardian*, 28 October 2016.

2 'Gorbachev Says Tensions Between U.S., Russia At "Dangerous Point"', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 October 2016.

for a particularly blunt statement: ‘Turkey and Russia join Iran to reboot axis of evil.’³ Likewise, according to the *Atlantic*, Russia at the end of 2016 was a ‘threat to liberal democracy’.⁴ In the two years following the Ukraine crisis of 2014, no world leaders explicitly reiterated Reagan’s declaration that Russia is ‘the focus of evil in the modern world’,⁵ but Russia was nonetheless portrayed as meddling and expansionist.

In addition, the American presidential election campaign of 2016 showed how persuasive a scapegoat Russia could be. Rather than addressing a growing crisis of confidence in the political establishment head-on, blame for various failures and crises was attributed to Vladimir Putin. In the weeks before ballots opened on 8 November, key battles were fought over questions about whether Donald Trump was compromised by Russian interests. Alongside these debates were others about whether Hillary Clinton was tough enough to fight the Russians — or too tough, and likely to provoke a war.⁶ Like Reagan and his opponent in the 1984 presidential race, Walter Mondale, both of these candidates were publicly assessed on the basis of their relationships to Moscow. The characters had changed, but the importance of Russia in American political discourse was undiminished. As we will see, Russia was being used in the same way that the USSR once was — to reassert a unified national identity and the validate discursive practices of a foreign policy built on the exclusion of the alien and strange.

Foundations

Modern discourses about Russia are built on deep foundations. They replay many of the same tensions that played out in the 1980s, and earlier still. Russia did not suddenly become an ‘evil empire’, as Ronald Reagan called it, in November 1917. It had already been defined as barbaric and despotic long before.⁷ This points towards a continuity in the construction of our political world — a continuity that comes about through the mechanisms of discourse, the creation of knowledge, and the effect that they have upon the world. We must consider

3 Roger Boyes, ‘Turkey and Russia Join Iran to Reboot Axis of Evil’, *Weekend Australian*, 22 December 2016.

4 ‘Beware: The Russian Bear Is Getting Bolder’, *Washington Post*, 1 December 2016; Larry Diamond, ‘Russia and the Threat to Liberal Democracy’, *Atlantic*, 9 December 2016.

5 Ronald Reagan, ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, FL 8 March 1983’, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 8 March 1983.

6 John Pilger, ‘Why Hillary Clinton Is More Dangerous Than Donald Trump’, *New Matilda*, 23 March 2016.

7 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994).

the historical construction of Russia and the USSR to understand how the same discursive structures have survived and re-emerged in the twenty-first century.

Approach

This thesis explores the foundations and underlying structures of discourses about the USSR and, by consequence, about Russia. It does this through an examination of the narrative content of prominent public discourses about the USSR in the United States and United Kingdom (UK) from 1984 to 1986. Using a methodology informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it investigates how the people who lived through this period explained their changing world — a topic that has rarely been addressed directly. To guide my analysis, this thesis asks the following: how did prominent discursive actors in the USA and UK explain the Soviet Union during this period? How did their explanations change to take account of new developments? Finally, how were these changes reflected in narratives about national identities and the West?

As my choice of questions suggests, this thesis is specifically concerned with what specific people said and wrote. It should be emphasised that this is not a thesis about public opinion in the USA and the UK towards the USSR. It is not about foreign policy or international relations. Neither does this thesis attempt to encapsulate everything that was or could be said about the USSR. Instead, the thesis examines how a quickly changing world was narrated by prominent discursive actors. Through a deep analysis and critique of what people said and wrote, it is possible to examine the discursive world within which they were positioned and how the tensions troubling that world were resolved.

A small pool of media and political personalities has been selected for analysis. Two of these individuals, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, require little introduction. The other three — William Safire, Martin Walker, and Ian Davidson — were (or are) journalists, and will be introduced in Chapter One. This narrow sample has been chosen for a reason: these characters represent overlapping yet divergent approaches to the USSR. Each of them demonstrated one possible way of talking about the Soviet Union that revealed the constraints within which they collectively operated. By considering their changing discourses towards the USSR, it is possible to see various attempts to dismantle or reinforce ‘common sense’ knowledge about the world. Through participation in these reconstructive projects,

journalists and politicians helped to shape the stories that rushed to fill the gap when the Soviet experiment ended and seemingly concrete certainties finally fell apart.

Thesis Structure

The first chapter of this thesis introduces the historiographical foundations, theoretical concepts, and methodology of this research. In particular, it discusses discourse and its relevance to the study of history. In Chapter Two, these tools are used to investigate core concepts and outlines similarities in the discourses of Thatcher, Reagan, Safire and Davidson during the period from January 1984 to March 1985. Chapter Three investigates the disagreements between these commentators, as well as the tensions and contradictions within their discourses. These chapters provide an understanding of how these people spoke about the USSR in 1984. They provide a baseline against which change over the following years can be measured.

Chapter Four unpacks the contradictions and tensions that existed within discourses of arms control and deterrence, and considers the attempts by Reagan and Thatcher to escape these conflicts. I show that Reagan attempted to do this through the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and then by taking on the role of a missionary and travelling to convert Gorbachev at Geneva in 1985. Chapter Five shifts the focus to journalistic commentators, and explores the gendered narratives that Safire, Davidson, and Walker used to explain and account for Gorbachev after he came to power.

A year after Gorbachev became General Secretary, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster took place. It was often used as evidence that the Soviet Union was secretive and despotic, but Chapter Six argues that Chernobyl was a Critical Discourse Moment (CDM). CDMs are events that cause widespread reassessment of discourses. Although initial responses to Chernobyl were hostile, they contained the seeds of a new emphasis on *glasnost*, or openness. In this chapter I consider a broader range of data than in the previous chapters. Instead of individual commentators, I consider four newspapers: the *NYT*, the *Guardian*, the *WP*, and *The Times*.

Chapter Seven brings together the key points developed in each chapter. In doing so, it provides a summary of the narrative developments that took place in this period and identifies analytical tools that can be used to understand discursive change. In closing, it briefly considers the two years after 1986. During this time, there was a more drastic

political shift towards cooperation with the USSR. The tensions discussed in this thesis resulted in new directions, but could not be escaped entirely. It is an interesting case study in the solidification of new narratives, and their relationship to underlying discursive structures.

Chapter One: Methodology

This chapter introduces the historiographical and methodological frameworks that structure this thesis, as well as the literature that informs it. Although terms like ‘discourse analysis’ are increasingly familiar to readers in the twenty-first century than they were in past decades, they are used in many different ways by different writers. Some discussion is required to define how they are used in this particular instance. Likewise, it is necessary to outline the historical scene and the methodological decisions that have been made during the research process.

This chapter begins by defining the theoretical building blocks of our research — discourse and identity. While a more traditional piece of historical analysis might first describe the time and place in question, discourse plays a fundamental role here and must lead the way. This thesis is concerned with a version of the USSR that existed in and because of discourse, not one that can be defined without reference to it.

Next, this chapter sets the context — the final decade of the Cold War — and historiographical considerations. It addresses the singular importance of Russia in Western political discourse, and the historical foundations that enabled and maintained it. This section answers the ‘why?’ to several important questions. Why this time and place? Why the US and the UK? And, most importantly, why Russia?

Lastly, we move into a discussion of methodology. The questions at the heart of this thesis are potentially enormous in scope, and it was possible to analyse only a fragment of everything that was said about the USSR in this period. This section outlines the samples used and presents a rationale for sampling with reference to existing literature on this, and related, topics. In doing this, it introduces the reader to the key actors who feature — the important journalists, politicians, and newspapers mentioned in the Introduction.

Discourse and Identity

Definitions of identity are as complex, many-layered, and changeable as identities are themselves. The model of identity employed in this thesis is a concept of ‘Self’ which is constructed through discourse, the characteristics of which provide justification and impetus

for decisions, desire, and action.¹ This Self is shaped through differentiation from the 'Other'. It is given meaningful existence when distinctions are imposed between a given 'I', or 'us', and a 'them'. Put another way, identity is created through the repeated insistence that differences exist between things. Selfhood is maintained and constantly re-created through practices and discourses that assert these differences, but the borders are never final. These boundaries are fluid and contested, as is the ground upon which they are built, and they maintain their outlines only as long as they continue to be reproduced. The harsh separation between any given Self and its constitutive Other(s) can be dismantled as easily as it can be reinforced, and must constantly be renegotiated. What was once Other can become, even temporarily, something familiar.

When we talk about identity, we normally assume that the subject — the Self — is a solitary human one, but there are identities beyond the personal. National identity is one example that is particularly relevant to this thesis. In *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, the political scientist David Campbell describes these collective identities thus:

While dependent on specific historical contexts, we can say that for the state, identity can be understood as the outcome of exclusionary practices in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the "inside" are linked through a discourse of "danger" with threats identified and located on the "outside." The outcome of this is that boundaries are constructed, spaces demarcated, standards of legitimacy incorporated, interpretations of history privileged, and alternatives marginalised.²

These identities are not constituted or experienced on a solely individual scale. They are maintained by discourses that pervade society, such as the discourses of danger mentioned by Campbell. Thus, it is possible to refer to national identities that are embedded within societies.

Some of these national identities, in similar fashion to constructs like gender, become hegemonic. That is to say, these versions of the nation become so normalised and deeply embedded in society that it is impossible to discuss any given topic except within the

¹ William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 64–67.

² David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 68.

parameters that they define.³ They become, ultimately, knowledge that is widely accepted as a reflection of the way the world really is. We call this common sense.⁴ For one example of a common sense proposition, it was relatively uncontroversial for an American to say in the 1980s that the US and the UK were ‘free’ countries with legitimate governments. The USSR, on the other hand, was taken to be unfree and repressive. These propositions sustained one another, as did many other dichotomies established to differentiate between the USSR and the West.

However, this thesis is not overly concerned with defining precisely the *collective* experience or nature of national (or civilizational) identities, but their articulation by individuals. People like Thatcher and Reagan promoted particular versions of the US and the UK with striking commonalities, but that also reflected their personal, contingent, circumstances. Close attention to these national *identities* reveals the shared assumptions and ideologies on which they were built. These assumptions can be seen in the exclusionary practices they enabled or by which they were enabled, as pointed out by Campbell. While his argument pertains specifically to foreign policy, the same practices and techniques can be found in the things said by people like Reagan about the USSR. The construction of boundaries, demarcation of spaces, privileging of interpretations, and so forth were narrated within those discourses. Commentators invoked legitimacy, borders, and the privileging of particular histories, explicitly and implicitly, when describing the Soviet Union and its relationship to their own lives. As demonstrated elsewhere, national identity is deeply intertwined with discourse and does not have any meaningful existence outside it.⁵

I use the term discourse to refer to several different concepts. At the most basic level, I apply the word to the bodies of speech, writing, and other texts produced by individuals and organisations (like newspapers) on a given topic. In this sense of the word, ‘Reagan’s discourse’ refers to the things that Reagan said and wrote about the USSR. At its

3 Felicitas Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political: Discursive Tensions in News Coverage of Russia*, *Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society, and Culture* 40 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 5.

4 Stuart Hall and Alan O’Shea, ‘Common-Sense Neoliberalism: The Battle over Common Sense Is a Central Part of Our Political Life’, *Soundings*, no. 55 (2013): 8–10.

5 For some examples of this scholarship, and detailed discussion of the discursive infrastructure of national identities see Ruth Wodak et al., *Discursive Construction of National Identity*, trans. Angelika Hirsch, Richard Mitten, and J. W. Unger, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Campbell, *Writing Security*; William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference*; Philipp Casula, ‘“Primacy in Your Face”: Changing Discourses of National Identity and National Interest in the United States and Russia After the Cold War’, *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (July 2010): 245–72.

broadest, I use discourse to describe the ways that knowledge about the world is created and organised. According to communications scholar Felicitas Macgilchrist, discourse is ‘any kind of meaningful practice that forms the identities of objects and subjects; the principles, orderings or matrices of meanings making something sayable/thinkable/doable at all.’⁶ Discourse does not simply reflect reality, but creates our experience of it.⁷ The world does exist independently of people, but it is not knowable or meaningful until we have imposed meaning onto that existing reality. According to this definition, knowledge is actively created through texts (linguistic and otherwise), practices used to organise information, and the interactions, both abstract and direct, between people. There are non-linguistic elements to discourse, too. Decisions about which information is meaningful or salient, and the processes used to determine this, are especially important. However, I deal specifically with what is spoken and written. As Stuart Hall notes, ‘language is the privileged medium in which we “make sense” of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged.’⁸

The relationship between discourse and our experiences of the world is determined by power. Discourses that are institutionalised and widespread shape our lives in many ways, visible or otherwise. Most researchers interested in discourse agree with the claim of theorist Jürgen Habermas that, in addition to a means of communication, ‘language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power.’⁹ Legitimacy is a vital part of hegemony. Through this social force, discourse actively affects us and our world at every level. The physiological experience of anxiety before an interview with a doctor and the deaths caused by a clash of great powers are both outcomes of power and discourse.¹⁰ Indeed, these dynamics and the entities they necessitate are only brought into existence in any meaningful way because they are described, constructed, and treated as real.

6 Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political*, 2.

7 Ibid.

8 Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Culture, Media and Identities (London: Sage Publications and The Open University, 1997), 1.

9 Ruth Wodak, ‘What CDA Is about – a Summary of Its History, Important Concepts and Its Developments’, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Introducing Qualitative Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 2.

10 Ruth Wodak, *Disorders of Discourse*, Real Language Series (London: Longman, 1996), 36–37; Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 10–11; Jason Dittmer, ‘Changing American Metanarratives of Russia in NATO Expansion Debates, 1993–2002’, *National Identities* 9, no. 1 (March 2007): 49–66.

Not only do hegemonic discourses enable the exercise of power and ideology, but they also obscure their roles in our lives. Discourses of gender, for instance, present dynamics that are created and propagated through human action as unwritten rules that extend beyond human agency — simply the way things are.¹¹ Ruth Wodak, an influential practitioner of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, describes this effect:

Dominant structures stabilize conventions and naturalize them, that is, the effects of power and ideology in the production of meaning are obscured and acquire stable and natural forms: they are taken as 'given'.¹²

Many discourse analysts, such as Wodak herself, have applied these concepts to the study of nationalism and other big-picture discourses in which the use of power plays a vital role. Anglo-American discourses about the Soviet Union are one area where these interactions between power, ideology, and language can be explored.

Taking the insights of discourse analysts like Macgilchrist and Wodak as starting points, this thesis critiques discourses of power and the ideological structures that shaped them. The narratives interrogated in this thesis were generated by individuals who played influential roles in public discourse, such as political commentators and heads of states. These people (and their descriptions of the world) received institutional backing in the form of newspapers and governments. Their discourses existed in relationships to power. For one example of such a relationship, consider the political uses to which the threatening image of the USSR was put. Depictions of the Soviet Union as dangerous and aggressive did not exist in a vacuum. They justified the actions of Western governments. The increases to defence spending that Ronald Reagan proposed throughout his presidency — proposals that served political objectives — depended on a broad consensus that the Soviet Union was a clear and present danger. The funding of rebel movements in developing countries provides another example of how the invocation of the Soviet threat served a political purpose.¹³ More

11 Raewyn Connell, *Gender: In World Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 5.

12 Wodak, 'What CDA Is about – a Summary of Its History, Important Concepts and Its Developments', 3.

13 Jeffrey Dudas, 'Subversives All! Ronald Reagan & the Paternal Roots of "Law and Order" at Home and Abroad', *Law, Culture & the Humanities* 8, no. 1 (February 2012): 119–52.

broadly, both political and media commentators took the successful exertion of power against the Soviet Union as evidence of the superiority of Western norms.¹⁴

Literature on discourse analysis also provides insights into the analysis of different types of texts. Most important is the acknowledgement that, while mass media wears a mask of neutrality, news producers are as embedded in existing discourses and ideology as any other institution. The things that are implied or left unsaid in the pages of newspapers are just as meaningful as what is stated aloud.¹⁵ I also consider 'typical texts' as worthwhile units of data, as do practitioners of CDA.¹⁶ Individual texts and the people who created them may not be representative of everything ever said on a topic, but they are embedded within specific discursive contexts and provide some degree of access to them. Texts, whether newspaper articles or political speeches, are not formed in isolation. They exist in dialogue with what has already been said and demonstrate, to some extent, which propositions are able to be challenged and which are taken as 'given'. Thus, texts that engage with particular issues or narratives give some indication as to the social context within which they were created.¹⁷ While it is not possible for me to show the entirety of public opinion, I can use typical texts to show which discursive assumptions were being considered or ignored at any given point in time. This allows an exploration of the nuances and different strands that composed these discourses, and the ways that they developed over time.

Narrating the late Cold War

The conceptual framework of a conflict between the West and the East, or capitalism and communism, was central to discourses about the USSR and their evolution. Towards the end of the 1980s, British and American people started to suggest that something they called the Cold War was over for good. But there was not some invisible line drawn through history that made peace impossible one moment and possible the next. What we now call the end of the Cold War refers to an unfolding series of events that were deeply intertwined with

14 Michael Cox, 'Another Transatlantic Split? American and European Narratives and the End of the Cold War', *Cold War History* 7, no. 1 (1 February 2007): 128–30.

15 Wodak, 'What CDA Is about – a Summary of Its History, Important Concepts and Its Developments', 6–7.

16 Michael Meyer, 'Between Theory, Method, and Politics: Positioning of the Approaches to CDA', in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Introducing Qualitative Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 25.

17 John E. Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 100.

crises of identity on both sides of the Iron Curtain.¹⁸ How did these crises of identity come about, and how were they narrated as they emerged? The collapse or reassessment of identities and relationships were not automatic, pre-determined reactions to an external world full of objective happenings. They were the products of contingency, historical context and, ultimately, decisions about what those events *meant*. The Cold War only had any kind of meaning because it was brought into being by the dictates of ‘common sense’ and collective imagination. Thus, because the Cold War had been spoken (or written) into life, it also needed to be narratively ushered out of the present and into the past. The end of the Cold War was experienced, brought about, resisted, and celebrated in countless ways, but all of them were given narrative dimensions.

Scholars have enthusiastically debated the process by which the ostensible end of the Cold War became, retrospectively, a story about Western superiority.¹⁹ Fewer have examined the story of its final years as it was told before the last page had been reached. The interactions between the protagonists of the Cold War — the USSR and ‘the West’ — were at the heart of these stories.²⁰ For the world to change, it was also necessary for stories about the USSR (or the West) to evolve. The West could not remain unchanged in a changing world. This did not result in the fabrication of entirely new frameworks to explain what it meant to be Western, American, or British, but it did contribute to the establishment of new rules and new objectives. As I will demonstrate, these reassessments were already taking place between 1984 and 1986. The reconfigurations necessary to justify some manner of Western identity (and thus the policies and alliances it enabled) without the threat of the USSR were underway well before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Russia and the Soviet Union

By 1984, the existence of the Soviet Union had long since become a scaffolding that supported the facade of Western identity. Soviet communism presented an alternative to liberal models of modernity, and its existence sustained the belief that those models were

18 Casula, “‘Primacy in Your Face’”.

19 Cox, ‘Another Transatlantic Split?’

20 It is not my intention to argue for a self-evident and innate separation of the world into two hemispheres. Such divisions are created and given meaning by human action. However, the idea that ‘the West’ was a meaningful description for part of the world that was defined by certain ineffable qualities was a foundation of Cold War discourse. This thesis uses the language of the West and Western civilization in the sense that it was used by Anglo-American people in the 1980s — to refer to a collective of ‘advanced’, democratic states that were supposedly profoundly different to a totalitarian and barbaric East.

superior. According to historian David Foglesong, 'the Bolshevik ideology of world revolution was the sole truly global rival to American liberal universalism in the twentieth century.'²¹ Ted Hopf, a theorist of international relations, likewise argues that 'the greatest threat to the Self is a comprehensive alternative identity, an Other that can plausibly be understood as a replacement.'²² Throughout the Cold War, communism was one of the foremost potential replacements for the liberal democratic order, and the alternate possibilities that the USSR represented made it dangerous. By virtue of its existence, the Soviet Union allowed Anglo-American commentators to justify their societies and ideologies. People like Ronald Reagan could look east and explain that the Soviet Union showed them what the West was, and what it was not. In practical terms, the ways that people spoke about and understood the USSR were inextricably connected to the practice of public policy, as well as conversations about society, culture, and religion. For this reason, the changes that took place in the USSR in the late 1980s had far-reaching implications for political discourse in both the US and the UK.

The antagonistic, deeply involved, relationship between East and West did not spring into existence with the Cold War, or even with the October Revolution. Long before the Bolshevik Party was founded, people from Britain and the United States had developed narratives about Russia and ways of talking about it that tended to be negative. Discourses about Russia were not always hostile, but they did mark it as different and less developed. Even the creation of 'Eastern Europe' as a concept by Enlightenment writers and travellers was in service to this project of differentiation. In order to articulate the boundaries and meanings of Western civilization, the East was conceptually transformed into a playground where the rules of polite society did not apply.²³

The consequences of that transformation persisted into the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first. Many of the narratives that defined Russia in the West were later imposed also upon the Soviet Union. In *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Larry Wolff identifies some of the recurrent tropes that contributed to the division between East and West: the suggestion that Eastern Europe was

21 David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire': The Crusade for a 'Free Russia' Since 1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

22 Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 8.

23 Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 4.

beyond the margins of civilization,²⁴ that its nature was determined by its geography,²⁵ and that it was governed by different rules to Western Europe. To travellers from the West, Russia was a place where slavery was an acceptable fact of life even though it was inappropriate in ‘more civilized’ countries.²⁶ These tropes did not translate into the twentieth century in a pure form, but their imprints could be seen in discourses about the USSR in the twentieth century. The suggestion that slavery was a peculiarly Russian phenomenon might thus appear in the pages of a magazine like the *Spectator*. There, the deliberately provocative columnist Auberon Waugh claimed that ‘the Russians actually enjoy living as slaves, shackled together in rags and grateful for any crusts thrown to them — certainly their entire history suggests this is what they prefer.’²⁷ With a similar emphasis on continuity, the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), a right-wing American think-tank, depicted the USSR throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the latest manifestation of the recurring Russian menace. According to the CPD, the geography of the country had always encouraged ‘Russia — Tsarist and Soviet alike — towards the conquest or domination of neighbouring lands.’²⁸

As with the examples of Waugh and the Committee on the Present Danger, commentators often conflated Russia and the USSR. Martin Malia, the late historian of Russia, pointed out that some commentators portrayed the USSR in the 1980s as the new face of an eternal Russia — a conflation he avoided.²⁹ Post-Soviet Russia, especially after the rise of Vladimir Putin, was frequently described in terms that closely resemble earlier criticisms of the USSR. As Michael C. Paul points out, even a decade after the Soviet Union’s collapse, media narratives about Russia that were much the same as those from twenty years earlier.³⁰ Likewise, Foglesong has demonstrated that the overall framework of American engagement with Russia, and the Soviet Union, was shaped over several centuries by a

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 30.

26 Ibid., 62.

27 Auberon Waugh, ‘Chinks in the Curtain’, *Spectator*, 23 June 1984, Periodicals Archive Online.

28 Simon Dalby, ‘Geopolitical Discourse: The Soviet Union As Other’, *Alternatives* 13, no. 4 (1 October 1988): 425.

29 Martin Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, MA: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

30 Michael C. Paul, ‘Western Negative Perceptions of Russia: “The Cold War Mentality” Over Five Hundred Years’, *International Social Science Review* 76, no. 3/4 (June 2001): 103–4.

singular and enduring missionary impulse.³¹ For all that discourses about Russia and the USSR had changed by the year 2010, much remained the same.

Churchill's Iron Curtain and the Cold War narratives that it inaugurated were intellectual constructions, built over time, rather than a natural border between two worlds. As Wolff notes, Churchill created this division on the back of an 'intellectual history that invented the idea of Eastern Europe long before.'³² The concepts of 'Eastern Europe' and the 'Cold War' were discursive categories used to structure knowledge about the world, and both concepts came about as a result of specific historical circumstances. These structures served a range of purposes, particularly the creation and consolidation of identity. It is not at all uncommon for such binary dichotomies to be used in the discursive construction of identities. As Macgilchrist points out, identities can be created through the differentiation of the Self from the Other 'in terms of geography, race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, ideology, rationality, and so on.'³³ Even though the Soviet Union ceased to exist before the end of the millennium, the image of Russia as something alien and ominous remained. By looking at a snapshot of Russia and the Soviet Union as they were portrayed by Anglo-American people in the 1980s, we see the foundations of what Russia and the West later became.

The Role of Gorbachev

Chronologically, I have chosen to look at the period in which Gorbachev became prominent and made his mark on the world. 1984 and 1986 are useful boundaries because they overlapped with distinct phases in Anglo-American engagement with the Soviet Union. Although Chapter One refers to Reagan's famously controversial 'Evil Empire' speech, given in 1983, it does so only for the sake of context. The central analysis in this thesis begins on 1 January 1984, after the peak of 'the Second Cold War' — a period of renewed criticism of the USSR in the wake of failed *détente*.³⁴ 1984 was a significant year in terms of international diplomacy, and thus a nexus for discourse about the USSR. Not only did arms control negotiations resume again in early 1984 after a period of tense silence, but it was the year

31 Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*.

32 Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 3–4.

33 Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political*, 2. As has Macgilchrist, I use the standard capitalization of 'Self' and 'Other' when referring to matters of identity and its constitutive parts.

34 Simon Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War: The Discourse of Politics, Geography and International Relations* (London: Pinter, 1990), ix–x.

that Yuri Andropov, the General Secretary of the USSR, died and was replaced by Konstantin Chernenko. Chernenko himself would only lead for the better part of a year before his death paved the way for Gorbachev. Investigation of discourse about the USSR in the year preceding Gorbachev's rise to power provides a foundation against which the discursive shifts that followed can be observed.

The next few years, during which Gorbachev rose to power, were transitional. Gorbachev was incorporated into Anglo-American discourses in ways that challenged the ability of commentators to form a consensus about what his significance might be. This thesis ends with discussion about the Chernobyl disaster, and in its conclusion touches on the changes and events that took place between then and 1989 — the year the Berlin Wall came down. By the time he visited Moscow for a summit in 1988, Reagan was prepared to deny that the USSR was an evil empire at all.³⁵

Gorbachev's rise to prominence in the West and his rise to power in the Soviet Union are central to this timeline. He played a singular role in the events of the late Cold War, both as a political actor and as a character within Anglo-American discourse. The General Secretary did not fit easily into existing narratives about the Soviet Union, and was attributed radically different meanings. He was described as charming, energetic, and even honest. His wife, Raisa, was fashionable and in the eye of the Western public unlike the largely invisible wives of prior Soviet leaders. She even appeared on the front cover of *Time* in 1988, described as 'a new image for the Soviet Union's overworked, underappreciated women.'³⁶ Gorbachev also preached openness and accountability, although not necessarily in ways that mirrored liberal norms. All of this contrasted with assumptions about the cynical dogmatism of Soviet leaders, but Gorbachev's devoted loyalty to communism meant that neither could he be straightforwardly accepted as a Westerner in a Russian disguise.

Despite these challenges, Gorbachev was eventually absorbed into narratives about the USSR. This was done in ways that allowed commentators to justify what they had already said about the Soviet Union, or to explain why they had changed. For all that Gorbachev was portrayed as something new, his incorporation into discourses about the USSR did not ultimately rupture the foundations upon which those discourses were built.

35 Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 192.

36 'TIME Magazine Cover: Raisa Gorbachev - June 6, 1988', *TIME.Com*, accessed 22 May 2016.

The United Kingdom and the United States

British and American people were not the only ones who talked and wrote about the USSR in the 1980s, but it would not be possible, or even beneficial, to survey representatives from every country with a stake in the future of the USSR. Why then focus on Anglo-American discourse in this thesis? In some ways, the US was the main Western player in many of the events mentioned in this thesis. Its ‘superpower’ relationship with the USSR makes the investigation of American discourses especially compelling. But the US did not exist in isolation. Discursive exchange is facilitated by shared language and cultural products, such as the exchanges and communications that connected the US and the UK across the Atlantic. Moreover, American and British politicians have long considered their governments to have a special relationship. In the context of this alliance, the (dis)similarities between the discourses of American and British commentators provide a fascinating counterpoint to one another.

Mainstream discourses

For the sake of manageability, it has been necessary in this thesis to prioritise some voices over others. The five voices that I have chosen do not stand in as representatives for all American and British people, or even the majority. My objective in selecting people like Reagan and Davidson is not to argue that they were typical individuals. They existed within specific contexts, and their discourses were shaped by unique forces. Rather than asking ‘what did the majority of people say about the Soviet Union?’, it is more interesting to ask how these discourses — which clearly had some level of institutional approval — were propagated and justified in the face of change. These discourses were engaged in what Macgilchrist calls ‘a constant struggle for meaning’.³⁷ Thus, this thesis focuses not on the popularity of certain discourses, but on how the discursive struggle was navigated. Given that the twenty-first century inherited many of the discursive tics, tricks, shortcuts and frameworks of the twentieth, analysis of the processes by which they changed is just as relevant today as it was then.

³⁷ Felicitas Macgilchrist, ‘Positive Discourse Analysis: Contesting Dominant Discourses by Reframing the Issues’, *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* 1, no. 1 (2007): 75.

The discourses I consider are those that I loosely class as ‘mainstream’. Although I admit that this word lacks precision, it conveys the prominent position given to these texts. They were widely distributed (in print, television, radio, or all three) and were not so controversial as to be relegated to niche publications or censored altogether. I primarily focus on the commentary of key political figures and the writers featured in influential, widely distributed newspapers. The narratives put forward by these people and through these institutions were ubiquitous and served the purposes of dominant political projects. To a certain extent, these ways of talking about and constructing the Soviet Union were of the ‘common sense’ kind described previously, even when controversial. They relied upon a common pool of assumptions that were portrayed as self-evident and rarely discussed explicitly. I refer to these foundations as discursive structures. This thesis goes beyond studying the words directly said by individuals and reveals these structures to critique.

One important feature shared by all the discourses that I describe here was that they constructed the Soviet Union as somehow problematic. The flaws of the USSR, whether innate or historically contingent, were transformed in these discourses into evidence that the West was superior. Despite their criticism of the Soviets, however, the people who generated these narratives were not necessarily hard-line cold warriors. The intensity of their criticism of the Soviet Union, and the specific meanings they attributed to it, varied considerably. Some commentators maintained that Soviet communism was irrevocably dangerous but others were less hostile, or even optimistic about the possibility of genuine reform in the Soviet Union. They described themselves using the language of ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’, and advocated different approaches to the USSR rather than fundamentally different understandings of what it was. For all of these commentators, the Soviet Union was Other, alien, and distant.

Because of the sheer quantity of material that contributed to these discourses, it was necessary to narrow the focus of my research. To that end, I chose a small number of individuals and newspapers as case studies. The most prominent of these individuals were Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, respectively the president of the United States and the prime minister of the United Kingdom during the period under review.

The material attributed to these figures that I consider in this thesis was largely accessed through two online archives: the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and the Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Presidential libraries occupy a strange archival position. They

are branches of the National Archives and Records Administration, and thus federally controlled, but also memorialise and praise the presidents to whom they are dedicated. Even by the standards of other presidential libraries, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library is partisan.³⁸ Nevertheless, it is the most comprehensive repository of materials from Reagan's presidency. Reagan's public papers, accessible through the website of the library, were compiled and published by the Office of the Federal Register, under the purview of the National Archives. The list of major speeches, however, is curated by the library's own audiovisual archivist.³⁹ The sources obtained through the Margaret Thatcher Foundation have a different provenance. The listing of statements provided on their website is a digitization of *Complete Public Statements of Margaret Thatcher 1945-1990*, a collaborative project between the Foundation and Oxford University Press. Categorisation of statements by importance was decided by the editors of *Complete Statements*.⁴⁰ With the exception of 400 statements, the contents of which have been lost, all of the 7500 public statements given by Thatcher before 1990 are listed in the database.⁴¹

The newspapers that I analysed were the *New York Times (NYT)*, the *Guardian*, the *Washington Post (WP)*, the *Financial Times (FT)*, and *The Times*. These mass-circulation newspapers encapsulated a variety of centre-right and centre-left perspectives, and all catered predominantly to elite audiences. That said, they were not the most widely distributed newspapers in this time and these places, as that honour fell to tabloids. During the first half of 1986, the daily average circulation for the papers in question was as follows:

38 Benjamin Hufbauer, 'Review of The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum', *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 3 (2008): 787.

39 'About the Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan', *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum*, accessed 9 June 2016.

40 Christopher Collins, the editor of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, acted as general editor. The editorial board was composed of notable historians and political scientists from a range of backgrounds — Professors Brian Harrison, David Marquand, Colin Matthew, Kenneth Morgan, and John Ramsden.

41 'Editorial Policy of Site: Preface to Complete Public Statements of Margaret Thatcher, 1945-90 on CD-ROM (Oxford University Press, 1998)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, accessed 11 June 2016.

Newspaper	Early 1986
New York Times	1,035,426
Washington Post	781,371
<i>Guardian</i>	481,209
Times	451,072
Financial Times	255,565

Table 1. Average Daily Newspaper Circulation in 1986⁴²

While tabloids may have had a higher readership, these broadsheets were influential and considered by their readers to provide important, insightful information about the world. Even within this narrow selection there were many thousands of articles, large and small, that mentioned the Soviet Union in passing or which strictly sought to report facts. Even articles that emphasised fact over opinion were formed through discursive processes that are worthy of analysis, but their quantity and generosity is an obstacle in itself. This ultimately necessitated that I focus on columns and other opinion-pieces, although other articles still play a role. The formal characteristics of these styles, such as the presence of strong authorial voice, make them useful for this thesis. More directly useful was the fact that many of these opinion-pieces took the form of ongoing columns, giving me access to writers who consistently wrote about the Soviet Union over time.

The columns of these newspapers were filled by the copy of talented journalists, but three journalists stood out to me as relevant to this thesis: William Safire, a political columnist at the *New York Times* (NYT), Ian Davidson, who served as chief foreign correspondent for the *Financial Times* (FT) in this period, and Martin Walker, the Moscow correspondent for the *Guardian* from 1985 onwards. Each of these writers produced commentary that had elements typical of broader Anglo-American discourses about the USSR, but that diverged from the other commentators here in noteworthy ways. The extent to which generalisations can be made about them is limited, except insofar as identifying the shared foundations of their discourses. But their divergences represent distinct possibilities

⁴² Circulation figures for the FT, *Guardian* and The Times were provided by Audit Bureau of Circulation. Data concerning the NYT and WP were taken from William J. Thorn and Mary Pat Pfeil, *Newspaper Circulation: Marketing the News* (New York: Longman, 1987), 74–75.

for how discourse about the USSR could manifest, and their disagreements make them interesting also on a human level.

In 1984, Ian Davidson (19–) was the Paris correspondent and chief foreign columnist of the *FT*. Prior to working at the *FT*, Davidson had studied Classics at Cambridge. He started with the *FT* in the 1960s, and was soon sent to Brussels as the paper's Common Market correspondent.⁴³ In his role as writer of the foreign affairs column, Davidson was responsible for the majority of the papers' coverage of Soviet foreign policy. This was the period in which the *FT* was rebranding itself as an international paper, and steadily increasing its coverage of European events. Davidson's wide-ranging column was a contrast, however, to the increasing specialisation of the *FT*'s foreign correspondents in business and industrial matters.⁴⁴ As such, throughout his articles in this period, Davidson constantly related the Soviet-American relationship back to questions of European security.

More than either Safire or Walker, Davidson's writing can also be considered broadly Europeanist. Unlike Safire, he wrote from the perspective of a European, and he emphasised European political identity to a greater extent than Walker. For Davidson — as it was for Safire, although with different connotations — Europe was a coherent entity that needed to steer a path between the US and the USSR.

From the opposite side of the Atlantic, William Safire (1929–2009) gave another perspective on Soviet behaviour. Safire, who identified himself as a 'libertarian conservative', played the role of the American cold warrior against Davidson's European moderate.⁴⁵ Before his career in journalism, Safire worked in a range of media and public relations roles. It was in his capacity as a public relations executive that he found himself in Moscow in 1959, exhibiting American products to the Soviets. There, he caught Nixon's attention at an expo in Moscow when he prompted the famous 'kitchen debate' between the future president and Nikita Khrushchev.⁴⁶ Later he worked with the Nixon presidential campaigns in 1960 and 1968 and, following Nixon's election, became a White House speechwriter. In 1973, Safire started writing 'Essay', a twice-weekly political column for the *NYT*. It was this column, specifically an article about an embezzlement scandal involving a

43 David Kynaston, *The Financial Times: A Centenary History* (London: Viking, 1988), 332.

44 *Ibid.*, 441–51.

45 'The Rise of the Conservative Voice: William Safire, George Will Win Pulitzer Prizes for Column-Writing.', *Columbia Journalism Review* 40, no. 4 (2001): 85.

46 William Safire, 'Essay: A Picture Story', *New York Times*, 27 July 1984, Factiva.

Carter administration official, that won him the Pulitzer prize for commentary in 1979.⁴⁷ Safire's column covered wide ground, but the USSR was a favourite topic. The Soviets also made appearances in 'On Language,' a column about popular linguistics that he wrote from 1979 to 2009.⁴⁸ Despite his connection to Nixon, Safire frequently praised Reagan's aggressive strategies and decried *détente*. At the beginning of 1984, he found the differences between the USSR and the US irreconcilable. Over the following years, Safire's hostility became increasingly out of place in mainstream discourse. However, he remained an influential and respected voice who continued to write for the most widely distributed broadsheet in the United States.

Martin Walker's (b. 1947) position was very different to those of both Safire and Davidson. In 1983, a year before Gorbachev came to power, Walker became a foreign correspondent for the *Guardian* in Moscow. He was the first permanent Moscow correspondent for the paper since World War II.⁴⁹ Prior to that, he had studied modern history at Oxford and Harvard. During his time in the US, Walker was a member of the American Political Science Association and worked in the campaign office of Ed Muskie, the Democrat Vice-Presidential candidate in Nixon's victorious 1968 election.⁵⁰ It was not long after his brief political career that Walker started writing for the *Guardian*, reporting first in the United Kingdom, then as a travelling correspondent, and later in Moscow. His Moscow reporting covered a wide range of topics including politics, the media, rural life and holidays. He offered insight into everyday life in the USSR that other commentators could not.

Walker was also less hostile towards the USSR than either Davidson or Safire. Perhaps because of this, his writing earned special ire in the pages of the unapologetically conservative *Spectator*.⁵¹ Notably, he was nicknamed 'Martin Webbovich' by Timothy Garton Ash, the magazine's foreign editor, on the grounds that he was a 'worthy successor' to the pro-Soviet Sidney and Beatrice Webb.⁵² Despite what Ash considered apologism for the USSR, Walker was typical of Anglo-American commentators in his insistence that to

47 'William Safire of The New York Times', *The Pulitzer Prizes*, accessed 21 May 2016.

48 Robert D. McFadden, 'William Safire, Political Columnist and Oracle of Language, Dies at 79', *New York Times*, 27 September 2009.

49 Geoffrey Taylor, *Changing Faces: A History of the Guardian, 1956-88* (London: Fourth Estate, 1993), 269.

50 'Martin Walker', *World Policy Institute*, accessed 7 February 2016.

51 'Toeing the Line', *Spectator*, 24 November 1984, Periodicals Archive Online; 'Martin's Mayday', *Spectator*, 11 May 1985, Periodicals Archive Online; Charles Moore, 'Diary', *Spectator*, 10 May 1986, Periodicals Archive Online; Timothy Garton Ash, 'New Orthodoxies: I', *Spectator*, 19 July 1986, Periodicals Archive Online; 'Kremlin's Guardian', *Spectator*, 2 August 1986, Periodicals Archive Online.

52 Timothy Garton Ash, 'Mr Steele Knows Better', *Spectator*, 2 February 1985, Periodicals Archive Online.

overcome its flaws, the Soviet system would need to undergo Westernisation on a massive scale.

Focusing on this small group of commentators serves the overall objective of this thesis: to look at how people adapt the discourses that, in part, construct their identities. This thesis provides no analysis of public opinion. Nor does it attempt to evaluate which discourses were most widely adopted in this period. Instead, people have been selected who spoke or wrote a great deal about the Soviet Union. I look at how they spoke about the Soviet Union prior to Gorbachev coming to power, or at the beginning of his career as General Secretary, and then ask how far they moved away from that baseline. This allows me to engage in deep analysis of how discourses are adapted. The result is insight into constructions of the Soviet Union and Western identity in this period, and what profound discursive change can look like. The extent to which my findings can be generalised is limited to the times, places, and communities that I consider, but they offer ample possibilities for further investigation.

Methodology

There are two main elements to my approach: an in-depth analysis of the similarities and differences in the discourses of key figures, and how these changed over time, and broader, comprehensive, analysis of reporting in specific newspapers. Aside from Chapter Five, each chapter focuses on the public commentary of the key figures described previously.

In the cases of Safire, Davidson and Walker this thesis takes a systematic approach to analysis of their reporting. I used the Factiva and ProQuest databases to search for all articles they wrote in periods of time dictated by the needs of each chapter that mentioned the Soviet Union. In total, I surveyed 188 articles by Safire, 160 by Walker (13 of which were co-written with other journalists), and 64 by Davidson.

I have taken a different approach for Reagan and Thatcher. Because the Soviet Union appeared so frequently in Reagan's speeches, I have restricted myself to analysis of his major speeches as identified by the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and selected other statements, letters, and addresses. I accessed 56 items in total. Thatcher, on the other hand, devoted less attention to the USSR in her speeches. As such, I have used the database of speeches maintained by the Margaret Thatcher Foundation to access a wider range of

material. There were 302 items, including speeches, press conferences, and transcripts of parliamentary questions.

Supplementing these case studies is a systematic survey of several newspapers, including the *NYT*, the *Washington Post (WP)*, the *Guardian*, the *FT*, and *The Times*. I used the Factiva and ProQuest databases to locate all articles in these newspapers on specific topics, such as the 1986 Reykjavik Summit. To maintain a focus on opinion pieces and other longer-form journalism, I excluded those results that contained less than 500 words. In total, I surveyed 2,517 articles outside of those authored by the key commentators listed previously. Having identified relevant articles, I surveyed each for content, tone, and the appearance of key themes or narratives. My analysis involved a close reading of those articles and identification of key words and topics. Through this it became possible to see certain patterns. Most relevant to this thesis were the repeated attempts by journalists to explain Gorbachev, and to categorise him as either a Westerner, a Soviet, or something between the two poles.

The methodology adopted in this study was inspired by a lack of clarity in some historiography about Anglo-American or Western engagement with the USSR. I owe a conceptual debt to writers like Martin Malia and Michael C. Paul, who have written about the discursive construction of Russia and the Soviet Union. However, there are methodological weaknesses in Malia's *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, and Paul's article, 'Western Negative Perceptions of Russia'. Both of these texts claim to survey views or attitudes, but in practice they slide back and forth between discussing policy, elite attitudes, public opinion, and discourse, without critique of the differences between them.⁵³ Moreover, their analyses cover a huge geographic and demographic territory while making little attempt to draw distinctions between cultures, people, and countries. As a result of this conceptual flattening, Malia could write without elaboration or evidence that 'on the near side of *détente* and [the second round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) in 1979], most Westerners preferred to trust in accommodation with the "really-existing" Soviet regime.' He could also make claims about what the 'average citizen' assumed had to be done about the USSR.⁵⁴ These claims ignore the huge diversity of opinion contained within such sweeping

⁵³ Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 7; Paul, 'Western Negative Perceptions of Russia', 104.

⁵⁴ Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 401.

categorizations. Who is this average citizen and what makes them average? This lack of clarity does not mean that Malia's findings are untrue or useless, nor are those of Paul. But it does call for further studies that refine, challenge, and critique these big-picture analyses. Thus, this thesis poses similar questions to Paul and Malia but answers them with a narrower, detail-oriented focus, and a greater degree of theoretically informed conceptual clarity.

The first step in developing a more rigorous analysis of Western engagement with the USSR is to define the terms of engagement and outline my divergence from established models. Historiography about the Cold War and images of the Soviet Union is rife with reductionism. Beliefs, speech, and policy are merged into generalisations like 'attitudes' or 'perceptions', with little to no discussion about what these actually entail. These categories of analysis are useful but they are not always precise, and so must be subject to the same critique as any other construct. In this spirit of lively critique I take the stance that — in contrast to their popular usage — attitudes, beliefs, speech, and policy should not be treated as though synonymous. To treat them as interchangeable does a disservice to their conceptual usefulness. There are, admittedly, connections between these concepts. For instance, any given person's psychology or personality influences their speech, and there are psychological consequences that emerge from political action. Particularly insofar as discourse, the creation of meaning, can be understood to include processes of decision-making and the implementation of those decisions, there is clearly a relationship between cognition, speech, and action. This is depicted in an abstract fashion in Figure 1. However, it is misleading to assume that these connections are straightforward or intuitive.

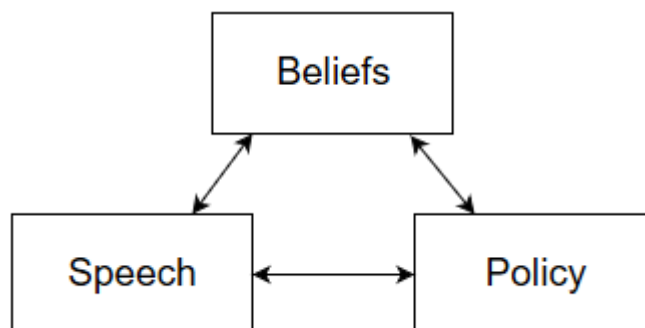


Figure 1. Relationship between beliefs, speech and policy

For a pertinent example of the unhelpful conflation of psychology and speech, let us take Stephen Benedict Dyson's argument that Thatcher's possession of a 'lower complexity cognitive style' could be seen in her 'snap decision' to befriend Gorbachev.⁵⁵ Dyson writes:

As [Thatcher] recounted to George Urban, an academic who occasionally advised her on foreign policy, 'I was talent-spotting in the Soviet leadership, and that's how Gorbachev came to visit me here at Chequers. I immediately hit it off with him and that's when I coined the phrase "we can do business with him." My whole relationship with Gorbachev was ... based on that first meeting.' This type of snap judgement can be characteristic of leaders with straightforward cognitive styles - placement of a new actor into one of the two categories 'friend' or 'enemy' is made quickly and, once made, is highly resistant to change.⁵⁶

Dyson argues that the positive relationship Thatcher established with Gorbachev as a result of her snap decision directly inspired new diplomatic approaches on both sides of the Iron Curtain.⁵⁷ Dyson's thesis relies on several assumptions when it comes to this piece of evidence: that Thatcher's comments to Urban were honest, that her own memory of the event was static and precise, that Thatcher's 'cognitive style' was the primary reason for her public statements about Gorbachev, and so forth. This is only one piece of Dyson's evidence, but his analysis assumes that it was indicative of one psychological explanation when there were many other forces at work. It is also worth mentioning that Dyson's assessment of Thatcher's 'complexity' is based on quantitative analysis of her speech patterns when answering parliamentary questions. Such a discursive environment is hardly everyday or indicative of how she would conduct herself in every situation. It might be relevant to a spontaneous debate, but not necessarily to her strategic depiction of the new General Secretary. However, Thatcher's responses to parliamentary questions did provide evidence for what she had said and which narratives she had relied upon in saying it. Focusing on the evolution of these narratives, rather than attempting to read psychological processes into their use, allows me to reach less speculative conclusions. In this thesis, I am not going to make any claims about the authentic, personal beliefs of the characters under examination, but in the interconnections and tensions within their public performances. If there is

55 Stephen Benedict Dyson, 'Cognitive Style and Foreign Policy: Margaret Thatcher's Black-and-White Thinking', *International Political Science Review* 30, no. 1 (2009): 38.

56 *Ibid.*, 43.

57 *Ibid.*, 44.

anything a historian can learn from analysis of speech and writing, then it is about the content of that discourse.

The peril of a simplistic conflation between cognition, discourse, and action is that it fails to take into account the rich tapestry of experiences and influences that play a part in causation. In this particular example, the attribution of Thatcher's positive comments about Gorbachev to her psychological disposition obscures other contributing factors. Writing about the steps leading up to Gorbachev's invitation to the UK, Archie Brown — an expert on communism and a Thatcher advisor — identifies myriad other causes for the Prime Minister's approach to the future General Secretary. Institutional forces, the pursuit of geopolitical interests, broad shifts of policy, Thatcher's own intellectual and professional development, and simple quirks of timing all played roles in determining how she spoke about Gorbachev.⁵⁸ For my own part, I point out in this thesis that Thatcher's commentary about Gorbachev up to 1986 served specific political and discursive purposes.

While it is occasionally necessary to speculate or generalise, this thesis attempts to avoid simplistic conflations between cognition, circumstance, and the expression of political beliefs as far as possible. To this end, I have taken specificity as a guiding principle. Illustrating the interplay between belief and discourse, or discourse and the mechanisms of policy creation, is not within the scope of this thesis. Indeed, Dyson is correct in pointing out that there is some relationship between Thatcher's personality and her commentary about Gorbachev. But the intricate nature of that relationship is irrelevant to the questions that I have asked. I have not attempted to research Thatcher's psychological state, and thus cannot make conclusions about it. The objective of this thesis is to focus exclusively on discourse and reveal the patterns, continuities, and interconnections within what Thatcher, and other people, said, not what they believed.

Such critiques aside, there is great value in scholarship that critically considers discourse in combination with attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, policy, and other interactions. An example of such scholarship is provided by the doctoral thesis of Buddy Wayne Howell, written at the Texas A&M University in 2006.⁵⁹ Howell's thesis explores Reagan's public diplomacy surrounding the four Reagan-Gorbachev summits that took place in the second

58 Archie Brown, 'The Change to Engagement in Britain's Cold War Policy: The Origins of the Thatcher-Gorbachev Relationship', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 3–47.

59 Buddy Wayne Howell, 'The Rhetoric of Presidential Summit Diplomacy: Ronald Reagan and the U.S.-Soviet Summits, 1985-1988' (doctoral thesis, Texas A&M University, 2006).

half of the 1980s, and how it was used to influence public opinion. Howell identifies a conflation between the concepts of 'peace' and 'human rights' in Reagan's discourse about the USSR, as do I. However, we apply these findings in different ways. Howell's concern is with the strategic reasoning underlying Reagan's rhetoric. My thesis focuses rather on the form of that discourse, its relationship to identity, and seeks to contextualize it as one evolving discourse amongst many. My claims are not about the underlying beliefs or psychological processes that dictated what was spoken. When I do speak of intention or belief, it is in the context of people talking about their own intentions and beliefs, and how they constructed narratives around these stated intentions.

Focusing on what was said by a small group of people over a relatively short period of time allows for an investigation that is both comprehensive and comparative. Discourse analysts from Michel Foucault to Wodak have discussed the impact of discourse on the world. I am happy to take the existence of these effects as given and allow other scholars to show exactly what they are. What my approach sacrifices in breadth, it makes up in detail and texture. The closeness of my reading allows me the opportunity to investigate nuance and uncertainties in the way that people talked about the Soviet Union that would otherwise be obscured. In the process, I can demonstrate complex discursive interactions with the concept of the Soviet Union that call into question truisms about the people and period that I have put under the microscope. It is my hope that this contribution will support future investigations into the events of the 1980s by revealing interconnections that are hidden when newspaper articles, political speeches, or even individuals are considered in isolation. These interconnections are also relevant for discourse about Russia in the twenty-first century

This approach also allows me the opportunity to identify and disentangle some of the processes that govern discursive change, and that have shaped discourses about the Soviet Union and Russia. It is one thing for a scholar to argue that Western actors pursued new strategies towards the USSR in the 1980s. It is another to show how these changes were sustained and integrated into pre-existing, resilient discourses — or how these shifts were often contradictory or inconsistent. By doing so, I move analysis of international relations, newspapers, and diplomacy away from attempts to determine who was right or who had the best strategy, and instead emphasise the social construction of communication and knowledge. In the process, we gain tools that allow us to understand the contextual,

contested nature of discourse and also the resonances between discourse in the past and in our own time.

Chapter One: Common Threads in Anglo-American Discourse About the USSR, January 1984–February 1985.

This chapter assesses the shared characteristics of mainstream Anglo-American discourses about the Soviet Union from the beginning of 1984 until just before the death of Konstantin Chernenko in March 1985. The purpose of this assessment is to provide a baseline understanding of what was said and written about the USSR, prior to Gorbachev's rise, by the key individuals under consideration. This chapter also surveys key narratives, themes, metaphors, and other discursive features shared between these people. Identifying these characteristics in this period allows me to identify the fissures that subsequently opened up as commentators adapted their discourse in differing ways to account for the Gorbachev phenomenon. It also allows me to determine which commonalities endured over time.

The material considered in this chapter has been explored by other researchers, either in passing or in isolation, rather than through the lens of a sustained comparison. Reagan in particular has received a great deal of attention. Presidential speeches are popular subjects for analysts of rhetoric, and 'the Great Communicator' offers a fascinating case study.¹ The debate over whether he was a lifelong hawk or a hopeful reconciler, an erratic improviser or a man with a plan, continues today.² Thatcher has received less attention, and there has been no systematic analysis of how either Davidson or Safire reported on the Soviet Union. More important than any individual statement made by one of the commentators considered here are the similarities between them. Even more interesting are the silences — the unspoken assumptions they shared, and that were taken to be uncontroversial. By identifying these invisible claims about the world, it might be possible to identify similar patterns of discourse in our own times.

This chapter is divided into four sections. It begins with an overview of the period under consideration and a summary of key events to which commentators were responding when they discussed the USSR. Then, the common threads shared in these discourses are introduced. Lastly, the discourses of two political commentators (Ian Davidson and William Safire) and two

1 Ryan L. Teten, 'Evolution of the Modern Rhetorical Presidency: Presidential Presentation and Development of the State of the Union Address', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2003): 334–35.

2 James Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 2.

political leaders (Reagan and Thatcher) provide the basis for an analysis of common discursive threads.

Historical Overview

1984 started at a difficult moment in East-West relations. On-again, off-again arms control negotiations between the USSR and US in Geneva had ended acrimoniously in November 1983, and the consequences of the breakdown were still unknown. These 'walk-outs,' often blamed on the Soviet leadership, cast a shadow on the New Year. Foreign policy luminaries like George F. Kennan and W. Averell Harriman, both of whom had helped to shape post-war American strategy towards the USSR, depicted the situation as a profound crisis of American-Soviet relations.³ Other responses were less bleak, but expressions of concern were not reserved for the grand old men of the diplomatic establishment.⁴ Even though the tensions of 1983 never spilled over into catastrophe, they shaped discussion about the USSR during the year that followed.

On 16 January, several months of relative silence between superpowers ended with the opening of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence and Security Building Measures and Nuclear Disarmament in Europe.⁵ The conference was intended to run for two years, and was largely devoted to the detailed minutiae of arms regulation policy. According to Lawrence Eagleburger, an Under Secretary of State in the Reagan administration, the conference was intended 'to make it more difficult for either side to use the arms that do exist in Europe for surprise attack or intimidation.'⁶ Normally the opening of a relatively low-priority conference would not be especially interesting or newsworthy, but its position in relation to the Soviet withdrawal from negotiations in November lent it prominence. The centrepiece of reporting about the summit was a meeting between Andrei Gromyko, the veteran Soviet Minister of

3 W. Averell Harriman, 'If the Reagan Pattern Continues, America May Face Nuclear War', *New York Times*, 1 January 1984, Factiva; George F. Kennan, 'Reducing Tensions', *New York Times*, 15 January 1984, Factiva.

4 David Buchan, 'Why Reagan Is Playing the Moscow Overture', *Financial Times*, 11 January 1984, Factiva; Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: The EEC Crisis - No Time for Brinkmanship', *Financial Times*, 6 January 1984, Factiva; Robert G. Kaiser, 'Muscle: Can We Blame Reagan's Global Woes on Military Men?', *Washington Post*, 15 January 1984, Factiva.

5 James E. Goodby and Robert L. Barry, 'The Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe', *International Negotiation* 1, no. 2 (June 1996): 188.

6 Lawrence Eagleburger, 'Security for Europe', *New York Times*, 13 January 1984, Factiva.

Foreign Affairs, and George Shultz, Reagan's Secretary of State.⁷ The results of the meeting between Gromyko and Shultz were inconclusive, but the conference is important to this thesis for the expressions of hope and scepticism with which it was greeted.

The death of Yuri Andropov, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, on 9 February was a more dramatic moment. Andropov had become General Secretary on 12 November 1982, at the age of 69. The 14 months that followed brought heightened international tension but also social and economic reforms in the USSR. Andropov's reformist leadership did not last for long, however, and from August 1983 until his death on 9 February 1984, failing health restricted him to governing from a hospital bed. He was succeeded by Konstantin Chernenko, who was three years older than Andropov and also in poor health. Some Anglo-American commentators accorded symbolic significance to the election of Chernenko, a member of the Politburo's old guard, instead of a younger man like Mikhail Gorbachev. Robert G. Kaiser, the associate editor of the *WP*, took Andropov's death as an opportunity to 'find out if the Soviet Union is wallowing in a profound national crisis, or if it is at last ready to try to deal forcefully with its many problems under a new generation of leaders.' He added, 'another round of this geriatric musical chairs could truly discredit this party leadership.'⁸ Other commentators agreed. According to *Guardian* foreign correspondent Hella Pick, 'the ruling elite has again opted for an interim leadership.'⁹ Anthony Robinson, an *FT* foreign correspondent, stated that 'Mr Chernenko appears to have been chosen to hold the ring while younger men gain more experience and support.'¹⁰ According to these writers, Chernenko's accession meant business as usual. It was an interesting turn of events, but one that journalists from the *Spectator*, *NYT*, *WP*, and the *Guardian*, took to have little significance in the grand scheme of things.¹¹

7 James Reston, 'Washington: Shultz and Gromyko', *New York Times*, 15 January 1984, Factiva; Peter Osnos, 'Despite Fanfare, Little Expected In Stockholm', *Washington Post*, 19 January 1984, Factiva; Bridget Bloom and Anthony Robinson, 'Gromyko Rules Out Return to Geneva', *Financial Times*, 20 January 1984, Factiva; Hella Pick, 'The Five Hours That Did Not Shake the World', *Guardian*, 20 January 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

8 Robert G. Kaiser, 'Generations: Picking a Leader Whom the Soviets Can Believe In', *Washington Post*, 12 February 1984, Factiva.

9 Hella Pick, 'Hopes of West Are Dashed by Chernenko', *Guardian*, 14 February 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

10 Anthony Robinson, 'The Struggle Has Just Begun: The Soviet Leadership', *Financial Times*, 14 February 1984, Factiva.

11 Charles Moore, 'Political Commentary: Eastward Ho', *Spectator*, 18 February 1984, Periodicals Archive Online; Serge Schmemmann, 'Chernenko Possibility: New Detente', *New York Times*, 18 February 1984, Factiva; Hedrick

Some commentators saw the comparatively young Mikhail Gorbachev as a possible contender for General Secretary when Andropov died. When that did not eventuate, they predicted with certainty that he would succeed Chernenko.¹² For this reason, the official visit by Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, to the UK in December 1984 provoked considerable interest. The visit was widely reported from political and human interest angles, and it contributed to the growth of Gorbachev's celebrity. It was an opportunity for commentators to discuss the man who could (and would) become the next General Secretary and what he might mean for the USSR.¹³

These were not the only events that featured in mainstream discourse about the USSR. Other topics were reported on less widely than these discrete events, or concerned the Soviet Union only secondarily. Margaret Thatcher's official trip to the Hungarian People's Republic, the war in Afghanistan, proxy conflicts in South America and Africa, and numerous human interest stories about life or oppression in the Soviet Union, provided material for discourse about the USSR.¹⁴ The Soviets also appeared frequently in coverage of Reagan's re-election in November 1984.¹⁵ Because he is one of the main discursive actors featured in this thesis, Reagan's successful election campaign and the influence it had on his commentary about the Soviet Union cannot be ignored.

Smith, 'Looking for a Message from Moscow', *New York Times*, 19 February 1984, Factiva; Pick, 'Hopes of West Are Dashed by Chernenko'.

12 Michael Getler, 'Top Soviet Visits Britain Gorbachev Stresses Arms Control in Opening Statement', *Washington Post*, 16 December 1984, Factiva; 'Editorial: Mr Gorbachev in London', *Financial Times*, 20 December 1984, Factiva; 'The Gorbachev Phenomenon', *Washington Post*, 21 December 1984, Factiva.

13 Michael Getler, 'Natty Gorbachevs Take London -- and Its Iron Lady', *Washington Post*, 20 December 1984, Factiva; Patrick Cockburn, 'European News: Chernenko's Heir Apparent Under Western Eyes', *Financial Times*, 14 December 1984, Factiva; Jo Thomas, 'British Take to Gorbachev in a Big Way', *New York Times*, 23 December 1984, Factiva; Serge Schmemmann, 'Man in the News; Rising Star in Kremlin', *New York Times*, 17 December 1984, Factiva; William Safire, 'Essay; Maggie Likes Mike', *New York Times*, 24 December 1984, Factiva.

14 Seth Mydans, 'Afghan War: The Russian Public Is Still a Believer', *New York Times*, 3 December 1984, Factiva; Timothy Garton Ash, 'The Salami Lady', *Spectator*, 11 February 1984, Periodicals Archive Online; Viron P. Vaky, 'What Do We Want in Nicaragua?', *The New York Times*, 18 June 1984, Factiva; Arthur Jacobs, 'The Arts: Bach in the USSR', *Financial Times*, 28 April 1984, Factiva; Martin Walker, 'Russia's Capitalist Kids Show the Way', *Guardian*, 19 October 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

15 David S. Broder, 'Prediction: A Reagan Victory', *Washington Post*, 1 January 1984, Factiva; Paul Taylor, 'Mondale Says --- President's Joke Wasn't Funny Reagan's Ad-Lib on Bombing Gives His Foes Ammunition', *Washington Post*, 14 August 1984, Factiva; J.W. Anderson, 'The Carter-Reagan Years...', *Washington Post*, 31 August 1984, Factiva; James David Barber, 'Political Illusionism', *New York Times*, 26 April 1984, Factiva; Buchan, 'Why Reagan Is Playing the Moscow Overture'.

Timeline of Significant Events, 1982-1985

12 November 1982	Yuri Andropov becomes General Secretary of the USSR.
1 September 1983	KAL 007, Korean passenger aircraft, shot down over Soviet aerospace.
November 1983	USSR withdraws from arms talks in Geneva.
16 January 1984	Opening of Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe.
2 February 1984	Margaret Thatcher travels to Hungary.
9 February 1984	Yuri Andropov dies.
13 February 1984	Konstantin Chernenko elected to the position of General Secretary of the CPSU.
8 May 1984	USSR announces intention to boycott Los Angeles Olympics.
16-17 May 1984	35th annual meeting of NATO foreign ministers.
11 August 1984	Reagan jokes on live radio about beginning the bombing of the USSR.
4 September 1984	East Germany withdraws from planned meeting between German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany.
23 September 1984	Reagan meets Andrei Gromyko, Foreign Minister of the USSR.
6 November 1984	Reagan re-elected.
16-22 December 1984	Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev visit the UK.
20 January 1985	Reagan sworn in for second term.
10 March 1985	Konstantin Chernenko dies of heart, lung, and liver failure.
11 March 1985	Mikhail Gorbachev becomes General Secretary of the USSR.

Common Threads

Before discussing the tensions between different ways of talking about the Soviet Union, it is useful to show what united them. Unities and shared discursive assumptions provided context for the differences that I will discuss later, and in fact acted as the common ground that made disagreements comprehensible. In practice, this took the form of shared narratives, stereotypes, phrases, metaphors, and discursive strategies that were used to organise knowledge about the Soviet Union and its relationship with the wider world.

Central amongst these shared assumptions was the understanding that the USSR was fundamentally different to the West. The Otherness of the Soviet Union enabled the refinement and articulation of the West as a concept. As described in the Introduction, it is not at all uncommon for collective identities to be defined using the Self/Other binary, and there is an extensive literature on this topic. Much of the discourse considered in this thesis described particular versions of the USSR that corresponded with various images of the West.

The USSR was used in the creation of numerous Western selves and increasingly more specific identities nested within one another. Some of the collective identities that this thesis considers are broad umbrellas: the West, the United States, and the United Kingdom. However, within these identities, the Soviet Union was also used to articulate a more specific imagined community of liberal democrats. More specific still was the community of advocates for one of the dominant political projects of the 1980s — the ideology of neoliberalism. Stuart Hall, one of the great modern theorists of culture, along with Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, defined the ideological pillars of neoliberalism as ‘the supposed naturalness of “the market”, the primacy of the competitive individual, the superiority of the private over the public.’¹⁶ Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, two of the subjects of my thesis, were amongst the most prominent advocates of this ideology. This had significant consequences for what they had to say about the USSR. Their critiques of the USSR were also calls for neoliberal transformation.

It is outside the scope of this thesis to dwell too closely on the role played by the USSR in the discursive origins and articulation of neoliberalism, but the relationship must be noted. The existence of the USSR, and the question of what to do about it, allowed the proponents of neoliberalism to set themselves apart from their domestic political rivals and to define their ideology. Political scientist Stephen J. Collier writes in *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (2011) about the significance of the Soviet Union’s collapse for advocates of neoliberalism. According to Collier, it was ‘understood as the apotheosis of a century-long intellectual battle between advocates of planning and advocates of markets.’¹⁷ The Soviet Union was the laboratory and case study in which the socio-economic postulates of the new liberalism

16 Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin, ‘Framing Statement – After Neoliberalism: Analysing the Present’, *Soundings, After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto*, 2013, 9.

17 Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 131.

could be proven. Politicians like Thatcher and Reagan did not simply use the Soviet Union to define a generic West, but a neoliberal vision of the West that was shaped by specific assumptions about economics, government, the nature of human society, and human nature.

For all that it relied on generalisations about Soviet people and society, the Othering of the USSR in the 1980s was facilitated through a complex web of overlapping narratives. Anglo-American critics of the USSR — along with the basic frameworks of domestic and international politics — portrayed it as a threat. The nature of this threat was fluid, but in the United States, it was first and foremost constructed as a threat to security.¹⁸ Although there has been far less research on British discourse about the USSR, many of the same themes and fears were present. There was, after all, a broad social and political consensus in the US and Western Europe after the 1950s.¹⁹ The alleged Soviet threat to security took many forms: military power, political subversion, moral degeneration, social upheaval, and economic oppression, to name but a few of the most prominent examples. As Simon Dalby argues, territory and geopolitical space were amongst the most important considerations.²⁰ The USSR transgressed against the boundaries, ideological and territorial, between the Self and the Other. Furthermore, in the late twentieth century, geopolitics were more global in theory and practice than ever before. The most immediate perceived dangers stemmed from Soviet attempts to exert influence in parts of the world that were considered vital for Western security — South America, the Middle East, Europe — and Soviet nuclear weapons. However, criticism of the USSR was not limited to the Soviet Union's potential to transgress. The USSR was thoroughly condemned merely for existing within its own borders. Negative storylines about the USSR can thus be sorted into two categories: those about the threat that it posed, and those that criticised its very existence. Of course, these narratives intersected and overlapped. They cannot be properly disentangled, but it is helpful to consider them as two threads rather than as one. Doing so allows discussion of the varying emphases placed on discourse about the USSR in different times and by different people.

18 James Chace, *America Invulnerable: The Quest for Absolute Security from 1812 to Star Wars* (New York: Summit Books, 1988); Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*; Campbell, *Writing Security*.

19 Mary Kaldor, *The Imaginary War: Understanding the East-West Conflict* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 77.

20 Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 30–33.

Reagan's speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in March 1983 was a powerful example of both storylines. Although it took place outside of the period addressed by this thesis, the address succinctly described these two ways of talking about the Soviet Union. It provides a useful starting point and language for discussing the discourse that followed. Because his words were as evocative as they were controversial, I use Reagan's terminology to conceptualise the two storylines about the USSR in question. I shall refer to the first of these threads as the 'evil empire' narrative, and to the second as the 'present danger' narrative.

In the course of his speech to the evangelicals, Reagan famously labelled the Soviet Union an 'evil empire', and said that it was necessary to 'pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness.'²¹ The evil empire was a latent threat — mostly notable as a tragedy or travesty for the people who lived within it. According to this narrative thread, the Soviet Union was despotic, oppressive, selfish, and calculating — a model of immoral governance. The specific accusations against the Soviet Union within this strand of the narrative were diverse, but they were based on a moral critique of the Soviet Union's innate nature. These criticisms represented some of the most familiar and enduring themes in mainstream discourses about the USSR. Reagan was particularly blunt in his characterisation of the Soviet Union as degenerate, but he was not alone in making this claim. Commentators used discourses of liberalism, Christianity, industrialisation, economics, and any number of others as grounds to criticise the USSR, as will be discussed below.

In addition to his description of the USSR as evil, Reagan presented it as a threat — a 'clear and present danger' to the interests of the West and to the cause of democracy throughout the world. To protect the West and democracy, it was the task of the United States to lead the 'free world' in the struggle against Communism. He exalted the United States' antagonism towards the USSR as nothing less than 'the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil', and encouraged his listeners not to let that evil go unchallenged.²² Because the Soviet Union was evil and thus untrustworthy, it was a threat to security that had to be

21 Reagan, 'Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, FL 8 March 1983'.

22 Ibid.

countered with nuclear weapons.²³ The threat posed by the USSR was not always understood in moral terms, but the ‘clear and present danger’ was a common trope.

Reagan’s hostile rhetoric was not the only way to talk about the Soviet Union. In fact, it was deeply unpopular with many audiences at home and abroad. The ‘evil empire’ speech itself was hugely controversial thanks to Reagan’s moralistic, apocalyptic vision of world politics.²⁴ Anthony Lewis, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist writing in the *NYT*, declared: ‘When a politician claims that God favors his programs, alarm bells should ring. That is what Ronald Reagan has just done.’²⁵ Davidson lamented that ‘the Reagan administration remains as alarming as ever’, and argued that anti-nuclear sentiment was becoming increasingly mainstream.²⁶ Despite the critiques levelled against Reagan’s ‘evil empire speech’, however, the themes of Soviet evil and danger that Reagan identified were far from rare.

Media Commentators — Ian Davidson and William Safire

During the period in question, Ian Davidson wrote 27 articles for the *FT* that discussed the USSR in detail. Only three of these articles, including a book review, were shorter than 1400 words. Most contained between 1600 and 2000 words. These articles largely focused on summit meetings, the role of the USSR in European politics, and arms control. In his discussion of international politics, Davidson frequently incorporated elements of the ‘present danger’ narrative about the Soviet Union’s behaviour on the world stage. But because of the strict international focus of his writing, he commented only infrequently on the domestic politics of the USSR.

At the beginning of 1984, Davidson’s predictions for the year were less than optimistic. The Soviet Union, wrote Davidson, was temperamental and untrustworthy. Furthermore, the upcoming Stockholm arms control conference in January was unlikely to yield any productive results. The ‘Russians’ — by which Davidson meant both the diplomats at Stockholm and their

23 G. Thomas Goodnight, ‘Ronald Reagan’s Re-Formulation of the Rhetoric of War: Analysis of the “Zero Option,” “Evil Empire,” and “Star Wars” Addresses’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72, no. 4 (1 November 1986): 403.

24 *Ibid.*, 400.

25 Anthony Lewis, ‘Abroad at Home: Onward, Christian Soldiers’, *New York Times*, 10 March 1983, Factiva.

26 Ian Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: A Casual Revolution in Us Nuclear Strategy’, *Financial Times*, 28 March 1983, Factiva.

political masters — were entering into the negotiations in bad faith. As a result, ‘nothing constructive’ was to be expected of them.²⁷ The Soviets, he claimed, had no interest in engaging honestly with American proposals, and were motivated by wilful antagonism. According to Davidson:

Since the Russians do not want the Stockholm conference to succeed in its stated objectives, they can probably be counted on to put forward (not for the first time) a raft of quite different ideas ... which would be without real meaning or value.²⁸

Davidson had made the same point earlier in the year (‘the Russians will use the occasion for propaganda’) and in November 1983, when the USSR had withdrawn from the Geneva negotiations.²⁹

The theme of Soviet bad faith continued in Davidson’s reporting throughout the year, especially in his discussions of arms control summits. These summits, along with treaties, were key topics in Davidson’s writing. By contrast with some other commentators, who described summit meetings as largely meaningless, Davidson argued that their outcomes could have an active impact on European security. Poor results in negotiations between the US and the USSR put Europe at risk, given that it was the most likely battlefield for any future conflicts. Because of this, in Davidson’s articles, the ‘Russians’ were consistently portrayed as saboteurs, nuisances, and liars. They were, he claimed, propagandists who obfuscated the arms control process and flagrantly ignored the *Helsinki Final Act*, the declaration on human rights and territorial sovereignty that defined *détente*.³⁰ The Soviets were also histrionic and likely to ‘make a fuss’ for the purpose of causing embarrassment.³¹ But when their hostility was met in kind, the Soviets would retreat into ‘grouchy hibernation.’³²

27 Ian Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: The Diplomacy of Mere Gesture’, *Financial Times*, 16 January 1984, Factiva.

28 Ibid.

29 Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: The EEC Crisis’; Ian Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: A Turning Point in East-West Relations’, *Financial Times*, 24 November 1983, Factiva.

30 Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: The EEC Crisis’; Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: The Diplomacy of Mere Gesture’; Ian Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: Between Two Titans’, *Financial Times*, 20 February 1984, Factiva.

31 Ian Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: More Than Meets the Eye - Arms Control’, *Financial Times*, 30 January 1984, Factiva.

32 Ian Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: European Dilemma for Chernenko’, *Financial Times*, 3 September 1984, Factiva.

Furthermore, in describing Soviet behaviour in negotiations, Davidson consistently used metaphors of violence, arguments or interpersonal conflict. Here are some typical examples of the language used by Davidson:

- 'It is evident that the negotiations will at best be a long hard slog, with the Russians resisting every inch of the way.'³³
- 'The Russians will want to divert attention from the fact that it is they who have just walked out of three arms control negotiations.'³⁴
- 'The Russians have now broken off those negotiations.'³⁵
- 'If the Russians can use the negotiations in Vienna to limit US freedom of action, they may hope to hobble America's ability to intervene world-wide.'³⁶
- 'Russia tried to drag the British and French systems into the Euromissile talks.'³⁷
- 'They would have had much more grounds for a tantrum if they had waited ... for Star Wars.'³⁸

The Soviet Union's approach to international politics was thus defined by its aggressiveness, its unhelpfulness, and its unwillingness to compromise. The USSR that we encounter in Davidson's texts was hostile and a threat.

Davidson's narrative about the aggression of the Soviet Union bore a strong resemblance to that of Strobe Talbott, a pre-eminent American journalist and scholar of the USSR. Talbott, who wrote for *Time* from the early 1970s until 1993, also focused on international relations and nuclear strategy. Like Davidson, Talbott suggested that both the US and the USSR had some responsibility for resolving international tensions and that, despite this, the USSR was uniquely guilty of inflaming the situation. In an article in *Time* on 21 May 1984, 'Behind the Bear's Angry Growl', Talbott wrote:

33 Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: The Diplomacy of Mere Gesture'.

34 Ibid.

35 Davidson, 'More Than Meets the Eye'.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Hawks, Doves and No Agenda', *Financial Times*, 10 December 1984, Factiva.

The Soviet Union is in essence a militarized political system that views history as conflict and the world (including much of the real estate within the confines of its own empire) as enemy territory. ... Both before and since Reagan came into office, the Soviet Union has exacerbated international tensions by occupying and bullying its neighbors, stepping up its mischief-making around the world and arming itself beyond a level needed for self-defense or deterrence.³⁹

Talbott's argument was that, as unhelpful as Reagan could be, the Soviets were worse. His thesis was further punctuated by repeated metaphors of violence and aggression, some of which echoed Davidson. According to Talbott, the Soviets were 'screaming' and letting out 'howls of protest'. The USSR was a bear, and 'a born actor: he growls to frighten his foes so that they will back off, and plays tame so that they will draw nearer to be hugged (sometimes to the point of suffocation) or bitten.' While their interpretations on some matters were different, the assumption made by Davidson and Talbott that the USSR was uniquely troublesome was an uncontroversial starting point for their analyses.

It is important to note that, whenever Davidson discussed the sins and failings of the Soviet Union, he explicitly or implicitly measured the USSR by the norms of 'civilised' behaviour that were represented by 'the West'. At no point did he define the precise composition of the West, probably because the meaning of the term would be self-evident to his readers. But he made clear repeatedly that the West was opposed to the USSR. 'The West,' and the adjective 'Western', were used by Davidson to describe a community composed of the US, the UK, West Germany, and France that was united not by geography but by opposition to the USSR. Claims that 'we in the West have by now almost stopped noticing [the Soviets'] tedious and repetitious attacks on aggressive imperialism',⁴⁰ were typical of his writing. Davidson also frequently used the phrase 'East-West relations'. Wherever this phrase was used, the implication was that the West consisted of a range of countries in alliance with each other, whereas the 'East' was synonymous with the USSR. Repeated over and over again, the phrase 'East-West relations' reinforced the discursive line between 'us' and 'them'. At no point in his articles did Davidson question the paradigm within which he was writing, or suggest that there was any need for a

39 Strobe Talbott, 'Behind the Bear's Angry Growl', *Time*, 21 May 1984.

40 Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Between Two Titans'.

more nuanced delineation between West and East. The discursive division of the world into two antagonistic blocs was comprehensible to his readers, and he described it as though it were self-evident.

Davidson's conception of the West as a community united by opposition to the USSR was further illustrated by who he granted membership in that community. He accused Reagan of reckless provocation, but this did not lead him to question the Western identity of the United States nor its right to enjoy cooperative relations with other Western governments. Davidson even implied provisional membership in the West for Japan, which lay further east in geographical terms than the USSR.⁴¹ In contrast, the Soviet Union was assumed automatically to be excluded from membership in the West. Acceptable behaviour may have been grounds for the USSR to 'deserve a more confident relationship with the West',⁴² but there was no question that it could become Western itself.

Safire's critique went further than Davidson's argument that the Soviets were troublemakers who disobeyed Western norms. In a manifestation of the 'present danger' narrative thread, Safire insisted that the Soviet Union was actively dangerous and had to be dealt with as though war was possible. One article published in January 1984, 'Up the Laser River', provided an overview that was typical of his arguments at this time. In this article, Safire argued that it was necessary for the US to develop advanced anti-nuclear defences 'instead of hoping the Russians will forego the advantage, or grimly planning to compete to the bitter end.'⁴³ He had touched on this before, pointing to treaty-breaching Soviet research in the area of nuclear defence as evidence of bad faith. In 'Up the Laser River', Safire cast those who had previously disagreed with his claims about illicit Soviet research as 'the Sanhedrin of self-delusion'.⁴⁴ They were deluded, he maintained, because the Soviet threat was self-evident. With hyperbolic criticisms like this, Safire maintained that conflict and competition with the USSR was natural and inevitable.

41 Ian Davidson, 'The Barrier That May Soon Fall: Japan's Defence Spending', *Financial Times*, 4 February 1985, Factiva; Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Of Summits, and Their Uses', *Financial Times*, 2 April 1984, Factiva.

42 Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: The Diplomacy of Mere Gesture'.

43 William Safire, 'Essay: Up the Laser River', *New York Times*, 29 January 1984, Factiva.

44 Ibid.

When diplomatic conflicts or disagreements took place, Safire blamed them on Soviet behaviour. He referred several times to one specific example — the end of arms control negotiations in 1983, which he blamed on the Kremlin's imperialism. According to Safire:

The reason for the Second Cold War is plain: The West refused to accept the Soviet attempt to dominate Europe with SS-20 nuclear-tipped missiles, and when the most sincere Europeans could not talk the Russians out of this escalation of the arms race, the Western allies matched it. The Soviet Union, defeated in its gamble for domination, then went into its long diplomatic sulk.⁴⁵

This retelling rests on four particular claims, which can be summarised as follows:

1. The Soviet Union made a credible attempt to 'dominate Europe' using the SS-20s.
2. Western governments found this unacceptable and made reasonable overtures.
3. 'The Russians', committed to their path, rejected Western compromises and continued with their plans.
4. The Western allies reluctantly interceded, using equal force to the Soviet Union but no more.

According to the logic of Safire's argument, Soviet desire for domination ultimately caused the 'Second Cold War'. Driven by imperial ambitions, the Soviets took aggressive action against Western Europe, which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was then forced to counter. The USSR was thus cast as unreasonable and dangerous, while Western states were calm, even-handed, and benevolent. Thatcher retrospectively justified the stationing of the SS-20 missiles in much the same way, including when she travelled to Moscow in early 1985.⁴⁶

Earlier in the same article, Safire argued that imperialism was a fundamental trait of the USSR. It was purely 'self-interest', and besides, the Soviets had been openly trying to overcome the West 'for generations'.⁴⁷

45 William Safire, 'Essay: A Plum for Gromyko', *New York Times*, 1 October 1984, Factiva.

46 Margaret Thatcher, 'Radio Interview for IRN (Visiting Moscow)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 13 March 1985.

47 Safire, 'Essay: A Plum for Gromyko'.

When Safire used the word 'domination' or variations thereof, he referred almost exclusively to Soviet behaviour and not to Western behaviour. He frequently used it to explain the Soviet attempt to deploy SS-20 missiles in Europe. He only used the words dominance and dominate(d) in relation to other actors on three occasions:

- 'In the past week, Dr. Kissinger has dominated the news both as a player and as an expert on the sidelines.'⁴⁸
- 'The motive of the United States, and of our allies, has been to encourage the Christians and Moslems of Lebanon to make a deal to live together without the domination or occupation of any outside power.'⁴⁹
- 'Reagan can figure on two years of dominance, one year of rapid decline of power, and a final year of near-irrelevance.'⁵⁰

While these excerpts all focused on the US, the second example was relevant to the USSR. It came from an article that contained multiple references to Syrian combatants who acted as proxies and representatives of 'the domination or occupation of any outside power'.⁵¹ On each of these occasions, Safire stated that the Syrian fighters were backed by the Soviet Union and thus drew a connection between the situation in Lebanon and Soviet domination. The trope of unjust imperial authority was not used by Safire alone. One study showed that the *NYT* was five times more likely to mention martial law in Poland during 1982 than it was to mention the 1979 martial law that took place in Turkey, a US ally.⁵² Like his fellow *NYT* writers, Safire portrayed authoritarian violence as a Soviet trait. His near-exclusive use of 'domination' in reference to the USSR served to emphasize the danger and evil of the USSR.

Safire's metaphor of 'the long diplomatic sulk' was another recurring component of his explanation for the state of US-Soviet relations in 1984. The metaphor took several forms.

48 William Safire, 'Essay: Expert on the Sidelines', *New York Times*, 15 January 1984, Factiva.

49 William Safire, 'Essay: Reagan Standing Short', *New York Times*, 10 February 1984, Factiva.

50 William Safire, 'Reagan's Next Term', *New York Times*, 13 January 1985, Factiva.

51 Safire, 'Essay: Reagan Standing Short'.

52 Brett Silverstein, 'Enemy Images: The Psychology of U.S. Attitudes and Cognitions Regarding the Soviet Union', *The American Psychologist* 44, no. 6 (1989): 909; Brett Silverstein and Catherine Flamenbaum, 'Biases in the Perception and Cognition of the Actions of Enemies', *Journal of Social Issues* 45, no. 2 (1 July 1989): 56.

Russia, rather than the Soviet Union as a whole, was uniquely implicated in the moodiness Safire claimed to identify. For example:

- ‘The Russian bear is sore and sulking.’⁵³
- ‘... the present supersulk that is supposed to help defeat Ronald Reagan.’⁵⁴
- ‘The Russians recognize that the Big Sulk has failed.’⁵⁵
- ‘The Long Russian Sulk ...’⁵⁶

By suggesting that the behaviours in question were symptoms of Russian culture rather than Soviet political calculations, Safire invoked tropes of Russian backwardness and incivility. The image of a sulking Russia was derogatory, and suggested that the USSR was behaving more like a moody teenager than a world power. It connoted tantrums and precluded the possibility of rational engagement. Further, the metaphor of sulking implied that unfavourable Soviet responses (such as withdrawing from arms talks) were unreasonable, disproportionate responses to uncontroversial Western actions. Safire’s overall argument, that the Soviet objective had been to dominate Europe, drove home the irrationality of Soviet behaviour. The conception of the Soviet Union as unreasonable, or even childish, was not limited to Safire, either. Several versions of this claim appeared around the same time. For instance, David Buchan, a writer for the *FT*, described the withdrawal from negotiations as ‘petulant behaviour’ and Steven Erlanger, the *Boston Globe*’s European correspondent, joked ominously in a *Spectator* article that ‘a tantrum might mean apocalypse now’.⁵⁷ Safire’s metaphor shared a kinship with Davidson’s metaphors of physical violence and fitted easily within mainstream discourses about the USSR.

As a political writer rather than a foreign correspondent on the ground in Moscow, Safire’s columns on Soviet politics dealt primarily with the inner workings of the Kremlin rather

53 Safire, ‘Essay: Expert on the Sidelines’.

54 William Safire, ‘Essay: Revanche Is Sweet’, *New York Times*, 13 August 1984, Factiva.

55 William Safire, ‘Essay: Great Stone Face-Saver’, *New York Times*, 13 September 1984, Factiva.

56 Safire, ‘Essay; Maggie Likes Mike’.

57 Buchan, ‘Why Reagan Is Playing the Moscow Overture’; Steven Erlanger, ‘Dissembling on Disarmament’, *Spectator*, 28 January 1984, Periodicals Archive Online.

than life in the Soviet Union. He particularly emphasised the role of the Politburo, the central group of decision-makers in the Soviet state that included Konstantin Chernenko, Andrei Gromyko, and Mikhail Gorbachev. As Safire told the story, this group of men were the beneficiaries of an undemocratic culture that permeated the whole of the Soviet system. He used the death of Yuri Andropov to expound this theory by asserting that the next General Secretary would be determined through anti-democratic factional jostling rather than popular mandate. 'The trick in climbing to the top of the world's greasiest pole', he wrote, conveying both difficulty and sleaziness, 'is to get the support of the Red Army.'⁵⁸ Unsaid was his implication that corrupt pole-climbing would never happen in the US. Safire's claim that the Soviet system was uniquely dependent on bureaucratic factionalism was far from unique.⁵⁹

Safire then made an important clarification: when American governments acted inappropriately it was a temporary quirk, but when Soviet governments did so it was simply an inevitable by-product of the system. According to Safire, the factional, collective style of government that caused the USSR to be corrupt was also essential to it:

For example, the American system will remain free and democratic under Reagan, Mondale or Glenn, but each would make a measurable difference in the way we live. In a similar way, the Soviet system will remain repressive and expansionary under Chernenko, Grishin or one of the anti-bureaucracy crowd but the selection will affect the way the Soviet Union operates within its borders and in its dealings with us.⁶⁰

The thrust of this argument was that the Soviet Union was repressive and the United States was free. Moreover, Safire presented this observation as common sense. He did not expand on or justify the claim. Instead, he took it as given that his audience would be familiar with the narratives about the USSR on which his argument was built. He was not attempting to prove to his readers that the USSR was repressive in the present, because for him that was self-evident. Instead, he was arguing that USSR would remain so into the future.

58 William Safire, 'Essay: Not at All Alike', *New York Times*, 13 February 1984, Factiva.

59 Kaiser, 'Generations: Picking a Leader Whom the Soviets Can Believe In'; Anthony Robinson, 'Kremlin Power Brokers' Dilemma: The Andropov Succession', *Financial Times*, 11 February 1984, Factiva; Martin Walker, 'Confusion Amid Speculation of Ustinov's Death', *Guardian*, 12 November 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

60 Safire, 'Essay: Not at All Alike'.

The anti-democratic nature of the Soviet Union manifested for Safire as institutionalised dishonesty. In one article, entitled 'Truth in Crises', Safire embarked on a sustained comparison of Soviet and American dishonesty. His argument revolved around two political deceptions: Soviet attempts to obscure the illness of Yuri Andropov, and Reagan's attempt to mislead congress over a military operation in Lebanon. The article contained various versions of the claim that 'the Soviet Union is prepared to lie whenever lying suits its national purpose'.⁶¹ Indeed, dishonesty was 'to be expected from the Kremlin'.⁶² At no point did Safire even posit that there could be some situations in which the USSR would act in good faith. By starting from the premise that the Soviets were deceitful by default, Safire used the Soviet Union as the standard for dishonesty against which Reagan was being measured. Reagan's dishonesty was inappropriate for Safire, not only because it damaged 'our' credibility and 'our' system, but because it meant 'that difference [between Moscow and Washington] has been blurred in February of 1984.'⁶³ In the model of society that Safire advocated, governments had a responsibility to be honest in their dealings with citizens. In the US, he suggested that this was understood. In the USSR, however, deceit was common practice.

Safire returned to this theme regularly, during the period in question and later. At various points he claimed that the Soviets had lied about everything from the economy, the reasons for their antagonism towards the United States (which Safire suggested was a misdirection so that the Soviet people would not criticise their own government),⁶⁴ and the internal politics of the Kremlin.⁶⁵ When he pointed out instances of Soviet dishonesty it was to make the point that if the Soviet people knew the truth then they might criticise their government. The USSR was so awful that honesty was impossible. If Soviet people had access to the truth, they might see the Communist government the same that Westerners did. For Safire, the Soviet Union's lies were an essential part of its nature. If people could see the Soviet Union

61 William Safire, 'Essay: Truth in Crises', *New York Times*, 17 February 1984, Factiva.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 William Safire, 'Essay: Mind-Reading Gorbachev', *New York Times*, 8 June 1984, Factiva.

65 Safire, 'Essay: Great Stone Face-Saver'.

for what it really was, destitute and oppressive, it could face the same ‘rejection of Marxism and embrace of capitalism’ that he claimed had taken place in China.⁶⁶

Political Discourse — Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher

So far my analysis has focused on the discourse of political commentators, but it is also instructive to analyse the discourse of political leaders. Politicians like Reagan and Thatcher were subject to very different pressures than journalists like Davidson and Safire. Instead of editors and contracts of employment, they had to contend with advisers, lobbyists, foreign officials, and the voting public. The ways that these discourses changed gives us an insight into the particular configurations of discursive forces acting upon Reagan and Thatcher in this period. It is necessary to consider the advisers and speechwriters who helped shape the discourse of Reagan and Thatcher only briefly. While speechwriters play influential roles in the process of formulating discourse, the givers of political speeches obscure this influence. These speakers portray their words as their own, and, as pointed out by Wodak et al, are ultimately responsible for delivering the content of those speeches.⁶⁷

Both speakers gave a number of addresses, press conferences, and other public statements between the beginning of 1984 and March 1985. I have considered a selection of this corpus. In the case of Ronald Reagan, I put two speeches under the microscope: his January 1984 speech on Soviet-American relations, and the inaugural speech he gave in January 1985 following his re-election. I consider a wider range of Thatcher’s speeches because the Soviet Union was less central to her major speeches in this period. Examples include an address to the Joint Houses of Congress upon Thatcher’s visit to the United States in February 1985, a press conference and an interview she gave in Hungary in February 1984, and a speech to the Conservative Women’s Conference in May 1984, along with others.

The context of the speeches that I analyse here must be considered. They were delivered to specific audiences, but with the knowledge that many ears were listening. Reagan in particular faced a difficult election at the end of 1984 and his stance towards the Soviet Union was under close scrutiny. If he were too aggressive, he might alienate those who were

66 William Safire, ‘Essay: Greatest Leap Forward’, *New York Times*, 10 December 1984, Factiva.

67 Wodak et al., *Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 71.

concerned about the possibility that the US might get sucked into an escalating conflict with the USSR. During Reagan's presidency, popular approval for his Soviet policy grew when relations were relatively good and Reagan's discourse was most diplomatic.⁶⁸ But if his statements about the Soviet Union sounded too conciliatory, there was a risk that he might alienate conservatives and contradict the anti-communism on which he had built his career. Conservative intellectuals, for instance, were highly critical of any negotiations with the USSR.⁶⁹ Beyond the election campaign, the Reagan administration was engaged in attempts to draw the USSR back into arms talks and to sell controversial projects like the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to Soviet negotiators. Perhaps because of these pressures, Reagan was publicly more optimistic than either Davidson or Safire about the possibility of forcing the Soviets to come to an agreement. On the other hand, by framing his optimism in terms of a Western victory, he was able to preserve his anti-Communist credentials.

Reagan's commentary about the USSR was influenced by a sharp factional divide amongst his advisers and speechwriters. His administration included men like Pat Buchanan — a staunchly conservative former columnist — as communications director, and Richard Perle, nicknamed the 'Prince of Darkness', as assistant secretary of defence for international security policy. But it also included those aligned with George Shultz, firm advocates of arms control and negotiations.⁷⁰ According to Howell, 'the disagreements between the pragmatists and the hard-liners over U.S. Soviet policy and the most appropriate rhetoric to convey it' created the groundwork for a dual 'conciliation-confrontation approach to the Soviets'.⁷¹ By late 1983, Reagan had increasingly started side with the pragmatists both privately and publicly. He even decided, as he wrote in his diary, that 'some of the NSC staff are too hard line'.⁷² However, his passionate criticisms of the USSR did not cease, and he insisted that both factions remain in the administration.⁷³ Even aligned with less hawkish advisers, Reagan's discourse about the Soviet

68 Miroslav Nincic, 'The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Politics of Opposites', *World Politics* 40, no. 4 (July 1988): 463–64.

69 Robert Samuel, 'Conservative Intellectuals and the Reagan–Gorbachev Summits', *Cold War History* 12, no. 1 (2012): 141–42.

70 David Cortright, *Peace Works: The Citizen's Role in Ending the Cold War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 100.

71 Howell, 'The Rhetoric of Presidential Summit Diplomacy', 57.

72 Ronald Reagan, quoted in Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 186.

73 Howell, 'The Rhetoric of Presidential Summit Diplomacy', 60.

Union remained highly critical and constrained by existing narratives.

Reagan gave his first 1984 speech about the Soviet Union on 16 January, the eve of the Stockholm conference. He opened his address by expressing hope for peace. However, the reasons he cited for hopefulness were more anchored in what he — and others — had already said than in a bold new conception of the USSR. The speech was interpreted by some as an overture of cooperation, and by others as an election ploy.⁷⁴ Proponents of the ‘Reagan reversal’ theory, articulated most notably by international relations scholar Beth Fischer, argue that this was the beginning of a sharp turn towards conciliation in Reagan’s strategy.⁷⁵ However, within the speech Reagan made only two positive statements about Soviet behaviour in the past or present. He commented on ‘productive discussions’ with Soviet officials about improving communications, and claimed to be certain that the Soviet Defence Minister desired to avoid war. Reagan implied that the relationship had changed, but it was not because of any real shift in the Soviet position. The only factor that Reagan identified as having changed and improved the potential for peace was increased American strength. He wrote:

Look beyond the words and one fact stands out. America's deterrence is more credible, and it is making the world a safer place. Safer because now there is less danger that the Soviet leadership will underestimate our strength or question our resolve.⁷⁶

Soviet leaders had seemingly done nothing to facilitate improved relations, and still had the potential to sabotage them. At the end of his speech, Reagan stated that ‘if the Soviet Government wants peace, then there will be peace.’ Unsaid was the corollary to his statement: that if peace were not achieved, the fault lay solely with the Soviets.

If Soviet behaviour made it more difficult for the status quo to change, why did Reagan call for optimism? There were several requirements that the USSR could meet, as unlikely as he

74 James Reston, ‘Washington: Reagan’s Political Strategy’, *New York Times*, 18 January 1984, Factiva; Mary McGrory, ‘Despite His Handlers’ Hype, Reagan Didn’t Sound Converted’, *Washington Post*, 19 January 1984, Factiva; Stewart Fleming, ‘Reagan Appeals to Moscow to Enter New Arms Dialogue’, *Financial Times*, 17 January 1984, Factiva; Hedrick Smith, ‘Reagan’s Address: Trying a New Tactic’, *New York Times*, 17 January 1984, Factiva.

75 Beth A. Fischer, ‘Toeing the Hardline? The Reagan Administration and the Ending of the Cold War’, *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (1 October 1997): 486–87.

76 Ronald Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations 16 January 1984’, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 16 January 1984.

suggested that was. These expectations reflected Western, liberal norms, including the following:

Complying with agreements helps; violating them hurts. Respecting the rights of individual citizens bolsters the relationship; denying these rights harms it. Expanding contacts across borders and permitting a free exchange or interchange of information and ideas increase confidence; sealing off one's people from the rest of the world reduces it. Peaceful trade helps, while organized theft of industrial secrets certainly hurts.⁷⁷

Reagan's speech assumed several facts about these norms: that the United States obeyed them, that they were inherently good, and that the USSR would only respect them if it were put in a position where it had more to gain than to lose through compliance. Seen through this lens, the Soviet Union was still an evil empire and the United States the premier representative of freedom. Reagan continued to make this comparison throughout his speech. The traits and behaviours that Reagan gave as a basis for positive relationships were implicitly ones that the US had already exhibited and the USSR had not. The logic of this argument was that if the Soviet Union were already living up to these norms the world would be at peace.

Attribution theory, an insight from the discipline of psychology, is useful for understanding the tropes upon which Reagan relied in this speech. At its most simplistic, attribution theory attempts to understand why we interpret positive events to be caused by our personal traits when they happen to ourselves and the product of external forces when they happen to others (or vice versa, for negative events). Attribution theory has been thoroughly critiqued as a psychological theory, but some writers have fruitfully reconciled it with discourse analytical methods.⁷⁸ Yehudith Auerbach is one scholar who has found utility in attribution theory as a tool for analysing conflicts between people from different identity-groups, such as those conflicts between Israeli and Palestinian people. Auerbach summarizes the principles of attribution theory as follows:

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards, 'Nigel Lawson's Tent: Discourse Analysis, Attribution Theory and the Social Psychology of Fact', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 20, no. 5 (1 September 1990): 405–24.

According to this model, antagonists will explain their and their adversary's behavior in a way that strengthens their moral position in the conflict. 'Our' benign and conciliatory actions are attributed to our good and peace-loving nature, while our allegedly aggressive actions are portrayed as necessary reactions to the other's provocations. The same mechanism is used to explain the other's behavior. 'Their' benevolent actions are imposed by circumstances (e.g., international pressure), while malevolent behavior stems from their inherent wickedness and belligerence. This pattern of attributing good motives to ourselves and bad motives to the other amplifies the negative perception of the other and sears it into one's consciousness.⁷⁹

Irrespective of whether the model is valid for psychological research, the basic pattern that Auerbach describes appeared in Reagan's speech on Soviet-American relations. He claimed that Soviet malevolence was innate, and any positive Soviet behaviour was caused by international pressure. As a result, to ensure Soviet compliance in the pursuit of peace it was necessary for the United States to exert its strength. This argument served several discursive purposes. It emphasised the division between 'us' and 'them', portraying the differences between cultures as profound, and it provided a justification for Reagan's foreign policy. The same explanations of Soviet and American policy can be seen in Safire's narrative about the Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles in Europe and the regrettable necessity of the Western allies using force in response.⁸⁰ That they both made use of this argument without critiquing its foundations suggests that it was, at least in 1984, unproblematic in the context of either man's discourse.

The ease with which Reagan portrayed the Soviet threat as simultaneously inevitable (based on Soviet nature) and changeable (through Western strength), suggested a certain malleability in his image of the USSR. Between the beginning of 1984 and his second inauguration in early 1985, the managers and marketers of Reagan's election campaign made their own contribution to the discussion about the danger represented by the USSR. Most famously, the Reagan campaign released a television advertisement about a 'bear in the woods'. The words 'USSR' and 'Russia' were not mentioned at all in the advertisement. They did

79 Yehudith Auerbach, 'The Reconciliation Pyramid—A Narrative-Based Framework for Analyzing Identity Conflicts', *Political Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2009): 300.

80 Safire, 'Essay: A Plum for Gromyko'.

not need to be, as the meaning of the metaphor was unmistakable. Set to the sound of ominous drums, a grim narrator warned viewers about the danger that was posed by the bear:

There is a bear in the woods. For some people the bear is easy to see, others don't see it at all. Some people say the bear is tame, others say it's vicious and dangerous. Since no one can really be sure who's right, isn't it smart to be as strong as the bear – if there is a bear?⁸¹

The advert then cut to a photo of a smiling Ronald Reagan with the text: 'President Reagan – Prepared For Peace'. It created a narrative that did not align with either hawkish or dovish interpretations of Soviet-American relations, but which incorporated elements of both. To those who advocated a harsh foreign policy, the advertisement claimed that Reagan knew that the bear was dangerous and promised to answer with strength. To those who advocated constructive engagement with the Soviet Union, it called for peace and non-intervention. The advert portrayed Reagan's foreign policy as common sense — not beholden to ideology or even to any one interpretation of the Soviet Union. It implied that whatever the next step, everyone could agree on the importance of a national defence.⁸² This message was at the core of Reagan's discourse in 1984. Reagan's Russian bear was a 'made to measure' threat, suitable for any situation and any lifestyle.

Upon his re-election, Reagan continued to reiterate much the same story about the USSR. The 'evil empire' and 'present danger' narrative threads were prominent in his second inaugural address, given on 21 January 1985. This address was an opportunity for Reagan to convey his policy objectives for the next four years. Because they are watched by tens of millions of people, both in the US and abroad, modern inaugural speeches serve a discursive function of (re)defining the nation and its adversaries.⁸³ Reagan's address, delivered to an enormous audience of American and international listeners, including the Soviets, was no different. According to the television ratings published by Nielsen, the address was viewed by

81 'Commercial - Reagan 1984 Election Ad (Bear in the Woods)', *Youtube*, 15 October 2017.

82 A. Trevor Thrall, 'A Bear in the Woods? Threat Framing and the Marketplace of Values', *Security Studies* 16, no. 3 (24 August 2007): 464.

83 Reza Biria and Azadeh Mohammadi, 'The Socio Pragmatic Functions of Inaugural Speech: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach', *Journal of Pragmatics* 44, no. 10 (August 2012): 1290–1302.

25,053,886 people over the age of two in the United States.⁸⁴ It was one of the most high-profile speeches of his career. The public profile and multiple overlapping roles of this speech make it useful for analysing Reagan's construction of the Soviet 'Other' because it directly gives insight into the constitution of both 'us' and 'them'.

First and foremost, Reagan's speech centred on American identity. The word 'we' appeared in the speech no fewer than 62 times, surpassed only by 'to,' 'of,' 'and,' and 'the'. Repetition of the 'we' served to establish a sense of community with viewers. Reagan's audience was expected to know that they were included in this community, as he rarely addressed them explicitly as Americans. The words 'America', 'Americans', and 'American', appeared only 21 times in total. Then having established a collective identity as 'citizens of that Great Republic,' Reagan identified two threats to that identity: a 'bloated Federal establishment', to which he dedicated 404 words, and the Soviet Union, to which he devoted 360 words out of 638 words on foreign policy.

The Soviet threat gave Reagan the opportunity to portray himself, and the United States, as protagonists and heroes. He began his discussion of foreign affairs with these words: 'Today, we utter no prayer more fervently than the ancient prayer for peace on Earth.' But he immediately followed this pious wish with a warning about the need to stand firm against Soviet aggression:

Yet history has shown that peace does not come, nor will our freedom be preserved, by good will alone. There are those in the world who scorn our vision of human dignity and freedom. One nation, the Soviet Union, has conducted the greatest military build-up in the history of man, building arsenals of awesome offensive weapons.⁸⁵

Reagan made a blunt claim here: that the Soviet Union was the primary obstacle to peace, freedom, and the American vision of human dignity. In this narrative, peace and freedom were the assumed outcomes of the United States' objectives and the USSR prevented these objectives from being realised. Reagan was not specific about how the USSR blocked American

⁸⁴ 'Nearly 37.8 Million Watch President Obama's Oath And Speech On TV', *Nielsen*, accessed 18 January 2016.

⁸⁵ Ronald Reagan, 'Inaugural Address 21 January 1985', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 21 January 1985.

objectives, except through military build-up and MAD. However, he had given examples throughout 1984, primarily regarding regional conflicts. Speaking about US policy in Central America, Reagan accused the Soviet Union of subversion and imperialism in ‘Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Afghanistan, and recently, closer to home, in Nicaragua and now El Salvador.’⁸⁶ He made a similar point when addressing the United Nations General Assembly in September 1984, although he was less direct.⁸⁷ In the first of these speeches the USSR appeared as a dangerous subversive, and in the latter it was a potential partner in the peace process, but Reagan placed it in both at the centre of regional conflict. Considering his diplomatic turn, Fischer argues that the target of Reagan’s vitriol in early 1984 was not the Soviet Union, but war.⁸⁸ But Reagan’s inaugural speech indicated that war would be unlikely if it were not for the USSR and its meddling.

Reagan’s next statement added another link to this chain of logic. ‘We’ve made progress in restoring our defense capability,’ he reassured his audience. ‘But much remains to be done.’⁸⁹ American military strength and political resolve were more effective than good will in engaging with the USSR and securing a safer tomorrow. There was a striking similarity between Reagan’s emphasis on weapons as tools for modifying Soviet behaviour and the stories told by Enlightenment travellers in Eastern Europe. As Wolff relates in *Inventing Eastern Europe*, these travellers took both public and private beatings to be simply a fact of Russian life. However unpleasant and tiresome it was to have to beat Russian servants or threaten them with violence, force was assumed to be the only language that they would understand.⁹⁰ Negotiating with a lazy servant was pointless, because it did nothing to address the causes of their laziness: culture and personality. Likewise, Reagan fervently asserted that it was possible to negotiate with the Soviets — but only after they had been reminded of American strength.

After establishing the roles of the US and USSR as protagonist and obstacle to be overcome, Reagan’s argument changed tone. He expressed optimism again, but continued to

86 Ronald Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation on United States Policy in Central America May 9, 1984’, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 9 May 1984.

87 Ronald Reagan, ‘Address to the 39th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York 24 September 1984’, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 24 September 1984.

88 Fischer, ‘Toeing the Hardline?’, 490.

89 Reagan, ‘Inaugural Address 21 January 1985’.

90 Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 50–88.

develop the same themes regarding the unique danger presented by the USSR. Reagan's argument can be broken down into key statements that together formed the following chain of reasoning. Words that indicated a dichotomy between the US or the West and the USSR have been italicised for emphasis.

1. 'Is there either logic or morality in believing that if *one side* threatens to kill tens of millions of our people our only recourse is to threaten killing tens of millions of theirs?'
2. '*We* seek the total elimination one day of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth.'
3. '*I* have approved a research program to find, if we can, a security shield that will destroy nuclear missiles before they reach their target. ... It would render nuclear weapons obsolete.'
4. '*We* will meet with the Soviets, hoping that we can agree on a way to rid the world of the threat of nuclear destruction.'
5. '*We* strive for peace and security, heartened by the changes all around us.'

Within these statements were implied propositions about the USA and the USSR. These propositions furthered the Othering of the USSR, as can be seen when they are paraphrased as below:

Said	Unsaid
1. The doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD) is immoral and illogical.	1. If the USSR accepts the doctrine of MAD, then the USSR is immoral and illogical.
2. We (Americans) desire disarmament instead of MAD.	2. If the Soviet Union accepts MAD, then it is opposed to disarmament.
3. I (Reagan) intend to ensure disarmament through mutual protection that would make weapons obsolete.	3. If the Soviet Union does not accept my proposal, which is purely a matter of disarmament, then it is illogical and immoral.
4. Mutual protection, and thus disarmament, requires the consent of the Soviets.	4. If the Soviet Union does not negotiate on our terms then it is opposed to mutual protection.
5. We (Americans) have made these decisions because we desire peace.	5. If the Soviet Union does not cooperate, then it is evidence that Soviet people do not desire peace.

Table 2. Claims about the USSR in Reagan's inaugural speech, 1984

Reagan paid lip service to the notion that the United States and the Soviet Union were jointly responsible for the nuclear threat. However, his argument contained different claims about the USA and the USSR. Americans were portrayed as people who inherently desired peace — a trait that gave them a unique perspective. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, lacked this inherent desire. If Soviet leaders accepted Reagan's overtures, it would show that they also desired peace and acknowledged the superiority of Western norms. If Soviet leaders refused to follow Reagan's guidelines, however, they obviously did not. He did not directly say that the USSR had already failed his test, but it was highly unlikely that it would pass. With this argument, Reagan blamed the USSR for the absence of the peace that he desired.

Reagan's argument painted not just Soviet leaders, but the entire population of the Soviet Union, as warmongers. His language was explicitly nationalist, in that he referred to a universal 'we' — encapsulating all Americans — against a poorly defined 'them'. Americans, collectively, were depicted as striving for peace against the machinations of 'one nation, the Soviet Union'. In other speeches, Reagan drew a line between the supposedly evil Soviet state and the victimised people it governed, but none of those speeches were viewed as widely as his inaugural address — and neither did they have the same agenda-setting impact. There was a tension in Reagan's later speeches between condemning the Soviet Union in its totality and

condemning the actions of its government. Some (such as his state of the union address in 1986) positioned all Soviets against the free world and its peoples, while others (exemplified by his speech at the Brandenburg Gate in June 1987) made clear that he did not consider all Soviets to be the same.⁹¹

As indicated by Reagan's 1984 speech on Soviet-American relations and his 1985 inaugural address, his discourse in this period straddled the line between gestures of conciliation and vilification of the Soviet Union. He talked optimistically about peace as if it was a realistic objective within a foreseeable future, but even his neighbourly comments were framed squarely within hostile narratives about the USSR. The Soviet Union was positioned as a major obstacle, but not an insuperable one. Most of all, Reagan used the USSR to define the West — especially the United States — as peaceful, and his administration as essential to the peace that people all over the world desired.

Margaret Thatcher's political concerns were different from those of her American counterpart. She operated within a different geopolitical context, and did not have an election hovering over her head. However, her comments about the USSR in this period were embedded within the same discursive structures as those of Reagan and made use of similar narratives. Overall, Thatcher discussed the USSR less frequently and in less detail than Reagan, but what she did have to say is of significance to our analysis. It shows the correspondences and shared discursive world inhabited by Reagan and Thatcher.

Integral to Thatcher's speechwriting process was the holding of informal seminars on the topic of a given speech. These would often include external experts, as did the speechwriting process itself.⁹² A significant seminar series in 1983 concerned the re-evaluation of policy towards the USSR. One of these seminars, attended by academics including historian and political scientist Archie Brown, was the inspiration for Thatcher's friendly relationship with Gorbachev. Brown describes a broad consensus in Thatcher's government during the period

91 Ronald Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 4 February 1986; Ronald Reagan, 'Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin June 12 1987', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 12 June 1987.

92 J. Jeffery Auer, 'Traditional and Contemporary Influences Upon British House of Commons Debate', *Central States Speech Journal* 33, no. 2 (1 June 1982): 405.

between 1983 and 1985 that cooperation and increased contacts with the USSR were necessary to promote democracy in Eastern Europe.⁹³ This shift towards engagement did not negate Thatcher's critiques of the Soviet system, but it set the agenda for her public speeches about the USSR. Reagan's own strategies and rhetoric also influenced the Prime Minister. The two politicians were close friends and consulted regularly, even though they did not always agree.⁹⁴

In February 1985, Thatcher travelled to the United States and spoke to a joint session of the US Congress. Considering her alliance with Reagan, it is unsurprising that she made similar criticisms of the USSR to those made by the President. Indeed, they were criticisms that she had reiterated throughout 1984. This speech, carefully catered to Thatcher's audience of American legislators, was a particularly rich example of the role that the 'present danger' narrative thread played in her discourse. When it came time to discuss the Soviet Union, Thatcher's first rhetorical flourish was to compare explicitly the Soviet Union and the United States:

It is fashionable for some commentators to speak of the two super powers—United States and the Soviet Union—as though they were somehow of equal worth and equal significance. Mr. Speaker, that is a travesty of the truth! The Soviet Union has never concealed its real aim. In the words of Mr. Brezhnev, 'the total triumph of all Socialism all over the world is inevitable—for this triumph we shall struggle with no lack of effort!' Indeed, there has been no lack of effort!⁹⁵

The emphasis that Thatcher placed on the supposed Soviet thirst for world domination cast it as an antagonist that would not be out of place in a James Bond film. More interestingly, though, by using Brezhnev's words to describe contemporary Soviet objectives, she established continuity between the modern USSR and the historical one. The leap of logic she made when extrapolating conclusions about the 'real aim' of the Soviets was audacious. The 24th Congress of the CPSU, where Brezhnev spoke those words in 1971, was a comparatively minor event and has rarely featured in Western historical memory. The exception has been those times when it has been used as evidence for the existence of a continuous Soviet doctrine of expansion. Take for a further example the argument made by conservative *WP* columnist Arnold Beichman in his

93 Brown, 'The Change to Engagement in Britain's Cold War Policy'.

94 James Cooper, "'I Must Brief You on the Mistakes': When Ronald Reagan Met Margaret Thatcher, February 25–28, 1981', *Journal of Policy History* 26, no. 2 (2014): 275.

95 Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to Joint Houses of Congress', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 20 February 1985.

1991 book, *The Long Pretense: Soviet Treaty Diplomacy from Lenin to Gorbachev*. Beichman claimed that Brezhnev's declaration was evidence of 'an insatiable will to mastery' that had 'changed little in seventy years'.⁹⁶ Thatcher's claim and Beichman's were separated by six years and a fallen Berlin wall, but their shared fascination highlights the allure of this image of an eternal Soviet peril. Both took certain negative traits as essential to the USSR and its conduct, and concluded that these were not likely to change without intervention. According to Thatcher, only the application of external force could sway the Soviets from their course.

The establishment of continuity between the past and contemporary Soviet Union also acted as the basis of Thatcher's next proposition: that the historical conduct of the USA and the USSR dictated how they should be judged. Having considered the Soviet past, Thatcher found the USSR problematic. She offered the West as a positive counter-example:

Contrast this with the record of the West. We do not aim at domination, at hegemony, in any part of the world. Even against those who oppose and who would destroy our ideas, we plot no aggression. Of course, we are ready to fight the battle of ideas with all the vigour at our command, but we do not try to impose our system on others. We do not believe that force should be the final arbiter in human affairs. We threaten no-one. Indeed, the Alliance has given a solemn assurance to the world—none of our weapons will be used except in response to attack.⁹⁷

Thatcher's comparison included a range of negative claims about it that were typical of the 'evil empire' and 'present danger' narratives. As Thatcher portrayed it here, the USSR sought world domination, was aggressive, imperialistic, afraid of or unwilling to engage with 'ideas', totalitarian, and considered the use of nuclear weapons to be legitimate. With this, she again portrayed the Soviet Union and the West as at odds with each other. It also allowed her to argue in favour of NATO — the 'Alliance' to which she referred — and to praise its stance. In contrast to the evil represented by the Soviet Union, the West stood as unambiguously righteous and neighbourly.

⁹⁶ Arnold Beichman, *The Long Pretense: Soviet Treaty Diplomacy from Lenin to Gorbachev* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 127–28.

⁹⁷ Thatcher, 'Speech to Joint Houses of Congress'.

Thatcher also argued that these characteristics were essential the character of Soviet leadership. 'We find great difficulty in getting this message [of Western goodness] across', Thatcher told her audience. She explained that Soviet leaders were incapable of comprehending why someone would not use power for 'expansion or violence'.⁹⁸ Soviet leaders had not simply made a decision not to listen — they were incapable of doing so. This was a counterpart to the attribution fallacy made by Reagan. Thatcher's portrayal of the USSR assumed that its failings stemmed from nature rather than circumstance. Thatcher ended her comparison by wondering aloud whether the Soviet Union would have been as responsible or as restrained with a nuclear monopoly as she argued the United States had been following World War II. The answer that her musing assumed was, of course, no.

This speech is interesting, partially because of Thatcher's endorsement of the 'present danger' narrative, but also because of its timing. She gave her speech to Congress following Reagan's re-election. In part, it responded to and affirmed Reagan's presidency and the policy of his administration. She applauded Reagan's devotion to strength, and echoed the message of his 'bear in the woods' advertisement. The pursuit of armaments and strength was not a hostile act, in this story, but a sensible and just decision undertaken for the protection of vulnerable people. However, she went further in positing the Soviet desire for domination as the cause of the world's ills. Reagan implied that Americans desired peace more than their Soviet counterparts. Thatcher, on the other hand, explicitly stated that the Soviet Union desired domination rather than peace — something that both politicians had said before, but which Reagan had not said recently.

Thatcher's arguments about the unique evil of the Soviet Union pointed to the conclusion that it was fundamentally different to the West. She engaged with this theme throughout 1984. These alleged differences were in terms of culture, objectives, and desires — such as the desire for world domination or power. As will be discussed later, one of the desires that Thatcher expressed for her foreign policy was to develop 'understanding' between the West and the Soviet Union. This betrayed an assumption that the Soviet Union and the West were alien from each other, and faced difficulties in terms of comprehending the other. She

⁹⁸ Ibid.

wanted the Soviets to ‘see our way of life,’ suggesting as she did so that life was a fundamentally different thing in the USSR and the United Kingdom.⁹⁹ In other places she used the metaphor of distance to explain the difficulty of communicating with the USSR:

- ‘Other countries across the other side of the political divide think differently, believe differently.’¹⁰⁰
- ‘We must have discussion and contact across the great gulf which separates the West from the Communist world.’¹⁰¹
- ‘... the wish, nevertheless, to have dialogue across the East-West divide.’¹⁰²

At other times, she made the point more bluntly. ‘Of course we realise: - that the differences between our two systems are fundamental – and that Soviet ideology is implacably opposed to our own,’ went one such claim, made in a speech at the Lord Mayor of London’s banquet in November 1984.¹⁰³ For Thatcher, the Soviet Union was inherently alien and distant, and it was only possible to engage with when that was kept in mind.

What traits defined Thatcher’s West, by contrast to the Soviet Union’s alien nature? ‘We in Britain believe passionately in liberty and democracy and are prepared to defend them,’ she announced on her February 1984 trip to Hungary, ‘but I’ve also made clear that we believe in peace.’¹⁰⁴ She fervently maintained that NATO was a purely defensive alliance that presented no threat to the Soviet Union. In fact, she argued that the members of NATO — synonymous with the West — ‘believe passionately in liberty, justice, and democracy,’¹⁰⁵ and that this set them apart from the USSR. Western people and Western governments, according to Thatcher, were inherently inclined to peace. She claimed that ‘the whole tendency of democratic peoples

99 Margaret Thatcher, ‘TV Interview for Channel 4 News’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 4 January 1984.

100 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Radio Interview for IRN (Visiting Hungary)’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 4 February 1984.

101 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to Conservative Women’s Conference’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 23 May 1984.

102 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Press Conference at London G7 Summit’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 1 June 1984.

103 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech at Lord Mayor’s Banquet’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 12 November 1984.

104 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Press Conference Visiting Hungary’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 4 February 1984.

105 Thatcher, ‘Radio Interview for IRN (Visiting Hungary)’.

is of the way of the kind of people we are, to want perpetual peace.'¹⁰⁶ Thatcher's West was set apart from the Soviet Union by belief in liberty, democracy, and justice, each of which compelled Western states towards the promotion of peace. For her, the Soviet Union could hardly comprehend those virtues, let alone desire peace with the same intensity. These clashing definitions created two images — one of 'us', and one of 'them' — that justified her policies.

Conclusion

The discourses of these four commentators — Ian Davidson, William Safire, Ronald Reagan, and Margaret Thatcher — contain significant overlap. Each of them engaged with the 'evil empire' and 'present danger' narratives, endorsing some of the assumptions they contained if not all. These narratives, as discussed previously, constructed the USSR as inherently evil and dangerous on a global scale. Despite their many nuances, they were united by two discursive assumptions — that the Soviet Union was different from and inferior to the West, and that its difference was the result of innate traits.

The point on which these commentators agreed most strongly was that the USSR was dangerous. For all of them, the Soviet Union presented a threat that had to be addressed. The Soviets were expansionist, aggressive, and, according to some of these commentators, they sought world domination. Soviet leaders were products of their system — cynical, dishonest, and generally barbaric. Even Davidson, who also criticised American behaviour, insisted that Soviet behaviour in negotiations and international relations was unreasonably aggressive.

The logic underlying these claims continued to appear in discourse about Russia as late as 2017, with few signs that it might fade away. Russia was the 'top geopolitical adversary' of the US that was attempting to 'export ... pernicious ideas and influence to our homeland', wrote one former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) man in the *WP* on 17 October 2017.¹⁰⁷ In July of that year, an article in *Newsweek* argued that Putin 'bullies his neighbours'.¹⁰⁸ Intriguingly, other subjects could stand in for Russia within this discourse. Just like the Soviets, Donald Trump was

106 Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference at British Embassy in Washington', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 21 February 1984.

107 Daniel Hoffman, 'How America Has Failed to Contain Russia', *Washington Times*, accessed 23 October 2017.

108 Stephen Blank, 'While Trump Twiddles and Tweets, Putin Is Bullying His Caucasus Neighbors', *Newsweek*, 17 July 2017.

often described with the language of anger and violence. One *CNN* article used a range of descriptors in an attempt to convey the breadth and depth of Trump's 'volcanic temper', from 'temper tantrum' through to 'lashing out' and 'irate'. Using much the same language someone like Safire might have used about the USSR, the author insisted 'Trump's temper is a feature, not a glitch.'¹⁰⁹ The connection would be uninteresting if it did not accompany the narrative about his alleged ties to Russia and the hacking of Hillary Clinton's emails.

Further, for these commentators, innate traits made the Soviet Union and the West largely irreconcilable. The innate traits in question could be ideological, cultural, or the result of differing 'interests'. By definition, the Soviet Union was assumed not to act in pursuit of justice, liberty, or democracy. If it did, then discursive logic dictated it would be Western — an olive branch which none of these commentators offered, and a concept that had no place in popular discourse about the USSR. The dividing line between East and West has frequently shifted, and Eastern Europe has sometimes been brought across that line, but for these commentators the edges of the vast Soviet empire were where the world changed completely.

The commentators considered here all suggested that the Soviet system would remain Communist and oppressive for the foreseeable future. They did not claim that the Soviet Union would cease to exist, although it could be contained through policies of vigilance and strength. Reagan, however, implied one possible change. The Soviet Union could cease to be an obstacle to peace and instead become a partner. The other commentators here expressed less faith in this possibility and the divergence between them reflected significant discursive tensions. Until the Chernobyl disaster, consensus continued to suggest that the Soviet system could not change. The question of whether peace could be achieved, however, was the site of much greater tension between these commentators and within their own discourses.

109 Chris Cillizza, 'The Volcanic Temper of Donald Trump', *CNN*, 27 September 2017.

Chapter Two: Discursive Tensions in Anglo-American Discourse About the USSR, January 1984–February 1985.

Having outlined the common discursive ground between commentators, it is now possible to look at the ways that they differed and the discursive tensions this revealed. To do this, I investigate those debates or questions that were, at this time, unresolved within mainstream Anglo-American discourses about the USSR. Three questions guide my analysis: how did the discourses of these commentators differ from one another? What is the significance of these differences? And how do these differences relate to the structures and assumptions underlying these discourses?

Identifying areas of discursive tension provides a second criterion against which to measure mainstream Anglo-American discourses about the USSR. Over time, tension can sometimes be alleviated. However, tension can also lead to ruptures or other structural reconfigurations. In later chapters, I watch for how these tensions were resolved or ruptured. In addition, close attention to areas of tension and disagreement allows us to reconsider the practice and discourse of politics in the 1980s. We already know, for instance, that Thatcher and Reagan disagreed — sometimes substantially — on various issues.¹ But the differences between them point towards shared assumptions that ran much deeper, and that are often surprising. In particular, the discourse of both assumed the permanence of the USSR and the need for nuclear weapons.

This chapter first introduces and defines its primary theoretical concept, ‘discursive tensions’. Subsequently, I introduce key debates and questions that prompted or revealed these tensions in mainstream discourses about the USSR during this period. Because it was inextricable from these conversations, I also explore the relevance of the Cold War as a metaphor. The latter part of this chapter continues the analysis started in Chapter One. It investigates the disagreements, contradictions, and tensions that emerged in the responses given by Reagan, Thatcher, Davidson, and Safire to key debates.

¹ Cooper, ‘I Must Brief You on the Mistakes’.

Discursive Tensions

There are obviously many conflicting statements and narrative strands in any body of discourse, but most of these are irrelevant. The divergences that concern me here are those that reveal challenges to or potential transformations within those discourses. The debate about whether the USSR could change or be reformed was an old one by 1984, but it was not unchanging. Anti-communists like Reagan had claimed that the Soviets served a perpetual ideology, but even he was starting to call for international friendship. These two discursive pathways contained the potential to encourage and give shape to distinct ways of talking about the USSR, but both were criticised and individual commentators often followed them inconsistently. The conceptual and logical framework that enabled discourse about the USSR did not provide easy or uncontroversial answers to the question of how much the USSR could change. Because of this uncertainty, relevant debates could be highly contested.

At times, the erosion of the assumed truths on which a discourse was built came about because of logical inconsistencies within the discourse. It was unlikely that the USSR could simultaneously be open to reform and also unrepentantly, eternally evil. But as will be discussed later in this thesis, Thatcher occasionally maintained that all she wanted were several key reforms — like the introduction of market economies — not the abolition of the Soviet system. It was questionable if one of these could be achieved without also triggering the other. I use ‘discursive tensions’ to refer to inconsistencies and contradictions like this one, but not limited to it. They are moments when the linguistic and semiotic toolkit provided by a discourse has difficulty accounting for something and must, as a result, be renegotiated.

Renegotiation does not demand abandonment of a discourse. When the USSR ceased to exist, people did not create narratives about the post-Soviet world from nothing. They took what already existed to help them explain why the world was now different. As in that case, discourses can be modified in order to take account of any fact, event or development that causes narrative dissonance. The renegotiation of discourses is ongoing and necessary. According to Macgilchrist:

if there is no *final* socially or historically necessary ground then the ground which is generally accepted at any one time must be defended, and new grounds can be

laid. Any grounding which is done — and it must be done or we would live in a psychotic universe — is contingent, partial and political.²

The struggle to establish or erode solid ground takes place between people, but also between people and their past or future selves. The contradictory answers given by commentators to difficult questions are examples of attempts to navigate and restructure the precarious line between what can be said or goes unsaid and what is known or unknown.

Discursive tensions emerge from common conceptual frameworks that allow commentators to engage meaningfully with one another, but which also create the preconditions for their disagreement. It is unsurprising that participants in public discussion and debate disagree amongst themselves, but often they will even contradict themselves or make claims that appear to lack consistency. From a discourse analytical perspective, these conflicts, with others and with the self, are not important because of what they suggest about the inner life of these commentators. Rather, they are significant because they show the instability of discourses and identities. Interpretations, definitions, and understandings of the world do not occur spontaneously and naturally from a rational, individual human mind.³ People are constantly immersed in a vast number of incompatible discourses and situations through which they pass, and which they take into themselves. We might call this their discursive history. The contradictions and renegotiations arising from these stimuli can be seen in the texts that people create. People write and speak to make disorderly, complicated experiences seem sensible and subject to clear conclusions about what they mean.⁴ By paying close attention to the attempts made by commentators to defend their discursive assumptions or create new ones, it is possible to witness the processes of discursive change.

The most stable parts of a discursive structure are, somewhat counter-intuitively, indicated by the existence of contradictions and discursive tensions. For example, different proposals about how the US and the UK should engage with the USSR reveal a shared assumption — that something had to be done. Although Davidson, Safire, Reagan and Thatcher

² Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

⁴ Gunther Kress, 'Discourses, Texts, Readers and the Pro-Nuclear Arguments', in *Language and the Nuclear Arms Debate: Nukespeak Today*, ed. Paul Chilton, Open Linguistics Series (London: Frances Pinter, 1985), 73–74.

disagreed about how the West should engage with the USSR, they agreed that there should be some kind of collective or national response. Potential options included espionage, diplomacy, and military or economic interventions. This assumption that Westerners had to do something about the USSR was both an outcome of discourse about the USSR and something that sustained it. If there was no need to address or engage with the Soviets, then there would be far less reason to talk about them. Neither could the Soviet Union be used as a defining Other for the West. In addition to revealing instabilities and the potential for change, the analysis of discursive tensions shows the stable structures underlying those discourses.

Dalby has identified one attempt to renegotiate and impose order on a discourse in the activities of the Committee for the Present Danger in the 1970s. The CPD, which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three, was a lobby group formed first in the 1950s and then reformed in the 1970s to counter perceived threats to the US. The version of it that existed in the 1970s and 1980s was populated by conservative scholars, public figures, and government officials. Through these members, the CPD had an influential voice. As Dalby described it, the objective of the CPD was for its discourse to ‘become taken for granted, widely accepted as the appropriate premises from which to discuss matters of international politics.’ Ultimately, the members of the CPD sought to construct a dominant consensus. A consensus of this kind is often called ‘hegemony’.⁵ Like the CPD, the commentators I consider tried to define the Soviet Union, what it meant, and the overall framework within which it should be discussed. Their disagreements and personal renegotiations had consequences, not just in terms of what they themselves said and wrote about the USSR, but also in terms of the underlying structures of discourse about the USSR.

Key Debates

One question intersected with every other question asked about the Soviet Union in this period: ‘how should we respond to the USSR?’ There was no one answer, and the answers that people gave changed over time.⁶ Because of the prominence and significance of this question, it is ideal

⁵ Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 10.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the shifts that took place within the Reagan administration, see Foglesong, *The American Mission and the ‘Evil Empire’*, 174–95.

for investigation of discursive tensions. This was by no means the only prominent debate, but it played a central role in the Othering of the USSR. Many of the institutions that defined the Cold War and shaped the image of the USSR came about in response.

NSC-68, a 1950 policy paper of the US National Security Council (NSC), is one example of this. The writers of NSC-68 asserted that the USSR presented an ideological, cultural, and political threat to the United States and Western Europe. The paper went on to shape foreign policy and the outlines of the perceived Soviet threat for the duration of the Cold War.⁷ The doctrine of containment endorsed in NSC-68 was borrowed from George Kennan, for whom 'containing' the spread of the Soviet Union was also an attempt to contain and define the identity of the United States.⁸ The UK was also integral to the construction of institutions that defined both the Cold War and Western engagement with the USSR. The 1947 Brussels treaty between the UK, France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands provided the basis for the creation of NATO, and thus formalised the separation of Europe into Soviet and Western blocs. For Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary who bears significant responsibility for these projects, the purpose of these coalitions was to solidify British and Western spheres of influence in the face of communist competition.⁹ As these early examples show, decisions and discourse about how Western states should respond to the Soviets played a formative role in defining the space between the Self and the Other. These discourses combined ideological claims about the USSR with calls to action for the people and governments of the West. By making proposals about how the USSR should be dealt with, commentators argued that the assumptions contained within their discourses should be imposed on the world.

This question continued to be meaningful in the United States and the United Kingdom throughout the Cold War. Subsequent British and American governments had the motivation and capacity to transform calls to action and ideological critiques into significant activity. American and British governments created policy, entered negotiations, and made purposeful decisions about the USSR on the assumption that it was within their capabilities to influence it in

⁷ Campbell, *Writing Security*, 23–27.

⁸ Ned O'Gorman, *Spirits of the Cold War: Contesting Worldviews in the Classical Age of American Security Strategy*, Rhetoric and Public Affairs Series (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 28.

⁹ Kaldor, *The Imaginary War*, 89–90.

some way. The idea that the West had some ability and responsibility to respond to the USSR was largely beyond question in the discourses I discuss here.

Thatcher, Reagan, Safire and Davidson agreed that a response to the USSR was necessary, but they disagreed substantially about what form that response should take. They disagreed on three main issues: whether the Soviet Union could change, what role the West had in facilitating that change, and whether the USSR would exist indefinitely. These topics had significance for the formulation of responses to the USSR, as well as the philosophical and political constraints of the discourses within which they were articulated. Table 3 outlines these debates, phrasing them as questions, with the addition of some of the other questions that emerged from them. It is not my intention to provide the answers given in response to every one of these questions, but instead to use them as guideposts for my analysis.

Primary Questions	Secondary Questions
Can the USSR change?	How much can it change? How likely is it that it will change What role might Gorbachev have in this change?
What role does the West have in shaping the USSR?	Does the West have a responsibility to change the USSR? How should it be changed? What is the best way to do so: strength, diplomacy, or something else?
Will the USSR cease to exist?	If it changed, would it cease to be the USSR? Will it exist indefinitely?

Table 3. Debated questions in mainstream discourses about the USSR

Cold War

Responses to the USSR were shaped by the metaphor of Cold War — a metaphor with certain rules and clusters of meanings. These rules provided a framework for discussions about the USSR, and about what the purpose or nature of responses to it might be. The Cold War metaphor assumed certain components that appeared in discourse about the USSR: that there was some kind of struggle taking place, with victors, losers, and a tense back and forth between at least two parties. Commentators occasionally described international relationships with other

language, like Thatcher did when she said she could ‘do business’ with the Soviets, but the conflict framework proved resilient. The Cold War metaphor created a narrative within which commentators described international relations in terms of which ‘side’ had an advantage or was victorious at any one time.

As a result, the status of the Cold War was one way by which the efficacy of responses to the USSR could be measured. For example, some commentators described the United States as winning now that it had expanded its defensive capabilities and brought the Soviets back to the negotiating table. Others asked whether the Soviets were laying a trap, ready to strike as soon as the doves convinced their governments to lower their guard. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, optimistic claims about the future by people like Reagan and Thatcher were justified with reference to whether the West was winning or losing the war of ideology or civilisation. If the Soviet Union was constructed as more powerful than the West, and thus dangerous, it was evidence of Western foolishness or Soviet malice. Likewise, if the Soviet Union was weak, these commentators took it to reflect on the rightness of the Western mission or the innate strengths of liberal democratic governance.

It is important to note that people did not necessarily use the precise words ‘Cold War’ to describe the East-West conflict they spoke or wrote about. In the speeches considered here, Reagan and Thatcher did not use the term at all. In 33 articles, Safire only used it twice, in reference to the ‘second’ or ‘new’ Cold War of the 1980s.¹⁰ In 38 articles by Davidson, the term only appears in three articles, in which it is used to refer to the period before *détente*.¹¹ Nevertheless, the logic of conflict and threat — the substance of Cold War discourse — was embedded firmly within what they said.

Even though it was not always named, the Cold War metaphor permeated the discourses in question. During the 1980s, the concept of Cold War was thoroughly institutionalised and common-sense.¹² As shown by Cynthia Enloe, a feminist international

10 William Safire, ‘Essay: The Second Comeback’, *New York Times*, 16 April 1984, Factiva; Safire, ‘Essay: A Plum for Gromyko’.

11 Ian Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: 1954 Comes Round Again - European Defence’, *Financial Times*, 16 April 1984, Factiva; Davidson, ‘The Barrier That May Soon Fall’; Ian Davidson, ‘The Past Is Prologue: Background Report on US-Soviet Summit Meetings’, *Financial Times*, 11 November 1985, Factiva.

12 Everette E. Dennis, George Gerbner, and Yassen N. Zassoursky, eds., *Beyond the Cold War: Soviet and American Media Images* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1991), 1–3.

relations theorist, the Cold War had powerful material consequences for the lives of people all over the world — as did its drawn-out conclusion.¹³ Even commentators who rejected the ideological foundations of the war still lived in a discursive world where it was inescapable.

However, despite its significance the Cold War was not inevitable or natural. It was a created discursive phenomenon, the dimensions of which cannot be easily identified. Some manner of international rivalry or conflict did take place between the Soviet Union and other powers, but it was the people who spoke and wrote about these events who imposed meaning on them. I have thus far spoken about the Cold War, as both metaphor and historiographical term, as though it was and is an unproblematic concept. In reality, questions about whether the Cold War actually existed in the way that it has been said to are not new. A popular view is that it was a necessary struggle between two discrete forces responding to direct threats against them. Mary Kaldor, a political scientist and a figurehead of the European Nuclear Disarmament movement, disagrees. She wrote in 1991 that the Cold War was, in truth, an ‘imaginary war’. Kaldor writes:

What we actually experienced was a state of imaginary war. Over and over again, in military exercises, in the scenarios of military planners, in the games and stories of espionage and counter-espionage, in the training of millions of men, in the hostile rhetoric of politicians and newspapers, we have fought out an imaginary war between East and West. We have lived with the permanent anxiety of war, with many of the forms of organization and control that are characteristic of war.¹⁴

Unlike a real war, involving literal warfare and battlefields, the imaginary war is to Kaldor ‘a discourse which expresses and legitimizes power relationships in modern society.’ Others have since built further on the notion that the Cold War was, at least in the West, a manufactured state of anxiety. One view argues that the institutions and narratives of East-West conflict depended on the perception of threat, not on its actual existence.¹⁵ This raises questions about

13 Cynthia Enloe, ‘The Morning After’, *Progressive* 57, no. 9 (September 1993): 24.

14 Kaldor, *The Imaginary War*, 4–5.

15 Charles E. Nathanson, ‘The Social Construction of the Soviet Threat: A Study in the Politics of Representation’, *Alternatives* 13, no. 4 (1 October 1988): 443–483; Hugh Mehan, Charles E. Nathanson, and James M. Skelly,

whether the participants in the Cold War were responding to real threats, or whether the language of conflict was used to mask the contradictions in their own discursive systems. In response to this question, amongst others, Campbell demonstrates that the perception of threat typically associated with the Soviet Union did not dissipate in 1991. Instead, it was transferred onto other subjects such as global terrorism and the drug trade.¹⁶ The language of danger and threat persisted, serving new purposes.

Understanding the Cold War as a phenomenon that was ultimately constructed — rather than something that existed naturally — allows us also to understand discourses in the same way. By talking about the USSR using certain narratives, tropes, and metaphors, journalists and politicians alike dictated how the world could be described. When the logic underlying these modes of discourse was called into question, tensions emerged.

Reagan and Thatcher

Neither Reagan nor Thatcher gave just one answer about whether the Soviet Union could change. Over the course of their careers, both made seemingly contradictory statements on the topic. This opened both of them to accusations of inconsistency, but Reagan more so.¹⁷ However, these apparent contradictions emerged from narratives and internal logics that were already present with their discourses. Contradictions indicated unresolved discursive tensions, but they were not as novel as has sometimes been claimed.¹⁸ Many of these logical inconsistencies were built into assumptions about the USSR.

In Thatcher's speeches and interviews in 1984 and the beginning of 1985, she made two interconnected claims about the Soviet Union's capacity for change. As discussed in Chapter One, Thatcher consistently maintained that the Soviet Union was fundamentally different to the West and could not change its basic characteristics or system of government. She had even

¹⁶ 'Nuclear Discourse in the 1980s: The Unravelling Conventions of the Cold War', *Discourse & Society* 1, no. 2 (1 October 1990): 133–65.

¹⁶ Campbell, *Writing Security*, 7–9.

¹⁷ Barbara Farnham, 'Reagan and the Gorbachev Revolution: Perceiving the End of Threat', *Political Science Quarterly* 116, no. 2 (1 July 2001): 226.

¹⁸ Fischer, 'Toeing the Hardline?'; Farnham, 'Reagan and the Gorbachev Revolution'; James Reston, 'Washington: Reagan's Gentler Melody', *New York Times*, 11 January 1984, Factiva; Smith, 'Reagan's Address'.

claimed that Soviet leaders sought world domination. Her statements about fundamental Soviet characteristics, however, were often followed by the claim that the differences between the Western and Soviet systems could be put aside for the sake of better relations. Some examples follow:

- ‘We’ve recognised these concerns in our talks, we’ve also acknowledged our differences, ideological, political, social, they are there and they cannot be wished away but in recognising them we have not dwelt upon them, instead we’ve concentrated on the future, the peaceful and prosperous future which ordinary people want the world over.’¹⁹
- ‘We must have discussion and contact across the great gulf which separates the West from the Communist world. We recognise that neither side will relinquish its military strength, nor its way of life, but that both have an overriding interest in this nuclear age in avoiding military conflict between us—whether in Europe or beyond the NATO area.’²⁰
- ‘We have said so many times and ... although we both have very different political systems, and each of us would probably firmly defend in argument our own system and each of us believes our own system is best, we have one great interest in common at least ... to try to ensure that conflict does not arise between us.’²¹
- ‘[Gorbachev and I] both believe in our own political systems. He firmly believes in his; I firmly believe in mine. We are never going to change one another.’²²
- ‘Despite our differences with the Soviet Union, we have to talk with them, for we have one overriding interest in common—that never again should there be a conflict between our peoples.’²³

19 Thatcher, ‘Press Conference Visiting Hungary’.

20 Thatcher, ‘Speech to Conservative Women’s Conference’, 23 May 1984.

21 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Press Conference at London G7 Summit’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 9 June 1984.

22 Margaret Thatcher, ‘TV Interview for BBC (“I like Mr Gorbachev. We Can Do Business Together”)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 17 December 1984.

23 Thatcher, ‘Speech to Joint Houses of Congress’.

Thatcher's assertion that better relations with the USSR were possible took other forms, too, but its premises remained the same. The basic nature of the Soviet Union would not change and it was largely foolish to think that it might, but its behaviour could be influenced. Thatcher did not argue that the Soviet Union could become something entirely different, but that it could become tolerable. In contrast to her usual harsh criticisms of the Soviet system, Thatcher even noted upon visiting Hungary in February 1984 that it was 'very wise to follow an economic system that suits your own people.'²⁴ It was the Soviet threat to the rest of the world that she described as most concerning, not the system itself, and that threat could be neutralised by appealing to 'common interests'.

Reagan similarly suggested that the Soviet Union could change in some ways but not others. In his speech on Soviet-American relations before the Stockholm conference, he made a similar comment to those made by Thatcher. He argued that engagement with the Soviet Union was possible because common interests were more important than 'differences in Government structure and philosophy. The common interests have to do with the things of everyday life for people everywhere.'²⁵ He followed that proposition with a hypothetical anecdote about the meeting of an American and a Soviet family. Reagan asked whether Ivan, Anya, Jim and Sally would

debate the differences between their respective Governments? Or would they find themselves comparing notes about their children and what each other did for a living? Before they parted company, they would probably have touched on ambitions and hobbies and what they wanted for the children and problems of making ends meet.²⁶

Average people do not care about systems of government or philosophies, he suggested. It was the same sentiment that the pop musician Sting invoked in his July 1985 song 'Russians', crooning that 'what might save us ... is if the Russians love their children too'.²⁷ It was also a theme to which Reagan would return, although he had not yet resolved the tension between

24 Thatcher, 'Press Conference Visiting Hungary'.

25 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations 16 January 1984'.

26 Ibid.

27 Sting, *Russians*, The Dream of the Blue Turtles (A&M, 1985).

these two perspectives. No matter how irreconcilable the Soviet Union and the United States, for Reagan in 1984, there was common ground that could turn into conversation, or even friendship.

Despite his dreams of change, however, Reagan indicated an acceptance that the Soviet system would persist indefinitely. He made this point in a televised debate with his presidential rival, Walter Mondale. In response to a question about whether he had told two Democrats that ‘if [the Soviets] want to keep their Mickey Mouse system, that’s okay with me’,²⁸ Reagan stated:

I retract nothing that I have said. I believe that many of the things they have done are evil in any concept of morality that we have. But I also recognize that as the two great superpowers in the world, we have to live with each other. And I told Mr. Gromyko we don’t like their system. They don’t like ours. And we’re not going to change their system, and they sure better not try to change ours. But between us, we can either destroy the world or we can save it. And I suggested that, certainly, it was to their common interest, along with ours, to avoid a conflict and to attempt to save the world and remove the nuclear weapons.²⁹

This was a significant (if grudging) departure from his claim a year earlier ‘that communism is another sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages even now are being written.’³⁰ Despite Reagan’s insistence that the Soviet Union would not change, though, he left the door open for attempts to try and convert the USSR to a liberal democratic system. On two other significant occasions in 1984 — his January speech on Soviet-American relations and his address to the Irish National Parliament in June 1984 — Reagan again implied that the Soviet Union could undergo some internal reform.³¹ It was not a core theme, but neither was it one that he had abandoned.

28 Ronald Reagan, ‘Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri 21 October 1984’, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 21 October 1984.

29 Ibid.

30 Reagan, ‘Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, FL 8 March 1983’.

31 Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations 16 January 1984’; Ronald Reagan, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of Irish National Parliament 4 June 1984’, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 4 June 1984.

When explaining how the Soviet threat could be reduced, both Reagan and Thatcher used the language of 'common interests'. Borrowed from theories of international relations and political economy, the concept referred to those situations in which both parties were equally threatened or could equally gain. As paraphrased by Dalby, international relations scholars like George Kennan and E.H. Carr had earlier 'argued that a peaceful arrangement between the superpowers is possible provided the West is prepared to take seriously the interests of the Soviet Union.'³² As Kennan himself pointed out, the recognition of common interest had been at the heart of *détente*.³³ Reagan, however, had rejected the policies of

the seventies, years when the United States seemed filled with self-doubt and neglected its defenses, while the Soviet Union increased its military might and sought to expand its influence by armed forces and threat.³⁴

Thatcher had likewise portrayed *détente* as false, a policy that allowed the Soviet Union to effectively increase its arsenals.³⁵ For Reagan and Thatcher now to emphasise that the Soviet Union and the West could share interests without compromising their essential characteristics or putting the West in danger was a sharp divergence from their past discourse. This emphasis assumed that coexistence with the Soviet Union was possible or that an ideal compromise could be reached wherein both sides could go on peacefully believing in their political systems. Admittedly, even appeals to common interests opened new avenues for negative portrayals of the Soviet Union. Reagan and Thatcher had, after all, rejected *détente* on the grounds that the Soviets used it to serve their own interests and undermine those of their rivals.

Although their strong criticisms of the USSR clashed with calls for increased cooperation and discussion, Thatcher and Reagan provided explanations that attempted to mask this dissonance. In order to bring together these claims, they argued that the capacity of the USSR to change was dependent first and foremost on the West and its influence. This assumed a causal

32 Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 156.

33 George F. Kennan, 'America's Relations with the Soviet Union', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 34, no. 6 (1978): 21–23.

34 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations 16 January 1984'.

35 Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to Chelsea Conservative Association (Attacking Detente)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 26 July 1975.

relationship between Western activities and Soviet behaviour. The narrative that Reagan constructed about this potential change was teleological. He portrayed the past as a dangerous place in which Western weakness and naive goodwill allowed the Soviet Union to act immorally. The present was a time of American revival, and Reagan insisted that new strength and confidence had made the world a safer place. He asserted that if his compatriots recognised the accuracy of his words the future might hold lasting peace. This narrative can be seen in the way that Reagan talked about the past, present, and future in regards to foreign policy, peace, and the Soviet Union. His speeches contained a recurrent motif of progress.

The state of the union address given by Reagan in January 1984 provided an example of this rhetorical technique. The state of the union address is one of the modern president's major speeches. Originally, it was an opportunity to update legislators on national issues. After it was first televised in 1947, the state of the union address became a way of speaking directly to American people. It has since been used to outline the agenda of the president and his administration, as well as proposing programs and legislation.³⁶ Notably, because the speech is given around the same time every year, it is prepared far in advance and painstakingly constructed. Every element is subject to scrutiny by the president and his advisors.³⁷ As such, the address represents a purposeful attempt to set a discursive agenda for the country and state.

Unsurprising for a speech given less than a year before an election campaign, progress was the central theme of Reagan's 1984 state of the union address. Out of 4,973 words, 963 were devoted to the challenges of the past that Reagan claimed to have overcome. He blamed an overlarge government for a decline that had led, at the beginning of the 1980s, to 'the worst crisis in our postwar history.'³⁸ Amongst the challenges Reagan identified was the following:

On the international scene, we had an uncomfortable feeling that we'd lost the respect of friend and foe. Some questioned whether we had the will to defend

³⁶ Teten, 'Evolution of the Modern Rhetorical Presidency', 338.

³⁷ Mathew C. Moen, 'The Political Agenda of Ronald Reagan: A Content Analysis of the State of the Union Messages', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1988): 775–76.

³⁸ Ronald Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 12 June 1984', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 25 January 1984.

peace and freedom. But America is too great for small dreams. There was a hunger in the land for a spiritual revival; if you will, a crusade for renewal.

Because respect had been lost, it was seemingly impossible to influence the Soviet Union and thus defend peace or freedom.

However, Reagan insisted that this concern had now been addressed. His attempts to create a smaller government had increased American confidence and the result was global in its significance. In speaking of the present, Reagan claimed:

People everywhere hunger for peace and a better life. The tide of the future is a freedom tide, and our struggle for democracy cannot and will not be denied. This nation champions peace that enshrines liberty, democratic rights, and dignity for every individual. America's new strength, confidence, and purpose are carrying hope and opportunity far from our shores. A world economic recovery is underway. It began here.

Although the despondency of the past had been overcome, Reagan identified new international challenges. The spectre of the Soviet threat haunted the second and final part of his address. In this section, Reagan devoted 734 words specifically to discussion of international relations. As he told his audience, 'a lasting and meaningful peace is our fourth great goal.' The USSR and the question of how to engage with it was inseparable from this topic.

The heart of Reagan's proposal for peace was diplomacy, and he reassured his audience that he was 'committed to dialog, deterrence, and promoting prosperity.' It was not coincidence that a newly confident United States could supposedly bring about peace through cooperative engagement with the USSR. Reagan listed the following reasons for his optimism regarding this approach:

- 'Our NATO alliance is strong. 1983 was a banner year for political courage. And we have strengthened our partnerships and our friendships in the Far East.'
- 'A rebirth of bipartisan cooperation, of economic growth, and military deterrence, and a growing spirit of unity among our people at home and our allies abroad underline a fundamental and far-reaching change: The United States is safer, stronger, and more

secure in 1984 than before. We can now move with confidence to seize the opportunities for peace, and we will.'

While Reagan advocated diplomacy, he argued that it was only because of military strength that speaking with the Soviets became possible. In saying this, Reagan reiterated the notion that the United States (and NATO) had a special role to play in standing up to the Soviet Union. This was the same argument that he made throughout the year, including within the speeches discussed previously. Applauding the American people for rejuvenating alliances and defence forces, Reagan ended his address on a triumphant, and global, note. Now that freedom had been secured in the US, the next step was to take it out into the world. As he put it, 'with faith and courage, we can perform great deeds and take freedom's next step. And we will.'³⁹

The same narrative played out in other speeches that Reagan gave in 1984. Examples of his claims about the past, present and future in several of his speeches are given in Appendix 1. In these speeches, Reagan's claims about the past described American doubt, lack of self-confidence, weakness, and Soviet superiority. His claims about the present indicated that this weakness had been addressed thanks to the Reagan administration. The future was a place where these gains could be built on and American objectives realised. Many of these speeches took place explicitly in the context of the presidential race, and tell a story to Reagan's voters of why he should be re-elected. However, the incorporation of the Soviet Union into that story illustrates the central role of the American-Soviet relationship in his discourse about American, and Western, identity. With claims like these, Reagan established a relationship between renewed American strength and the possibility of cooperation with the USSR, and made this an important part of his image.

Thatcher mentioned weakness and the past less frequently. Perhaps it was because she was not trying to win an election, or perhaps because the Soviet Union was not as central to her conception of British identity as it was to Reagan's conception of American purpose. But she did use the same strategy of emphasising the relationship between Western strength and the ability to influence the USSR meaningfully. In the first part of the year she made this connection with

39 Ibid.

references to the strength of both British weapons and British will. The clearest examples of this came from answers that Thatcher gave to parliamentary questions about her visit to Hungary, and a speech to the European Atlantic Group — an organisation for the discussion of European-Atlantic relations. Of the following excerpts, the first two are from the former and the final from the latter:

- ‘The British nuclear deterrent is a fundamental part of the defence of the West and, in the last resort, of the defence of this country. If we gave it up unilaterally there would be little hope of bringing the Soviet Union back to the negotiating table and persuading it to reduce its nuclear weapons.’⁴⁰
- ‘We have shown that peace comes not just from a righteous cause. It comes from strength and from resolution, for the threat we face is unremitting.’⁴¹
- ‘We should remember that the possession of the nuclear deterrent has prevented not only nuclear war, but conventional war. The Opposition’s policies would hand the Soviet Union a major military, political and propaganda advantage in return for nothing.’⁴²

Then, in November 1984, a new date was set for American-Soviet arms talks to resume at Geneva in a year’s time — on 19-20 November 1985. Thatcher attributed this change to the policies for which she had advocated:

- ‘First—that it was not one-sided disarmament which has brought the Russians to the negotiating table. It was our strength.’⁴³
- ‘Let us be under no illusions. It is our strength and not their goodwill that has brought the Soviet Union to the negotiating table in Geneva.’⁴⁴

40 Margaret Thatcher, ‘House of Commons PQs’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 7 February 1984.

41 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to the European Atlantic Group’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 11 July 1984.

42 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to Conservative Party Conference’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 12 October 1984.

43 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to Young Conservative Conference’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 9 February 1985.

44 Thatcher, ‘Speech to Joint Houses of Congress’.

The return of Soviet negotiators to the Geneva talks confirmed what Thatcher had already said. Western strength could force the Soviet hand. Thatcher constructed the return to Geneva as evidence that Soviet behaviour could to some extent be influenced, and that the West was an active and effective force for peace.

Prior to this, Thatcher had already claimed to be in pursuit of a new relationship with the USSR. She wanted to 'get them out and talk to them', and to develop 'understanding'.⁴⁵ Between the beginning of her Prime Ministership and 1984, Thatcher had used the term 'understanding' to refer to a range of things. It meant comprehension of goals, objectives, and foreign cultures, the ability to communicate properly and without misinterpretation, and unofficial or unspoken agreements. In all of these contexts, understanding was framed unambiguously in positive terms. She described the goal of developing understanding as being able to 'understand the other's problems as well as your own.'⁴⁶ In the context of international relations, she almost exclusively spoke about developing understandings with friendly entities — Japan, India, Germany, France, Europe, NATO, Peru, the United States, and even Yugoslavia, a communist state. Before 1984, she referred to understanding in the context of the Soviet Union on at least three occasions: in a 1981 speech in India, then twice in late 1983. One of these was in a discussion about arms control, in which she stated that: 'Our policy must be based on a clear understanding of the people we are dealing with and the system they have shaped. Otherwise, we shall get it wrong.'⁴⁷ This was a different kind of understanding to the one that she called for in 1984, although it was related. The understanding that she advocated in India was of a strategic kind, whereas the understanding she described in 1984 and later was in the context of a relationship.

From the beginning of 1984, Thatcher repeatedly stated her desire to develop a relationship with the Soviet Union based on understanding. In her first public commentary of the year, a television interview, she explained her goals in detail:

45 Thatcher, 'TV Interview for Channel 4 News'.

46 Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference for Japanese Correspondents (Coming Visit to Japan)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 14 September 1982.

47 Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to the Canadian Parliament', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 26 September 1983.

I think the important thing now at this rather crucial stage in East/West relations is to get a greater general understanding, if we do that you know the details will come but I don't think you'll necessarily get the general understanding by negotiation on very complicated details ... I notice that our understanding is best with those countries whose leaders we see quite frequently and it's very important that we do that with the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

Throughout the year, Thatcher continued to prioritise the development of understanding with the USSR:

- 'I am satisfied, yes, I believe that I have a greater *understanding* now than I did 48 hours ago, I believe that I have made a contribution to East/West relations that I had not made 48 hours ago ... I tend to believe that it is easier to get down to details when you have a better *understanding* and I think that there is an awareness, if I might put it no higher than that, on both sides of the political divide, for a need for a better *understanding*.'⁴⁹
- 'Discussions between East and West to improve general *understanding* and to secure more results on disarmament will inevitably take a long time.'⁵⁰
- 'If there is to be progress on arms control—which I devoutly want—it will come not through negotiating skill alone but because a broader *understanding* has been reached.'⁵¹
- 'it was a very successful meeting, because he talked quite openly and debated very easily, so I felt that we were getting that kind of *understanding* which is going to be necessary if we are going to get the results we want from those arms talks in Geneva.'⁵²

Thatcher's praise for the benefits of understanding implied that misunderstandings in international relations were particularly risky, but that they could be avoided through mutual awareness. Understanding was something that could be shared between the West and the

48 Thatcher, 'TV Interview for Channel 4 News'.

49 Thatcher, 'Press Conference Visiting Hungary'.

50 Thatcher, 'House of Commons PQs', 7 February 1984.

51 Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference after Andropov's Funeral', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 14 February 1984.

52 Margaret Thatcher, 'TV Interview for CBS Morning News (Visiting Washington)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 20 February 1985.

USSR, and that took place mutually rather than being the responsibility any one party. Thatcher emphasised the mutual element when she said of Gorbachev that, emphasis mine, 'we were getting that kind of understanding.'⁵³ The onus was still put on the USSR to accept her offers of understanding, but Thatcher's discourse suggested a more collaborative approach than that of Reagan. Reagan wanted to 'meet them halfway,' as long as they met his terms and conditions.⁵⁴ Thatcher, on the other hand, wanted to 'get them out and talk to them' regardless of the outcome.⁵⁵

The purpose of developing understanding, according to Thatcher, was to re-establish dialogue, to communicate openly and without misunderstandings, and generally to engage in more diplomacy. The primary outcome of diplomacy that she proposed was a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons held by all powers to the lowest level possible to maintain deterrence. Thatcher still constructed the Soviet Union as a potential threat for the foreseeable future, one that made deterrence necessary, but it was a threat that could be downgraded.

Reagan used a range of terms similar to those used by Thatcher to describe American objectives throughout the year, including dialogue, cooperation, negotiations, relationships, and engagement. He implied that there should be reform in the Soviet system, but portrayed arms negotiations as a much higher priority. However, he was more specific than Margaret Thatcher about what could be accomplished and this indicated potential tensions. Rather than limiting himself to 'greater understanding' and a return to the Geneva arms talks, Reagan outlined specific proposals and treaties for the Soviet Union to accept. These included the requirements mentioned in Chapter One. The specific proposals Reagan made required more of the USSR than the diplomacy for which Thatcher asked. Thus, in laying out his terms, Reagan established criteria by which the Soviet Union could be judged. If the Soviets failed to meet his terms, the logic of his discourse suggested that they were responsible for a large proportion of the problems facing the world and for the absence of security or peace. The Soviets would not suddenly become heroes if they acquiesced to his requests, but, he argued, they could at least be tolerated.

53 Ibid.

54 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations 16 January 1984'.

55 Thatcher, 'TV Interview for Channel 4 News'.

To summarise, there were several points of agreement and contrast between Thatcher and Reagan during this period. Neither claimed or implied that the Soviet Union might cease to exist. As described above, their discourses operated on the assumption that they had to live with it for the indefinite future. The USSR was also unlikely to change its system fundamentally, although Reagan optimistically asked the Soviet leadership to consider it regardless. He placed his vision for arms control at the top of his hierarchy of desires for the USSR, but expected that liberalisation of the Soviet system would be a part of that vision. Thatcher, on the other hand, largely restricted herself to discussing peace and security. Both agreed that the preconditions for the Soviet Union to change its external behaviour, if not its system, were Western military superiority, unwillingness to back down, and the unique national, historical, and cultural characteristics of their countries. The importance given to these factors in the peace-making process is indicative of how the Soviet Union had been Othered. When military superiority, lack of willingness to compromise, and unique characteristics were attributed to the West, they were the keys to peace. When they were applied to the USSR, they were evidence for why the world was such a dangerous place and why the USSR was so problematic.

Gorbachev would later be described as a potential remedy for the flaws of the USSR, but, before he became General Secretary, neither Thatcher or Reagan discussed him in significant detail. Thatcher made her famous assessment in a television interview after his official visit to the UK in December 1984: 'I am cautiously optimistic. I like Mr. Gorbachev. We can do business together.'⁵⁶ She claimed to have common interests with Gorbachev and judged him positively on the basis that he communicated openly, and would likely bring this into arms control negotiations. She mentioned Gorbachev alongside several statements about 'greater understanding', and attributed to him some ability to change Soviet behaviour as a result.⁵⁷ Reagan, however, scarcely mentioned the future General Secretary at all. Gorbachev was notable as the Kremlin's second-in-command, but he had not yet been incorporated into Reagan's discourse.

56 Thatcher, 'TV Interview for BBC ("I like Mr Gorbachev. We Can Do Business Together")'.

57 Thatcher, 'TV Interview for CBS Morning News (Visiting Washington)'.

Davidson and Safire

Ian Davidson and William Safire were not subject to the same pressures as Reagan and Thatcher. They had no advisors, electorates, and foreign dignitaries with whom to contend, nor were they facing the same stakes. Journalists were and are expected to follow editorial policy, but poorly chosen words are more likely to result in stern letters to the editor than international crises. However, Davidson and Safire still had to navigate significant change taking place in the USSR and conflicting storylines about it. They also had the opportunity to speak, in a sense, to the politicians discussed above. As columnists, they published articles more often than politicians gave notable speeches. This gave them the opportunity to respond to the speeches and actions of political figures in real-time. By repackaging and criticising the discourses of Reagan and Thatcher, journalists revealed tensions and debates, and contributed to the construction or deconstruction of discursive consensus.

Safire and Davidson expressed ambivalence on the question of whether the Soviet Union could change, although for different reasons. Both writers advocated a dual-level explanation for Soviet change, similar to Reagan and Thatcher, wherein change was possible in terms of the Soviet Union's external behaviour but much less likely in regards to its domestic policies.

In Davidson's discourse, the international behaviour of the USSR had two sources. Its nature as an expansionist and aggressive power has been mentioned previously, but he also considered the effects of specific events. For Davidson, Soviet conduct was strongly dependent on the historical and contemporary attitudes, approaches, decisions, and discourses of Western powers towards the USSR. The cause of much of the Soviet Union's mischief, he argued, was the Reagan administration 'denying not merely the legitimacy of the Soviet regime, but also any reasonable role for the Soviet Union in the international system.'⁵⁸ Davidson traced that strategy back to an attempt by Nixon to keep the Soviet Union out of the Middle East in 1973. He argued that this denial of Soviet legitimacy made it difficult to communicate across the political divide, as 'it would be a conversation without subject matter.'⁵⁹

Davidson definitively advocated for a Western role in influencing the direction that the Soviet Union would take. However, he argued that this role was often overstated by the

⁵⁸ Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Between Two Titans'.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

superpowers themselves as well as by the people who were watching them. He accused the Reagan administration of being unnecessarily overbearing, writing at the beginning of 1984 that 'histrionics were out of place.'⁶⁰ In so saying, Davidson turned the trope of the irrational teenager, which he had used to describe the Soviet Union, against the American government. His primary explanation of American policy portrayed the actions of Reagan and his administration as worsening the international relationship unnecessarily. A month after his comment about histrionics, he wrote:

The puzzling thing about the long-drawn-out struggle between the two super-powers for global mastery over each other is that the images are so different from the historical reality. Each fears that the swirl of rhetoric and the deployment of ever-greater military force may herald some critical breakthrough by the other; the record suggests that each has suffered more from the counter-productive backlash of its own titanic efforts abroad than from any feat of cunning or military might by its rival. Let us say no more of Vietnam, Iran, Lebanon; but if the Soviet Union is such a threat, why is it so generally ill-considered except as a supplier of arms? The war in Afghanistan is much more costly to the Soviet Union, by every conceivable measure, than to the West.⁶¹

That was not to say that engagement was pointless. Arms control processes were beneficial according to Davidson. They were possibly 'the only way to reduce fear and hostility,' but the Americans made any substantial improvements impossible.⁶² American

psychological fears of Russian intentions and suspicions of their future plans in weaponry, have driven the alarms and excursions which have caused such traumas in East-West relations and inside the Atlantic Alliance in the past four years.⁶³

For Davidson, true cooperation was a better option than peace through strength. He did not write a great deal about the internal politics of the USSR but, in his discourse, change could be

60 Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: The EEC Crisis'.

61 Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Between Two Titans'.

62 Ian Davidson, 'Why the Medium Is the Message: Geneva Arms Talks', *Financial Times*, 14 January 1985, Factiva.

63 Ibid.

accomplished through calm and level-headed negotiations. If both sides took a deep breath and stepped back, everyone would be better off.

Davidson's comments differentiated sharply from those of the other commentators discussed here. They had much more in common with the realism of George Kennan, the grandfather of Sovietology. Kennan insisted in his 1951 book, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*, that the USSR had the same interests as other states.⁶⁴ In 1984, he continued to prioritise realist diplomacy and rejected as 'purest nonsense' the notion that an American military build-up had anything to do with improved Soviet-American relations.⁶⁵ In opposition to Davidson (and Kennan), Thatcher and Reagan both insisted that a strategy of intense criticism and military strength was the ultimate cause of the positive change that had taken place by the end of 1984. William Safire, too, had argued that the Anglo-American strategy of confrontation was sound. He even insisted that it did not go far enough. Davidson, by contrast, argued that the Soviet Union had a cause for grievance, even if that did not entirely account for its inappropriate behaviour.

Davidson's readers also differed with him, as shown by the occasional rebukes published in the *Financial Times* as letters to the editor. Three of the four letters published in 1984 that mentioned the USSR called on Davidson to be harsher and more aggressive. They emphasised the importance of a nuclear deterrent, and one called the Soviet Union 'the world's last empire', cautioning against giving it 'a legitimacy which is as spurious as it is undeserved.'⁶⁶ The last argued that American missiles were a threat to Europe — because they were more likely to drag Europeans into a war.⁶⁷ None of these letters were positive towards the USSR.

The impact of Western decisions, especially American ones, on Soviet behaviour and relationships was a recurrent theme in Davidson's writing. In addition to describing the outrage of the USSR at being treated as illegitimate, he argued that previous arms control proposals

64 O'Gorman, *Spirits of the Cold War*, 50–51.

65 Kennan, 'Reducing Tensions'; George F. Kennan, 'The Wrong Way to Treat Moscow', *New York Times*, 3 March 1985, Factiva.

66 Andrew Stuttaford, 'The World's Last Imperialists', *Financial Times*, 24 February 1984, Factiva; John M. Johnson, 'Doubts About Trident', *Financial Times*, 12 November 1984, Factiva; Malcolm Chalmers, 'The Case Against Trident', *Financial Times*, 29 November 1984, Factiva.

67 F.A.E. Pirani, 'European Security', *Financial Times*, 30 November 1984, Factiva.

made by the Americans had been unfairly one-sided and thus unacceptable.⁶⁸ He also claimed that ‘the election of President Ronald Reagan ushered in the sharpest frost in US-Soviet relations since the Cold War.’⁶⁹ Contrast this with the statement of Kenneth Adelman — the director of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency — in the *NYT* that ‘the world is not more dangerous today.’ Adelman asked: ‘What has made it more stable? Active American diplomacy and increased deterrent strength.’⁷⁰ Davidson and Adelman agreed that Soviet adventures had played a central role in the end of *détente*, and they even agreed that the international situation was in need of improvement. But where they disagreed was in terms of the American role in the contemporary world — not the Soviet one.

This was a debate that was often played out in the media, especially around moments of heightened interest in diplomacy, such as the Stockholm Conference. When Reagan was at his harshest about the Soviet Union, journalists tended to portray the consequences of his strategy in one of two ways: as contributing to Soviet hostility, and thus increasing danger, or as showing the Soviets that the US could not be bullied, and so decreasing it. The first of these stances, advocated by Davidson, was favoured by those like James Reston of the *NYT* and Donald Treford, editor of the *Observer*, a sister paper of the *Guardian*, who distanced themselves from ‘anti-communists’, ‘hawks’, or hard-liners.⁷¹ They were joined by a chorus of other voices.⁷²

In the pages of the papers considered here, supporters of confrontation were rarer. One of these supporters was George F. Will, a fiery conservative columnist at the *WP*, who rejected Reagan altogether as too political and too weak-willed. A decision by the Reagan administration in 1984 to cease blocking the entry of Poland to the International Monetary Fund was, in Will’s words, ‘a disgusting episode.’ The change of policy marked ‘the collapse of the moral

68 Ian Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: Tangles of a Twin-Track Gambit’, *Financial Times*, 15 October 1984, Factiva.

69 Davidson, ‘The Barrier That May Soon Fall’.

70 Kenneth L. Adelman, ‘More Secure Than 4 Years Ago’, *New York Times*, 4 October 1984, Factiva.

71 Reston, ‘Washington: Reagan’s Gentler Melody’; Donald Treford, ‘Gorky Park View of Armageddon’, *Observer*, 1 April 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

72 Hella Pick, ‘Why Mrs Thatcher Has Put Her Iron in the Fire’, *Guardian*, 10 January 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Stephen S. Rosenfeld, ‘Simple Ideas...’, *Washington Post*, 20 January 1984, Factiva; Herbert Scoville Jr., ‘Poor Record on Arms’, *New York Times*, 12 February 1984, Factiva; Tom Wicker, ‘In the Nation: Too Late to Conciliate’, *New York Times*, 20 January 1984, Factiva; McGrory, ‘Despite His Handlers’ Hype, Reagan Didn’t Sound Converted’.

pretensions of Reaganism and illustrates the dialectic by which democracies perish.⁷³ Beyond occasional examples like those of Will and Adelman, Safire's voice was one of few that consistently advocated for confrontation, as was discussed in Chapter One. What these commentators did agree on, more or less wholeheartedly, was that the Soviet Union was fearsome, aggressive, and a source of genuine danger. As one *NYT* editorial on the eve of the Stockholm conference read, 'there's nothing partisan about fears of war and the deterioration in relations with Moscow.'⁷⁴

These accounts, on both sides of the debate, often made the same attribution errors as Reagan. In the instances described above, they assumed that Soviet behaviour was dependent on the West — either Western diplomacy or Western strength. Davidson occasionally departed from this model with allusions to the role of mere human error on the Soviet side of the equation. Sometimes the Soviets, like the Americans, showed poor judgement, confusion, lack of comprehension, or simply failed to communicate. Some examples of Davidson's depiction of the Soviets' human fallibility are given below (emphasis mine):

- 'The Russians *cannot fathom* [Reagan's new language of cooperation].'⁷⁵
- 'The Russians *made a frightful mess* of their public relations hand.'⁷⁶
- 'The Russians *have not yet worked out* a credible policy for East-West relations.'⁷⁷
- 'The Russians are *foolish* to make difficulties about the agenda for space weapons talks.'⁷⁸
- 'Mr Gromyko's pugnacious stance in New York was *boorish, stupid and shortsighted*.'⁷⁹
- 'This was characteristically *short-sighted* of them.'⁸⁰

73 George F. Will, 'OP/ED: Still Stalinist, Still Anti-Semitic', *Washington Post*, 23 December 1984, Factiva.

74 'Evil Empire... Come In, Evil Empire', *New York Times*, 17 January 1984, Factiva.

75 Davidson, 'More Than Meets the Eye'.

76 Ibid.

77 Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: European Dilemma for Chernenko'.

78 Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: What Gromyko Wants to Know', *Financial Times*, 17 September 1984, Factiva.

79 Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: If Nuclear Arms Control Is Dead...', *The Financial Times*, 1 October 1984, Factiva.

80 Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Hawks, Doves and No Agenda'.

The acknowledgement that some Soviet decisions were a result of fallible and contextual human failings left open the possibility that better decisions could be made next time. The important role that Davidson attributed to contextual forces in determining Soviet conduct suggested that the factors influencing that conduct were at least partly contingent, rather than essential. By contrast, Reagan and Thatcher did not offer fallibility as an explanation for Soviet behaviour. According to these politicians, Soviet decisions were indications of the system's true nature. The way it had acted in the past was evidence that it was imperialistic, and the decisions still to come would reveal whether or not it was serious about peace. Whereas Reagan, Thatcher and Safire all portrayed every Soviet move as calculated, Davidson argued that Soviet decisions could sometimes be miscalculated, improvised or contingent.

Despite the irritation he displayed towards the conduct of the United States, Davidson was also highly critical of the USSR. Especially at the beginning and the end of 1984, he dwelt on Soviet 'mischief' and the pernicious ways in which it played the geopolitical game as described in Chapter One. He did not claim that these basic Soviet traits were likely to change, and wrote, 'there is little chance of bringing about modifications in the Kremlin's general policy objectives directly.'⁸¹ Davidson's evidence was that

No such radical modification has taken place as a result either of President Reagan's blood-and-thunder rhetoric early in his first term or of the American arms build-up, nor is it likely as a result of softer rhetoric and more regular dialogue between Moscow and Washington.⁸²

Continuity was thus an important theme. Like Thatcher, he also established an equivalence between the Soviet Union of the past and the Soviet Union of 1984. In the most striking of these historical comparisons Davidson drew a line of equivalence from the invasion of Afghanistan to the post-war geopolitics of Stalin's USSR and then further back to the Nazis:

If there is an analogy with Hitler's Germany it is Stalin's Russia, concentration camps, mass murders and antisemitism; and the change for better since 1953 has been modest at best. While Hitler was gearing up for his 1941 invasion, Stalin

81 Davidson, 'Why the Medium Is the Message: Geneva Arms Talks'.

82 Ibid.

seized a large chunk of Eastern Europe and in the final victory added massively to the Soviet empire. Thirty-five years later, Moscow embarked on the annexation of Afghanistan.⁸³

While he did often imply that there were prospects for change, Davidson's language in cases like this was counter to that. For Davidson, as for Thatcher and Reagan, the Soviet Union could change to a certain extent, but it would always be the Soviet Union. He implied that this was not as terrible as some of his counterparts suspected. 'For Europeans,' Davidson wrote, 'Russia is a distasteful and dangerous reality; it may be barbaric, but it has always been there.'⁸⁴

Where Davidson advocated a degree of understanding for the grievances of the USSR, Safire was sceptical and belligerent. The differences between Safire and Davidson are unsurprising. The British and American contexts for engagement with the USSR were not the same. Although Davidson was critical of both American and European strategies and usually portrayed himself as an international observer, European politics was the main focus of his writing. As he pointed out, overbearing American aggression made European security more precarious. Davidson was also the representative of a newspaper that was newly branching out and marketing itself as a respectable international publication. Safire, on the other hand, was an outspoken conservative whose writing for the venerable *NYT* was noteworthy as much for his iconoclastic opinions as his political analysis. In addition, Safire identified himself very closely with American interests and culture. Davidson's analysis was doubtless influenced by his origins, but Safire wore his affiliation on his sleeve and made it central to his writing.

Safire agreed with Davidson that the Soviets could not be trusted to negotiate in good faith. However, the problem with Western policy towards the Soviet Union, he argued, was not that it was too confrontational. Rather, it was not confrontational enough.⁸⁵ He maintained that the Soviet Union would not reform itself, even under external pressure, but simply recalibrate.⁸⁶ In this respect, Safire's discourse was typical of what Dalby refers to as the 'totalitarian' school of thought about the USSR. A key tenet of that school, according to Dalby, was that,

83 Ian Davidson, 'Let's Be Firm, But Generous', *Financial Times*, 21 January 1985, Factiva.

84 Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Between Two Titans'.

85 Safire, 'Essay: A Plum for Gromyko'; William Safire, 'Essay: The Peace Offensive', *New York Times*, 22 November 1984, Factiva.

86 Safire, 'Essay: Mind-Reading Gorbachev'; Safire, 'Essay: Greatest Leap Forward'.

if the system is as the totalitarian conception says it is, then the system will not change by inducement or contact with the West. Any apparent changes are either dismissed as cosmetic, not substantive, or else as a ruse to lull the West into complacency, hence making it more vulnerable to plots to subvert it.⁸⁷

This argument suggested that the USSR did not have legitimate interests in the same way as other states. The CPD was an archetypal example of the totalitarian school, and many of its members vigorously denied any legitimacy to Soviet objectives.⁸⁸ Their approach was shared widely amongst neoconservatives. Magazines like *Commentary*, edited by the influential neoconservative thinker Norman Podhoretz, and William F. Buckley's *National Review* courted writers who insisted that the Soviet Union would stop at nothing short of world domination. According to these commentators, the USSR was not a 'normal' state and realist strategies would not be sufficient for neutralising the threat it represented.⁸⁹ To assure meaningful progress towards the vision of a safer world that Safire shared with these commentators, the USSR could not be given the opportunity to empower itself under the guise of friendship.

Safire's many references to Reagan in the context of arms control give insight into his firebrand approach to influencing the Soviet Union, as well as his divergence from the discourse of the president. If Safire was to be believed, Reagan had allegedly departed entirely from his earlier methodology of confrontation. If true, this was a significance shift given Reagan's background. He was a member of the CPD in the late 1970s, and a number of his advisers — including the historian Richard Pipes — were influential members of that group.⁹⁰ The tensions between Safire and Reagan can be seen in the following excerpts from Safire's column:

1. 'The Soviet leaders know that Mr. Reagan would like to soften his image to reassure American doves of his trigger-unhappiness; the Russians can exploit the pressure on him to make concessions.'⁹¹

87 Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 66.

88 *Ibid.*, 156–57.

89 Samuel, 'Conservative Intellectuals and the Reagan–Gorbachev Summits', 141–42.

90 Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 178.

91 Safire, 'Essay: Expert on the Sidelines'.

2. 'In a second term, Mr. Reagan will be free to abandon his confrontational pose and will do business on détente. ... Mr. Reagan will want to be remembered not as the man who countered the Soviet challenge but as the man who made peace.'⁹²
3. 'First, just as we [the Soviets] were about to break the long stalemate and win dominion over Europe with our SS- 20's, he snatched that victory away from us with his Pershing 2's.'⁹³
4. 'I suspect, however, that Mr. Reagan has recently hinted that pre-election picture-posing would be accompanied by the kind of disguised precondition that Mr. Gromyko could triumphantly brandish before Politburo friends and foes.'⁹⁴
5. 'President Reagan's words have been true about the Soviet Union. His deed in refusing to be intimidated by the SS-20's was a good deed.'⁹⁵
6. 'A generation from now, the Reagan Presidency will be remembered for sinking the socialistic Law of the Sea and for launching the world's counterterror space defense.'⁹⁶

Safire's negative or ambivalent comments about Reagan (in excerpts 1, 2, and 4) portrayed Reagan as making concessions or otherwise backing down from his uncompromising stance. He portrayed Reagan in those statements as bowing to short-term domestic pressure from the doves whom Safire derided. In such instances, he also accused Reagan of misunderstanding the Soviet Union. Unlike those who argued that it was possible to negotiate effectively with the Soviets, Safire argued that they would use any such opening for cynical advantage. Safire's positive comments about Reagan, on the other hand, portrayed him in a heroic light. He was standing strong, refusing to be intimidated, and remaining uncompromised despite the transitory pressures that put him at risk of manipulation. The American decision to station SS-20 missiles in Europe was symbolic for Safire of how the international relationship should be conducted.

92 William Safire, 'Essay: Split Screen Candidate', *The New York Times*, 9 March 1984, Factiva.

93 Safire, 'Essay: Mind-Reading Gorbachev'.

94 Safire, 'Essay: Great Stone Face-Saver'.

95 Safire, 'Essay: A Plum for Gromyko'.

96 William Safire, 'Essay: Bolt from the Blue', *New York Times*, 15 October 1984, Factiva.

Safire's prominent platform at the *NYT* gave readers ample opportunity to take issue with his claims, and the content of these refutations is revealing. The result was the publication of many disgruntled letters to the editor. These letters took issue with his use of the word 'freezenik' to describe anti-war activists, his analysis of international relations, and his enthusiasm for a confrontational strategy.⁹⁷ What they did not contest, in this period, was his overall perspective on the USSR: that it was dangerous, antagonistic, and something to be contained. In the pages of the *NYT* it may have been acceptable to quarrel about strategy, but discourse about the threat presented by the Soviet Union was much more unified.

In general, Safire argued that the Soviet Union could be contained, although certainly not reformed, if the Reagan administration continued on the path of confrontation. His prescription for the Western role in influencing the Soviet Union was blunt:

This is a good moment to stop rubbing our hands in anticipation of hot news from wintry Moscow and to start to remember what triggered the latest Kremlin Peace Offensive. Love of peace, nuclear sanity and international morality had nothing to do with it. The Russian leaders negotiate only when not negotiating is to their disadvantage. They will make an agreement only when they are certain we are prepared to forgo an agreement. The Reagan strategy, which is working, is to move the Russians by their fears rather than let them move us by our hopes.⁹⁸

In this narrative, 'the danger now would be to respond to the sulking — the Kremlin's breaking off of talks, its diplomatic hectoring and threatening — by accusing ourselves of being "confrontational".'⁹⁹ Any agreement reached with a Soviet Union that had not been suitably cowed, Safire suggested, would be largely meaningless and would simply allow the Soviets to undermine the West. Safire supported this argument with detailed and shocking descriptions of

97 Alfred A. Hormel, 'Why Would the Russians Invade Western Europe?', *New York Times*, 13 April 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Philip F. Henshaw, 'The Trouble With "Open-Secret" Wars', *New York Times*, 29 April 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Margaret MacG Guiton, 'Nix on "Nik"', *New York Times*, 4 March 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Edward L. Drangel, 'What Is a "Freezenik"?', *New York Times*, 22 November 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Frederic L. Propas, 'Beyond a Tactical Issue', *New York Times*, 13 April 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Carl Oglesby, 'Attempt on the Pope's Life: Unpersuasive Case Against Moscow', *New York Times*, 24 June 1984, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

98 Safire, 'Essay: The Peace Offensive'.

99 Safire, 'Essay: Expert on the Sidelines'.

the ways that alleged Soviet dishonesty was already at work, from a 'blatant attempt' to manipulate the US presidential campaign, through to the secret and illegal development of advanced war technologies.¹⁰⁰

Safire adapted Gorbachev into his discourse in different ways to Thatcher, Reagan, and Davidson. He devoted more words to the future General Secretary than did any of the others. Safire wrote that Gorbachev would likely be the next Soviet leader, with significant consequences for the international relationship. By contrast, Davidson only mentioned Gorbachev offhand and only for the sake of commenting on the future General Secretary's visit to the UK.¹⁰¹ Safire explained Gorbachev as an example of the dishonesty and danger inherent in Soviet overtures of peace.

Following the death of Andropov and the rise of Konstantin Chernenko to the position of General Secretary, Safire wrote a satirical article titled 'Mind-Reading Gorbachev' from the perspective of the future General Secretary. He painted a portrait of a man who supposedly knew that the Soviet system was flawed, and believed that dishonesty and oppression were necessary for its continued existence. Safire's Gorbachev was cynical and knew what he needed to do — direct 'the Soviet people's anger at Ronald Reagan.'¹⁰² This Gorbachev was more threatening than the old men who had preceded him. The following words, put into Gorbachev's head by Safire, was demonstrative of the deceitfulness that Safire attributed to the USSR:

When my time comes, I will exploit the congenital Western hope that the new man will be better - more reasonable, less repressive. I am short and balding and pleasant, which will help. That will be the moment for a peace offensive, with the stage set by our years of anger. The pressure will be on Reagan or his successor to help the new man succeed, by slowing the trend toward defensive weaponry, by extending credits and, as Lenin said, selling us the rope.¹⁰³

100 Safire, 'Essay: Great Stone Face-Saver'; Safire, 'Essay: Up the Laser River'.

101 Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: The NATO Dilemma on Risk Sharing', *Financial Times*, 26 November 1984, Factiva.

102 Safire, 'Essay: Mind-Reading Gorbachev'.

103 Ibid.

When Gorbachev visited the UK in December 1984, Thatcher was impressed by his charm. Safire, by contrast, portrayed the famous Gorbachev charm not as an opportunity for bridge-building, but as a threat. With a sexist flourish, he accused Thatcher of harbouring a 'schoolgirl crush on The Russian With the Smile.' This crush, he argued, had resulted in Thatcher obtaining an important arms control concession from Reagan on behalf of Gorbachev, thus undermining Safire's vision for American strategy. It was typical of the gendered nature of discourse about the USSR and international relations, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. There was one solution to Gorbachev's attempts at subversion. According to Safire: 'President Reagan should assert his plan proudly, and not let it be nibbled to death by all those entranced by the smile of Young Mike.'¹⁰⁴

Like Davidson, Safire defined the Soviet Union in terms of continuity. He portrayed changes in Soviet governance as having little real significance. A new leader might make the economy more efficient or might represent a new threat, as in the case of Gorbachev, but the system would remain the same. The fiery columnist did give one clue as to what he claimed could bring about systemic change in the Soviet Union when he made the following claim:

If China succeeds in just feeding itself with a market economy, the neighboring Soviet system will be shown to be a failure; the entire Russian leadership - millions of party members - will be threatened internally, by the same sort of counterrevolution that threw out the doctrinaire Marxists in China.¹⁰⁵

The Soviet Union could only change if the Soviet people as a whole knew how broken it was. The events of the next few years challenged Safire's dictums about his communist enemies, given his insistence that the Soviet Union would not compromise itself unless coerced to do so.

For all his vitriol, Safire also helped to sow the seeds of a profound discursive shift that would take place in the following years. In those articles in which he mentioned the Soviets, even in passing, the USSR was almost always portrayed as the primary antagonist of the 'West'. Even when the substance of the article was about a conflict in the Middle East, references to the

¹⁰⁴ Safire, 'Essay; Maggie Likes Mike'.

¹⁰⁵ Safire, 'Essay: Greatest Leap Forward'.

Soviet Union still portrayed it as the hostile force that was at work behind the scenes. However, in several articles about arms control, Safire identified a third threat:

In the coming generation, where is the greatest nuclear danger? Not from the other superpower, which has much to lose and is likely to act rationally. Tomorrow's danger is from a terrorist state — like Libya, which could buy a German missile and help Pakistan develop a bomb — that would have less to lose and could well be headed by an audacious blackmailer or kamikaze fanatic.¹⁰⁶

Somewhat surprisingly, Safire's response to the potential threat of terrorism was to propose a fundamental rethinking of the Soviet-American relationship and the arms control paradigm overall. He was generally an advocate of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), but in his view it took on a new significance in the context of 'superterrorism'.¹⁰⁷ His suggestion was that the Soviet Union accept Reagan's proposal to share SDI research, enabling both powers to shoot down nuclear missiles, and then for the two powers to form a mutual defence pact against terrorist attacks. Safire acknowledged the bizarre character of his own proposal when he asked his readers to 'consider the unthinkable: World War III may not be the Soviet Union versus the Free World, but terrorism versus civilization.'¹⁰⁸

With his claim that one day the Soviet Union might stand on the side of civilisation, Safire foresaw the outlines of one of the great discursive ruptures that would come about with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the last years of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the new prominence of Islamic fundamentalism allowed Russia some limited and contingent identification with the West. In *Journalism and the Political*, Macgilchrist has looked at this discursive shift in detail as seen through the lens of the Russian-Chechen conflict. She points out that the Cold War understanding of geopolitical space as divided between East and West was giving way, at this point, to a *civilisational* demarcation instead. In the clash between civilisation and terrorism, Russia was sometimes folded, albeit

106 Safire, 'Essay: Up the Laser River'.

107 Safire, 'Essay: Bolt from the Blue'.

108 Ibid.

conditionally and with reservations, into the ranks of the civilised.¹⁰⁹ Safire's claim about the future was prescient, then, even if he could not have known the details.

For all of the differences between Safire and Davidson, their discourses were both more cynical about the prospects for change in the East-West relationship than Reagan or Thatcher. They agreed that limited change could take place, but they did not portray it as likely. However lacking in pragmatism the hopes expressed by Reagan and Thatcher might have been, they were simpler in one sense: all that was required was for the Soviet Union to accept their appeals, and peace would be obtained. As journalists, Safire and Davidson did not have the luxury of making such pithy appeals. They identified a range of obstacles to the West's ability to influence the Soviet Union and the ability of the Soviet Union to change, although they disagreed on what those obstacles were. Soon, they would have to account more fully for Gorbachev and the enigma that he represented.

Conclusion

Each of the commentators investigated in this chapter were more or less agreed that the Soviet Union was only likely to change in terms of its external behaviour. The Soviet system of government defined it, and that system was characterised by expansionism, aggression, despotism, and immorality. Reagan indicated that there was some potential for the Soviet Union to change when he called on its leaders to liberalise their government, but this was less than likely. Safire took the harsher view that the Soviet system was never going to change substantially and that it should be accounted for: one could not just wish it away. Whether it was innate characteristics, Western antagonism, or power politics, the Soviet Union was framed as largely unchanging, caught in inertia.

The means for exerting influence that these commentators advocated were substantially different. For Thatcher, Reagan, and Safire, Western strength was key to engaging with the Soviet Union. Reagan portrayed the past as a time when the Soviet Union ran rampant because America was not strong enough to contain it. For these commentators, the USSR could not be trusted to negotiate in good faith unless it was at a disadvantage. Now that the West had

109 Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political*, 92–93.

revived and Westerners could see through the deceptions of the past, it was possible to stand up to the Soviets and be respected. This narrative intersected closely with the Othering of the USSR, establishing the Soviet Union as an existential and spiritual threat.

However, there were growing tensions in this narrative. Safire represented a more antagonistic tendency. He interpreted the stated desire of Thatcher and Reagan for understanding and engagement as overenthusiastic, and actively dangerous. According to Safire, there could be no true rapprochement with the Soviet Union until another, more dangerous, threat came along. The differences in ideology and outlook were simply too great. In the discourse of the other three commentators, negotiation offered a path of constructive engagement that would not change the USSR fundamentally, but which might make it more tolerable.

Reagan and Thatcher shifted towards an emphasis on goodwill and cooperation, but they justified this change through placing it within in the narratives that they had previously endorsed. Their appeals for peace put the onus on the Soviet Union to demonstrate that it shared common interests with Western governments and that its people were peaceful. If Soviet leaders did not accept their proposals, it would reflect poorly on the Soviet Union as a whole. The USA and UK, on the other hand, were taken to be already peaceful and righteous. The USSR could only change by becoming more like them. By agreeing to return to arms control discussions in Geneva, Soviet leaders started down this path and confirmed the claims made about the importance of strength.

All of these discourses operated on the assumption that the Soviet Union would persist for some time, if not indefinitely. None of the commentators in question suggested that it might not exist in the coming future. Thatcher and Reagan diplomatically avoided their earlier claims that the USSR would eventually be overcome by democracy. Safire gave preconditions for its collapse but did not describe a collapse as particularly likely. The future that these commentators described, despite their antagonism, was one in which the USSR and the USA had to continue their coexistence. The path to that future would be difficult, but 1984 was a year of changes and new policy directions. It would take time and a new General Secretary in the Kremlin for these commentators to be able to assess their claims properly.

Gorbachev was still too fresh on the international scene for him to be given detailed discussion, but the beginnings of the role that he would later be given could be seen during this time. For some, like Thatcher, his charm and style positioned him as a different kind of Soviet leader, one with whom business could be done. Safire by contrast regarded Gorbachev's claim as a threat. If the Soviets were playing nice, he argued, that was simply extra reason not to trust them. On one point, however, Reagan, Thatcher and Safire were agreed: there was something different about Mikhail Gorbachev.

Chapter Three: Political Discourses from Chernenko to Geneva, March 1985–April 1986.

This chapter analyses the discourses of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher about the USSR between the death of Konstantin Chernenko in March 1985 and the Chernobyl disaster in April 1986. Many scholars have written about the evolution of Soviet-Western relationships in this period, although they have attributed different levels of significance to them.¹ The Geneva Summit and the rise of Gorbachev both took place in 1985, and these events marked it as an important turning point in the history of the USSR. Thus, this chapter explores the narrative threads, themes and metaphors that these world leaders used to explain the changing relationships between their countries and the Soviet Union.

In 1985, the relationship between the US and the USSR held special significance for Reagan. It was the beginning of his second presidential term, and relations with the USSR had been a pillar of his re-election campaign.² As Reagan told the story, his foreign policy had enabled fruitful engagement with the Soviets and opportunities to influence them. Notably, the Geneva arms talks were renewed in November 1985 with a summit meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev — the first time that Reagan had met with any Soviet leader. He used the Geneva Summit to justify his foreign policy, but also to find new ways of talking about Soviet people. Although a range of Reagan's speeches are relevant, four stand out in terms of their focus on the USSR: his January 1985 inaugural address, addresses given to the European

1 This scholarship tends to focus on the Soviet-American relationship, and British foreign policy is only rarely considered. For some examples of this scholarship from a variety of perspectives, see: John Lewis Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States: An Interpretive History* (McGraw-Hill Pub. Co, 1990), 320–38; Thomas Blanton, 'Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and the Revolutions of 1989: American Myths Versus the Primary Sources', in *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945-1989*, ed. Mark Kramer and Vít Smetana, Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 279–304; Brown, 'The Change to Engagement in Britain's Cold War Policy'; James Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*; Ilaria Poggiolini, 'Thatcher's Double-Track Road to the End of the Cold War: The Irreconcilability of Liberalization and Preservation', in *Visions of the End of the Cold War in Europe, 1945-1990*, ed. Frédéric Bozo et al., vol. 11, Studies in Contemporary European History (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 266–79; William D. Jackson, 'Soviet Reassessment of Ronald Reagan, 1985-1988', *Political Science Quarterly* 113, no. 4 (1998): 617–44; P.J. Westwick, "'Space-Strike Weapons" and the Soviet Response to SDI*', *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 5 (2008): 955–979.

2 Farnham, 'Reagan and the Gorbachev Revolution', 234; Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States*, 327–28.

Parliament and UN General Assembly in May and October 1985 respectively, and his January 1986 state of the union address.³

The Geneva Summit had less political immediacy for Thatcher than it did for Reagan. She was an observer rather than a direct participant in the negotiations, thus she spoke about Geneva less extensively in her major speeches. While this chapter primarily considers Reagan's key speeches, it surveys a wider range of Thatcher's commentary that includes interviews and press conferences. Of particular interest were two newspaper interviews that Thatcher gave in 1985, to the *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* and the *WP*.⁴ These interviews allowed her to express herself in far greater detail than she could in either press conferences or speeches. Both publications portrayed Thatcher as cynical about the prospects for reform, intrigued by Gorbachev, and confident in the precepts of nuclear deterrence.⁵ Although these interviews were only published in edited form, reading transcripts of the full interviews makes it possible to see statements that Thatcher was willing to become public.

This chapter looks for the tensions and contradictions that existed within discourses of nuclear strategy and foreign policy. The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) represented one, largely unsuccessful, attempt to negate these tensions. Because it did not allow for a total escape from these constraints, Reagan also attempted to change the discursive construction of the USSR. The Geneva Summit represented an opportunity for the terms of engagement to be redefined.

Gorbachev and Geneva

On 10 March 1985, Konstantin Chernenko, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, passed away after an extended period of illness. He was succeeded by Mikhail

3 Reagan, 'Inaugural Address 21 January 1985'; Ronald Reagan, 'Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France 8 May 1985', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 8 May 1985; Ronald Reagan, 'Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 24 October 1985; Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986'.

4 Margaret Thatcher, 'Interview for Wall Street Journal', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 1 May 1985; Margaret Thatcher, 'Interview for Washington Post', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 20 March 1985.

5 Karen Elliott House, Robert Keatley, and Philip Revzin, 'Britain's Thatcher Dismisses French Plan To Fix Exchange Rates as "Jabberwocky"', *Wall Street Journal*, 2 May 1985, Factiva; George F. Will, 'The Thatcher Brand of Diplomacy: Keep Your Powder Dry', *Washington Post*, 28 March 1985, Factiva.

Gorbachev, the rising star of the Politburo. Before visiting the UK in December 1984, Gorbachev had been a relatively unknown figure in the West. Commentators identified him as a spiritual successor to Yuri Andropov, Chernenko's predecessor, although there was no consensus about what kind of leader he would become. Some writers interpreted him as the heir to Andropov's reforms and others claimed that he was more likely to have inherited an allegiance to the KGB from the late General Secretary. We now know that Gorbachev's period in office witnessed immense changes in the USSR. As General Secretary, he played an important role in the last days of the Soviet Union. In March 1985, however, commentators had few ideas about what would happen over the next five years.⁶

Despite knowing little about Gorbachev and what kind of leader he would be, the Reagan administration invited him to a summit meeting mere hours after receiving news of his accession.⁷ The result of that invitation was the Geneva Summit, which took place over 19 and 20 November 1985. In Geneva, Reagan and Gorbachev held meetings over several days, sometimes accompanied by teams of advisors and sometimes with only interpreters present. They discussed numerous technical aspects of modern warfare and relations between their countries. The controversial topics included the field testing of high-tech nuclear weapons, SDI, conflict in the Third World, and restrictions on the deployment of intercontinental and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. These categories of missiles included the SS-20s — discussed in Chapter One — as well as the Pershing-2 missiles which the United States had deployed in response. Reagan went so far as to propose the eventual abolition of strategic nuclear missiles altogether.⁸ The two leaders reached an antagonistic deadlock over SDI, which Reagan maintained would be shared with the USSR, and which Gorbachev interpreted as a threat. Nevertheless, a private discussion that Reagan dubbed 'our fireside summit' resulted in an agreement to hold future meetings, and considerably improved the atmosphere of the negotiations.⁹

6 Cox, 'Another Transatlantic Split?', 125; Bruce D. Berkowitz, 'U.S. Intelligence Estimates of the Soviet Collapse: Reality and Perception', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence* 21, no. 2 (2008): 237.

7 Fischer, 'Toeing the Hardline?', 494.

8 Ronald Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Following the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 21 November 1985', 21 November 1985.

9 Christer Henrik Pursiainen and Angelica Matveeva, 'Initiating Trust in High Politics: The Gorbachev-Reagan Summit in Geneva 1985', *International Negotiation* 21, no. 1 (15 December 2016): 119–23.

Nuclear Strategy and Foreign Policy

When talking about the USSR in the first half of the 1980s, Reagan and Thatcher relied upon conceptual frameworks that were firmly anchored within discourses of national security. Reagan used SDI, and then the Geneva Summit, to try and escape from the logical contradictions inherent to these discourses. This destabilised the grounds upon which debates about the USSR and foreign policy took place.

In *Creating the Second Cold War*, Simon Dalby unpacks the assumptions, practices, and objectives at the heart of these national security discourses through a case study of the CPD. While the CPD represented an especially harsh strain of anti-Soviet discourse, the arguments made by its members were not isolated or original. They borrowed from disciplines as diverse as game theory, historiography, geopolitics, and military strategy. Two elements were central to CPD discourse about security. One of these was the existence of a threatening Other. The second was the notion that security depended on excluding the Other from the space occupied by the Self. This was the basis of the concepts of 'territorial sovereignty and the territorial state.' Discourses of territorial sovereignty made it possible to differentiate between people within the state and those outside of it, and transformed those outside of the state into threatening Others. It was necessary to protect against these threats, and this geopolitical paradigm gave meaning to the discourse of national security.¹⁰ From the spatial discourse regarding the threatening Soviet Other emerged the languages of 'containment,' 'rollback,' 'domino theory,' and other key elements of Cold War narratives about the USSR.

Space and distance, geographical and cultural, have often provided conceptual tools for understanding Eastern Europe and the USSR. For example, the perceived distance of Eastern Europe from self-proclaimed 'civilization' is at the heart of Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe*. The travellers described by Wolff constructed Eastern and Western Europe as meaningful categories through their attempts to imagine, invent, and map the far side of an invisible curtain. These projects allowed men like Voltaire and Casanova to attribute meanings to the places that they encountered: backwards, barbaric, grotesque, thrilling. According to Wolff, 'Eastern Europe was

¹⁰ Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 10–22.

constructed as an experimental domain that gave free play to the social theories and political reveries of the Enlightenment.¹¹ Malia, too, identifies matters of space and geography as fundamental aspects of Russia's many images in the West. According to Malia, assessments about Russia's European or Asiatic identity and the deterministic characteristics suggested by these categories correlated to the level of threat or kinship with which Europe treated it. For Malia, the beginning of the Cold War fixed the geographies of Russia and the West in place, drawing the lines sharply when previously they had been fluid.¹² When the possibility that Soviet communism could be fused with Western liberty was evoked, it was often conceived in spatial terms — as 'convergence.'¹³ Malia makes the same point as Wolff and Dalby: there was a relationship between conceptions of space and descriptions of the USSR.

The discourse of the CPD — one that placed special emphasis on the spatial exclusion of the USSR — was formative in Reagan's approach to international relations. In 1984, the CPD claimed that over 60 of its members had served in the Reagan administration.¹⁴ Reagan himself was on this list, as were numerous key figures responsible for arms control and Soviet affairs.¹⁵ These included William Casey, director of the CIA, Richard Pipes, an anti-Soviet historian and head of Soviet affairs at the National Security Council between 1981-1982, Caspar Weinberger, Secretary for Defense, and George Shultz, Secretary of State from 1982 onwards.¹⁶ This is not to suggest that Reagan's discourse followed that of the CPD precisely. Indeed, Foglesong argues that the differences between Reagan's approach and those of the CPD stalwarts in his administration were more striking than the similarities.¹⁷ To whatever extent that Reagan was or was not typical of CPD members, however, much of the structure of his discourse was inherited from them.

11 Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 359.

12 Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 4.

13 Rósa Magnúsdóttir, 'Cold War Correspondents and the Possibilities of Convergence: American Journalists in the Soviet Union, 1968–1979', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 41, no. 1 (19 March 2014): 38–40.

14 Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 161.

15 John Boies and Nelson A. Pichardo, 'The Committee on the Present Danger: A Case for the Importance of Elite Social Movement Organizations to Theories of Social Movements and the State', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 38 (1993): 76.

16 Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 177–82.

17 *Ibid.*, 181.

The CPD discourse that dominated Reagan's discourse in his first term defined the USSR as totalitarian, militaristic, and shaped by geography or the Russian past. The Soviet state was portrayed as illegitimate, and thus reliant on repression. Based on this premise, CPD members (and Reagan) concluded that *détente* was a failure because it did not provide solutions for the basic problems of Soviet expansionism and duplicity. Further, they argued that the foreign policies of the 1970s did not take into account Soviet strategic doctrine. This doctrine, according to members of the CPD, was predicated on the assumption that a nuclear war could be won. Thus, the CPD constructed both arms control and diplomacy as wrong-headed methods for regulating Soviet behaviour. The only common-sense way to respond to the USSR, insisted members of the CPD, was to obtain clear nuclear superiority and prepare seriously for fighting a war.

In 1985, this discourse represented an attempt to set new grounds about the acceptable uses of nuclear weapons. By claiming that a nuclear war could be fought, the Reagan administration diverged sharply from popular discourse about international relations and nuclear war. G. Thomas Goodnight identifies four propositions that were 'given' or 'public knowledge' about these topics at the beginning of the first Reagan administration:

First, science and technology inevitably produce more powerful and varied weaponry; second, the power of nuclear weapons renders an effective defence impossible; third, the purpose of military power basically is to deter a nuclear attack; and fourth, deterrence can be sustained so long as there is a rough equivalence of power, ensuring a capacity to retaliate in case of attack.¹⁸

Goodnight argues that, in several speeches given in his first term, Reagan subverted each of these propositions and articulated a discourse of war that had been abandoned with the introduction of nuclear weapons. In these addresses, which included the 'evil empire' speech and the announcement of SDI, Reagan contravened the propositions above in the following ways: he characterised martial strength as a means not of deterring nuclear war but of influencing Soviet behaviour, he declared that nuclear defence (in the form of SDI) was possible, and he argued for a massive augmentation of American nuclear forces. Mehan et al. argue that

¹⁸ Goodnight, 'Ronald Reagan's Re-formulation of the Rhetoric of War', 390.

this contravention amounted to an attempt to justify waging a nuclear war, which invalidated the concept of deterrence and initiated a 'breach' of discourse. In a breach, assumed truths ceased to be widely accepted and new grounds could be laid. As a result of this opening up of possibilities, the wider public gained new opportunities between 1983 and 1985 to critique discourses of security and nuclear strategy.¹⁹ Reagan and Thatcher were as much a part of this process of renegotiation as were church leaders, peace activists, and scholars.

Reagan's breach of discourse with the introduction of SDI gave rise to tensions that required resolution. These tensions became particularly salient with the resumption of the Geneva arms talks in 1985. How could Reagan's calls for massive increases to nuclear capabilities coexist with his vision for a world in which missiles no longer had a purpose? How did Thatcher's claims that she could do business with Gorbachev intersect with her insistence that communism was unchanging and could only be managed through strength? A close analysis of the metaphorical language used to talk about international relations reveals these discursive tensions, and the attempts of Reagan and Thatcher to resolve them.

Defence, Strength and Deterrence

Three concepts underpinned the methods that Reagan and Thatcher proposed for influencing the USSR: strength, deterrence, and defence. Each of these concepts was malleable and assumed a great deal, but their meanings were constrained and made sensible through existing discourses. They were not objective realities of international relations, and had only attained the transitory status of 'common sense' through the accretion of many previous discursive acts. As such, defence, strength, and deterrence contained within themselves the tensions that gave them the potential to rupture.

'Defence' was central to the discourses of Reagan and Thatcher in this period. Reagan used the word, and variations thereof, in all ten of the major speeches considered in this chapter. Thatcher similarly relied on the word. Defending was something in which they claimed to be actively engaged, and which allowed them to protect security.²⁰ In his speech on national

19 Mehan, Nathanson, and Skelly, 'Nuclear Discourse in the 1980s', 134–35.

20 Ronald Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget and Deficit Reduction 24 April 1985', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 24 April 1985; Margaret Thatcher,

security on 26 February 1986, Reagan used ‘defence’ and its derivatives 32 times, making it one of the most-used words in that speech — significantly more than security, which he used nine times. According to Reagan and Thatcher, any lasting security (not to mention peace) began with defence of sovereignty and geopolitical interests. According to Thatcher, the purpose of defence was to keep out external threats. As she announced in May 1985, ‘we threaten no-one, but we shall defend ourselves and keep our defences high enough to deter any would-be aggressor.’²¹ In her ideal world, sovereignty would be respected by other states. Given that the world did not match Thatcher’s ideal, however, it was necessary to defend sovereignty.

For all that Reagan and Thatcher emphasised the importance of defence, it was a problematic concept. As described previously, theories of nuclear strategy took it as given that defence was impossible. Because a missile could not be stopped once it had been launched, discursive work had to be performed to translate these offensive weapons into metaphorical defences. The primary mechanism of ‘defence’ in the foreign policy and discourse of the Thatcher government was the construction and deployment of enough weapons to reach a state of ‘balance’ with the USSR. Weapons and arms races thus became the default tools of balance and defence employed by governments. By contrast, people in the UK who argued for disarmament were accused by the Conservative government of being dangerous and subversive. Defence in Thatcher’s Britain essentially referred to what Fowler and Marshall, respectively a linguist and a literary scholar, called the ‘real Conservative objective’ — building more nuclear weapons.²² As Dalby points out, the actual processes by which these nuclear strategies and exercises in bomb-building translated into defence — whatever form they took — were obscured by strategic theory and appeals to expert authority. Reagan and Thatcher took it as given that missiles were defensive — they did not need to explain why this was the case.

‘Press Conference After Meeting with President Gorbachev’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 13 March 1985; Margaret Thatcher, ‘Interview for Der Spiegel’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 22 April 1985.

21 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Press Conference for Chinese Correspondents’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 8 May 1985.

22 Roger Fowler and Tim Marshall, ‘The War Against Peacemongering: Language and Ideology’, in *Language and the Nuclear Arms Debate: Nukespeak Today*, ed. Paul Chilton, Open Linguistics Series (London: Frances Pinter, 1985), 13.

Within this discourse, defence was a semi-mystical concept that had little connection to material events and which could easily be made to suit the purposes of power.

In 1985, Thatcher continued to claim that defence was a product of nuclear missiles — destructive weapons that could only be used to strike, suicidally, against the enemy. In March 1985, a month after the arms negotiations had been resumed, she announced the following to the House of Commons:

For any right hon. or hon. Member to suggest that he would remove cruise missiles from Britain and then close United States' nuclear bases here is thoroughly to undermine our defence and security, freedom and democracy.²³

Thatcher continued to insist on the primacy of defensive balance throughout the year, although this clashed with her claims that SDI was a 'defence against nuclear weapons.'²⁴ As she said in an interview for the *WSJ*, 'you have got to have some kind of balance between us.'²⁵ Thatcher used this conception of defence to set herself apart from her domestic political opponents. In a speech to a conference of the Scottish Conservative Party, she declared that her Labour opponents sought to eliminate British 'defences' entirely. If Labour had its way, the Soviets would have no reason to respect Britain and even the defensive alliance with the United States would collapse.²⁶ Defence, according to Thatcher, was the foundation of a sane world order.

She also argued that defence was inseparable from strength. As Thatcher told the Scottish Conservative Party Conference:

Only with a defence that is strong, and known to be strong, can we in the West safely conduct a dialogue with the Soviet Union. Only with a defence that is strong, and known to be strong, can we hope to negotiate balanced and verifiable treaties that reduce weapons on both sides.²⁷

23 Margaret Thatcher, 'House of Commons PQs', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 12 March 1985.

24 Margaret Thatcher, 'Radio Interview for BBC Radio 4 It's Your World (Phone-In)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 28 April 1985; Thatcher, 'Interview for Der Spiegel'; Thatcher, 'Interview for Washington Post'; Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Party Conference', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 11 October 1985.

25 Thatcher, 'Interview for Wall Street Journal'.

26 Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to Scottish Party Conference', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 10 May 1985.

27 *Ibid.*

In this storyline, strength complemented defence and endowed the UK with the ability to influence the USSR. Strength could be measured in weapons, but also by a strong economy, strength of will, and strong alliances.²⁸ Through cultural, political, and economic strength, Thatcher's West could display mastery over the Soviet Union.

Beyond defence, the purpose of strength was to influence the Soviet Union. Now that negotiations had been resumed, Thatcher claimed to have evidence that her approach was an effective one. Western strength had changed Soviet behaviour, and thus it fulfilled promises about Western superiority. As Thatcher told the House of Commons on 12 March 1985, it was the 'strength and unity of the West' that had made the Geneva talks possible.²⁹ She invoked this theme again in October when she asked her audience at the Conservative Party Conference if they thought Gorbachev was the kind of person who would respect weakness.³⁰ She suggested that the Labour Party certainly seemed to think so. As a result, she argued that her success in cowing the Soviets was evidence that Labour's policies were wrong-headed. Because military strength and confidence successfully influenced the Soviets, the dismantling of that strength would put 'British soil' at risk.³¹ Thatcher's claim also emphasised the spatial element of her opposition to the Soviets. Strength and defence kept the Other from setting foot on British soil.

In the same speech, Thatcher drew attention to the importance of personal strength in addition to national strength. Reagan was an example of such strength, and she applauded his plans for the Geneva Summit. 'The West,' Thatcher added, 'could not have a better or a braver champion.'³² With this claim, Thatcher cast Reagan in the role of gladiator. He was not just the representative of NATO or the West but, as she said in a television interview, he was 'our champion as he goes to Geneva.'³³ Reagan was going there to conduct diplomacy, but it was conveyed with the metaphor of combat. He was particularly brave because he was *going* to Geneva. Summits, more than letter-writing or other forms of diplomacy, were spaces where the

28 Thatcher, 'Press Conference for Chinese Correspondents'; Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference After Addressing UN General Assembly', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 24 October 1985; Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference on Geneva Summit', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 21 November 1985; Margaret Thatcher, 'TV Interview for ITN (Bonn G7 Summit)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 4 May 1985.

29 Thatcher, 'House of Commons PQs', 12 March 1985.

30 Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Party Conference', 11 October 1985.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Margaret Thatcher, 'TV Interview for ITN (Visiting UN)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 24 October 1985.

distance between the Western Self and the Soviet Other was briefly nullified. Reagan would see the Other eye-to-eye and engage Gorbachev in close interpersonal combat. Just as weapons were used to counter the threat of Soviet encroachment on the geopolitical scale, Reagan's strength was expected to negate Soviet cunning at the negotiation table.

Strength, of the military kind or otherwise, was likewise essential to Reagan's explanation of international relations and American history. Speaking to the European Parliament in May 1985, Reagan reiterated his story of American revival after the dark years of doubt that were the 1970s. He described it as a time of 'growing Soviet and stagnating Western nuclear strength.'³⁴ Reagan further argued in early 1985 for a correlation between military strength and peace:

You know, we only have a military-industrial complex until a time of danger, and then it becomes the arsenal of democracy. Spending for defence is investing in things that are priceless—peace and freedom.³⁵

Similarly, in February 1986 Reagan claimed that 'the only guarantee of peace and freedom is our military strength and our national will.'³⁶ Perhaps the bluntest manifestation of the union between strength and peace was in the naming of weapons, like the American LGM-118A Peacekeeper missiles that were in preparation for deployment at the time.

Strength was, for Reagan, an effective way to influence Soviet behaviour. According to his February 1985 state of the union address, the US's 'determination to maintain a strong defence' was the key to the resumption of negotiations.³⁷ Likewise, in his address to the nation on national security at the end of February 1986, Reagan argued that American strength was 'a sheltering arm' to America's allies, and 'the most persuasive argument we have to convince our adversaries to negotiate seriously and to cease bullying other nations.'³⁸ Portraying himself as a bearer of special knowledge — perhaps a veteran — Reagan claimed to know from painful

34 Reagan, 'Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France 8 May 1985'.

35 Ronald Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union 6 February 1985', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 6 February 1985.

36 Ronald Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on National Security 26 February 1986', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 26 February 1986.

37 Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union 6 February 1985'.

38 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on National Security 26 February 1986'.

experience that the Soviets ‘respect only nations that negotiate from a position of strength.’³⁹ This claim was characteristic of the CPD discourse. Because the Soviet Union was ruthless and expansionist by nature, it could not be properly reasoned with.

Defence was the objective of the foreign policy discourse articulated by Reagan and Thatcher and strength was what they required to pursue it. How, then, did they conceptualise and describe the use of strength in pursuit of defence? The answer, theorised generations of strategists, was ‘deterrence.’ Reagan and Thatcher did not, however, take the time to explain how deterrence actually functioned or what it entailed. It was a given — constructed as common sense rather than a subject of critique. Deterrence was so deeply embedded within Cold War discourses that it was largely beyond question. As previously described, it was only when officials in the Reagan administration started arguing that a war could be fought instead of deterred that the foundations of the concept became subjects of widespread critique.⁴⁰

Deterrence concealed the actual practices of international relations. It was a vague term, used in ways that actively obscured the processes and discourses that justified it. However, the concept gave few clues as to the discursive work that had gone into building the connections between those mechanisms. According to linguist Paul Chilton:

In [the phrases] ‘NATO deters Russia’ and ‘nuclear arms deter Russia’ a caused event is asserted, namely, that Russia does not do some unspecified actions; the causing event is left equally unspecified.⁴¹

In the discourse of deterrence, the opponent was prevented from doing something (presumably attacking) by something else (the existence of nuclear arsenals). But the process by which cause resulted in event was invisible. In consequence, almost anything could be said to deter or be deterred. Any number of other factors bearing on Soviet decision-makers were hidden.

Thatcher gave some insight into the many possible meanings of deterrence in her interview with

39 Ibid.

40 Mehan, Nathanson, and Skelly, ‘Nuclear Discourse in the 1980s’, 138.

41 Paul Chilton, ‘Words, Discourse and Metaphors: The Meanings of Deter, Deterrent and Deterrence’, in *Language and the Nuclear Arms Debate: Nukespeak Today*, ed. Paul Chilton, Open Linguistics Series (London: Frances Pinter, 1985), 107.

the *WSJ* in May 1985.⁴² In this interview, deterrence took seemingly contradictory forms. First, she said ‘the greatest deterrent to ever getting involved in another [war]’ was ‘the practical memory of a war’ — not bombs at all. But then she went on to say that deterrence was something that could be purchased and which had a monetary cost. Building nuclear weapons was ‘the cheapest way to buy extra deterrence.’ However, she then made clear that nuclear weapons themselves were not always a deterrent. They were transformed into one when ‘someone is prepared to push the button.’

Cosmetically, Reagan and Thatcher gave similar descriptions of deterrence after March 1985. Reagan gave a typical explanation of what it entailed in his speech to the European Parliament in May 1985. He claimed that:

From the creation of NATO in 1949 through the early 1970’s, Soviet aggression was effectively deterred. The strength of Western economies, the vitality of our societies, the wisdom of our diplomacy all contributed to Soviet restraint; but certainly the decisive factor must have been the countervailing power — ultimately, military, and above all, nuclear power, which the West was capable of bringing to bear in the defense of its interests.⁴³

Thatcher likewise positioned military power at the centre of deterrence when she spoke to the International Democrat Union (an international organisation of centre-right political parties) in July. According to Thatcher, ‘the reality [is] that the defence of the West for many years will continue to depend upon deterrence through nuclear weapons.’⁴⁴ Both of these claims, by Reagan and Thatcher, aligned closely with one made by Thatcher in 1984. In April of that year, Thatcher told the Federation of Conservative Students that the policy of deterrence was directly responsible for the absence of global wars since World War II. She argued that ‘the nuclear deterrent is not just a phrase without meaning. ... It has deterred. It has preserved the peace in Europe for almost forty years.’⁴⁵

42 Thatcher, ‘Interview for Wall Street Journal’.

43 Reagan, ‘Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France 8 May 1985’.

44 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to International Democrat Union’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 25 July 1985.

45 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to Federation of Conservative Students Annual Conference’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 6 April 1984.

Despite continuing to be used in familiar ways, the word deterrence itself appeared comparatively few times in the major speeches of either Thatcher or Reagan between March 1985 and April 1986. Reagan did not explicitly use the word in any of his six major speeches between May 1985 and February 1986.⁴⁶ Thatcher mentioned deterrence frequently in press conferences and interviews, but rarely in her major speeches.⁴⁷ Yet, both of these speakers had consistently discussed deterrence during the previous year.⁴⁸ Where had deterrence gone? One possible answer is that it no longer served the strategic and diplomatic purposes of these two politicians and their advisers. 1985 was potentially the moment when the Reagan administration shifted its approach to the Soviet Union. However, I am not concerned with the development and evolution of foreign policy, but instead the evolution of what people said about the Soviet Union. Looking through the lens of discourse, not policy, reveals another change that coincided with the temporary absence of deterrence. That change was the growing dominance of SDI in the discourses of both Reagan and Thatcher.

The Strategic Defense Initiative

SDI was a program of research into futuristic ways of stopping incoming ballistic missiles. In its first iteration, under the Reagan administration, the intended final product was space-based lasers that could destroy missiles in mid-air, or even in the silo.⁴⁹ Given the visions such a plan conjured of miniature Death Stars orbiting the earth, it is no surprise that it was given the

46 Ronald Reagan, 'Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Bar Association 8 July 1985', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 8 July 1985; Reagan, 'Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985'; Ronald Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 14 November 1985', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 14 November 1985; Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Following the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 21 November 1985'; Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986'.

47 Thatcher, 'Press Conference After Meeting with President Gorbachev'; Thatcher, 'TV Interview for ITN (Bonn G7 Summit)'; Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference for British Journalists (Visiting Washington)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 26 July 1985; Margaret Thatcher, 'Interview for Press Trust of India', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 12 October 1985.

48 For a highly abbreviated list of examples, see: Reagan, 'Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations 16 January 1984'; Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 12 June 1984'; Reagan, 'Address to the 39th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York 24 September 1984'; Thatcher, 'Speech to Federation of Conservative Students Annual Conference'; Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Women's Conference', 23 May 1984; Thatcher, 'Speech to the European Atlantic Group'.

49 Westwick, "'Space-Strike Weapons' and the Soviet Response to SDI*", 959.

moniker 'Star Wars'. According to Reagan, however, SDI was much more benevolent than implied by the nickname that he studiously avoided.

When Reagan first announced SDI in 1983, he stated that he was motivated by the belief that it was necessary to remove the threat of nuclear war. He wanted to '[rise] above dealing with other nations and human beings by threatening their existence.'⁵⁰ When he spoke at the United Nations in October 1985, two and a half years after his first 'Star Wars' speech, Reagan took the opportunity to elaborate his plan — as he had many times before. This took place several weeks before the Geneva Summit. As in the following quote, his explanation was particularly poetic:

Surely, the world will sleep more secure when these missiles have been rendered useless, militarily and politically; when the sword of Damocles that has hung over our planet for too many decades is lifted by Western and Russian scientists working to shield their citizens and one day shut down space as an avenue of weapons of mass destruction.⁵¹

In this quote, Reagan blended old claims about the Soviet Union with a vision for the future that he identified as new (or even part of a second American Revolution, as he had claimed in February 1985).⁵² He suggested that military competition between the USA and the USSR was, to some extent, historically predestined. This argument closely mirrored those made by the CPD. However, Reagan also described Soviets and Americans working together against a terrible force that he identified as the true threat: the entire paradigm of nuclear strategy. As Fischer has pointed out, from 1984 onwards Reagan increasingly spoke of war itself as a threat.⁵³ Within the context of Reagan's discourse, this seemed on the surface to be a radical reassessment. Traditionally, the USSR and its potential for ideological subversion had been the primary source of threat.⁵⁴ Thus, when he had first announced SDI, Reagan had said that its

50 Ronald Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security March 23, 1983', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 23 March 1983.

51 Reagan, 'Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985'.

52 Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union 6 February 1985'.

53 Fischer, 'Toeing the Hardline?', 487.

54 Campbell, *Writing Security*, 26.

purpose was 'to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive.'⁵⁵ It was not primarily about preventing war, but about countering the Soviets. He had described SDI as one-sided — designed to protect Americans from the USSR. At the United Nations, though, he insisted that there was a path to a future in which the Soviets ceased to be the existentially threatening Other.

This was, however, only a fleeting redrawing of the battle lines. The Soviet Union in the here and now, Reagan insisted, was as troublesome as ever. Within the same UN speech, he suggested that Soviet claims of peaceful intent were disproven by '118,000 Soviet troops prosecuting war against the Afghan people,' as well as those in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Angola, and Nicaragua. These imperial projects were driven in this story by the coercive nature of Marxism-Leninism.⁵⁶ Thus, while Reagan conceded that the USA bore some responsibility for the perpetuation of MAD, he claimed again that the US was only acting defensively in response to Soviet aggression. Whatever hopes he expressed for the future of the USSR, his explanation of SDI (in late 1985) portrayed the Soviet Other as aggressive and the United States as enlightened.

Reagan portrayed SDI as a means of escaping reliance on deterrence, and thus MAD. For him to explain why this was the case, he needed to engage with the tensions within discourses about defence and deterrence and outline why they were unsuitable. For instance, Reagan predicted an end to the Cold War. Yet an arms race justified by deterrence could potentially be carried on indefinitely. The stance of the Reagan administration had mandated this. Supposedly, the arms race would eventually give way either to a profound political crisis in the Soviet Union or a nuclear war. By this logic, the objectives of both out-spending and potentially out-fighting the USSR required constant development of better and more plentiful weapons.⁵⁷ Such a conception of international relations was not only horrifying in its apocalyptic implications, but also financially unviable. Reagan's discourse about SDI answered this crisis by challenging the perpetuation of the arms race. He portrayed a future in which SDI negated the necessity of building new weapons. Once that had been achieved, states could simply improve their *defences* as they wished. He claimed that the costs of SDI were justified by contrast to the costs

55 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security March 23, 1983'.

56 Reagan, 'Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985'.

57 Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 151–52.

of the arms race. The arms race could cost countless lives, whereas SDI would only cost money. Unlike the development of weapons, Reagan noted with a rhetorical flourish that SDI could ‘save millions of lives, indeed humanity itself.’⁵⁸

SDI was in large part a redefinition of strategy, but Reagan also started to rewrite the metaphorical language by which it was justified. He described SDI as a shield, rather than a weapon. In February 1986 Reagan gave two of his most important domestic speeches of that year: the state of the union address, and an address on national security. In both of these televised speeches, Reagan said that SDI was a ‘security shield.’⁵⁹ He described its purpose in two different ways — to ‘render nuclear weapons obsolete’ or to ‘protect us and our allies.’ But although its stated purpose varied, the central concept remained the same. Reagan maintained that SDI was a ‘nonnuclear defense against ballistic missiles’ that would subvert the assumptions on which nuclear war discourse was based.⁶⁰ In that sense, he depicted the initiative as a ‘true’ defence, as opposed to the false defence of deterrence.

By focusing on defence and claiming to reject weapons, Reagan’s discourse about SDI was an attempt to redefine the concept of defence. Previously, a discursive paradigm of deterrence precluded actual defence in favour of offensive capabilities. Essentially, defence was reduced to a euphemism. Defence was the goal that deterrence — itself a misleading term — was supposed to promote, even though it derived from overwhelming nuclear force. The effect of deterrence and defence discourse was ultimately to portray immensely destructive weapons as passive, reactive, not inherently threatening, at least as long as they were possessed by Westerners. The metaphorical defence that was constructed by deterrence did not, however, offer a particularly effective *shield*. For instance, deterrence assumed that any government possessing nuclear weapons would engage in rational game-theory to determine its strategy. Thus, it was unlikely that a missile would ever be fired. But it could not defend against a missile that was launched accidentally or by some party that did not suffer the same constraints as a superpower like the USSR. Given the increasing prominence of terrorism and ‘rogue’ states in public discourse, the assumption that nuclear weapons would not proliferate was not a safe

58 Reagan, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union 6 February 1985’.

59 Reagan, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986’; Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation on National Security 26 February 1986’.

60 Reagan, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union 6 February 1985’.

one. Reagan claimed to offer an answer for this failure of defence: if the USSR and the US both had foolproof anti-missile systems they would cease to be mutually vulnerable and would instead become invulnerable. Perhaps the whole world could be protected.

Despite Reagan's efforts, hindsight shows us that he did not escape the logics of deterrence or MAD in 1985, let alone the Cold War paradigm. Nuclear conflict still imperils the world and the engines of the Cold War were not decommissioned in Geneva. Neither did Reagan escape the discursive tensions and contradictions inherent to these concepts. In fact, Reagan's discourse remained firmly upon the foundations of existing discursive structures. The logic that gave these structures their scaffolding could not change their shape or purge themselves of tensions and contradictions so easily. Thatcher's explanations about SDI, which differed from those of Reagan, revealed and addressed some of these tensions.

Thatcher was, overall, an enthusiastic supporter of Reagan's foreign policy — including SDI. The degree of common ground between them is hardly surprising. Not only had Reagan and Thatcher consulted directly with each other about the initiative, but it had also been endorsed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).⁶¹ Furthermore, she justified the importance of the initiative in a similar way to Reagan — with reference to Soviet aggression. In a speech to the Conservative Women's Conference on 22 May 1985, Thatcher went even further than usual in speaking about the danger presented by the USSR. She often claimed that the Soviet military build-up was evidence of expansionist desires and disregard for peace. But, in this speech, she argued that 'our nuclear deterrent would fail if the day ever came when the Soviet Union knew they could stop our nuclear weapons but we could not stop theirs.'⁶² Her implication was that, without SDI, the USSR would take direct hostile action against the West.

However, arguments like this one — which were similar to Reagan's portrayal of Soviet behaviour — indicated contradictions between them. Unlike Reagan, Thatcher did not describe SDI as a way to escape the necessity of deterrence or the possibility of inflicting massive damage with a nuclear strike.⁶³ Instead, she portrayed it as a common-sense way to build a better deterrent. She explained her approach at length in two newspaper interviews. In an interview

61 NATO, 'Final Communiqué Chairman: Lord Carrington.', *NATO*, accessed 25 July 2016.

62 Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Women's Conference', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 22 May 1985.

63 Thatcher, 'Interview for Wall Street Journal'.

with *The Times* in March 1986, four months after Reagan and Gorbachev gone to Geneva and talked about the total elimination of nuclear weapons, Thatcher argued that both of her counterparts were misguided. According to Thatcher:

Both of them have expressed a view, both the President and Mr. Gorbachev, that they want to see a world without nuclear weapons. I cannot see a world without nuclear weapons.⁶⁴

This claim rejected the most important attribute of the optimistic future envisaged by Reagan. Whether the Americans and Soviets wanted to replace their bombs with ploughshares, as Reagan and Gorbachev agreed, was irrelevant. Nuclear weapons had already been invented and Thatcher responded that it simply was not possible to ‘disinvent the knowledge of how to make them.’⁶⁵ If the Soviet Union was not building bombs, someone else would. This meant that SDI was essential to defence, because when some third party developed nuclear weapons, said Thatcher, any rational person would want to be ‘jolly certain you had got an SDI to stop it.’ For Thatcher, SDI was not the guarantor of a world free of nuclear weapons — a concept she told Geoffrey Smith, *The Times*’ interviewer, was a ‘pie in the sky.’ SDI was less than that. It was purely a matter of practicality.⁶⁶

Even before casting doubt on the Genevan optimism of the President and the General Secretary, Thatcher had expressed lower expectations about SDI. In her interview for the *WSJ* in May 1985, she had argued that SDI could not be foolproof. She questioned Reagan’s notion that SDI could facilitate disarmament by negating offensive weapons. Even with a system for shooting down missiles, there would always be some that got through. Something like SDI might lessen the devastation, but it was not in itself enough to prevent ‘unacceptable damage.’ To explain her argument, Thatcher employed an elaborate metaphor in her *WSJ* interview that subverted Reagan’s depiction of SDI as a shield designed by Russian and Western scientists for their citizens.⁶⁷ She said:

64 Margaret Thatcher, ‘Interview for The Times’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 24 March 1986.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Reagan, ‘Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985’.

Every single weapon you have had in history you try to develop a defence against, and that makes sense. You have an aeroplane carrying a bomb, so you have anti-aircraft guns; you have radar; you have missiles and then the aircraft develops possibilities which throw off some of them, but some of the missiles get through and some of the aircraft get through.⁶⁸

SDI was thus another defence against nuclear weapons that would itself eventually be superseded. Shields do not stop wars from happening — they just make people better at them. Inevitably, even shields become obsolete. Reagan claimed that SDI was important because it could let him navigate a path out of MAD. Thatcher, on the other hand, implied that SDI, like everything else built for war, was simply the next step in the never-ending struggle to avoid it.

Thatcher questioned the extent to which SDI could lead to an escape from reliance on deterrence and thus, ultimately, the Cold War. However, she was only pointing out internal contradictions within Reagan's discourse that already existed — they did not come into being purely because she highlighted them. These tensions emerged from the discursive foundations on which Reagan was building. It was far from certain that SDI could accomplish the technical feats that Reagan claimed.⁶⁹ But other tensions emerged from unspoken assumptions within his discourse. Reagan attempted to redefine defence in a way that portrayed nuclear weapons and MAD as illegitimate, yet he continued to call for increases to defence spending on weapons as well as 'shields.' Likewise, Reagan continued to argue that the key to abolishing weapons was building more of them. He persisted in his praise for the self-identified renewal of American military power, and claimed that it was a vital part of the American narrative — while simultaneously describing weapons and war as symptoms of madness.

Given Reagan's stated intentions, it was problematic that SDI could not offer an escape from the paradigm of Cold War conflict. As Dalby argues, SDI challenged none of the assumptions on which the discursive infrastructure of the Cold War was built. Star Wars depended on the never-ending development of more powerful technology and more 'rational' means of predicting the strategies of the enemy. More fundamental for Dalby's argument and

68 Thatcher, 'Interview for Wall Street Journal'.

69 Westwick, "Space-Strike Weapons" and the Soviet Response to SDI*, 969–70.

my purposes was that SDI depended on the narrative that the Soviet Union was an Other that must be excluded, defended against, and ultimately combated.⁷⁰ Yet Reagan claimed that he wanted to move beyond the use of conflict as a way of interacting with the world. His discourse supported this claim in occasional instances, such as when he described Soviets and Americans fighting together against the inhuman threat of the bomb. However, his discourse and the logic of SDI depended on the existence of the Soviet Other to give them meaning. As long as the Soviet Union was constructed as a threat, it could not somehow become a friend or ally except for a few brief moments. SDI offered a way to control the Other, or would eventually, but it did not offer Reagan any easy way to negate its Otherness. The two factors that Reagan described as obstacles to peace were the paradigm of MAD and the Soviet Union, and his challenge to the former was neutralised by the existence of the latter.

Ronald Reagan on Peace

As Reagan announced in his February 1985 state of the union address, peace began at home from where it could spread into the wider world.⁷¹ Places outside of the US — like Europe — were ideological battlegrounds upon which peace was actively contested.⁷² But peace had to be global for it to be meaningful, as Reagan explained a month before the Geneva Summit, in October 1985, during his address to the United Nations General Assembly.⁷³ This address was the most global of the speeches he gave between March 1985 and April 1986 in terms of both content and audience. Reagan repeatedly declared — not just in this speech, but consistently — that the objective of his foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, including SDI, was peace. In his UN address, he used the word peace 30 times — more than any other significant word, like world (24), people (23), or Soviet (22). This number was exceptional even for Reagan, but the language of peace permeated all of his discourse about the USSR.

⁷⁰ Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 152–67.

⁷¹ Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union 6 February 1985'.

⁷² Reagan, 'Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France 8 May 1985'.

⁷³ Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union 6 February 1985'; Reagan, 'Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France 8 May 1985'; Reagan, 'Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985'.

Reagan continued to claim in 1985 that the Soviet Union was an obstacle to peace. He insisted that Americans had a desire for peace that set them apart from Soviets. By his logic, any action taken by the US could be assumed to be in service to peace. Any exceptions represented temporary mistakes of judgement, as in the case of the Iran-Contra controversy that rocked the Reagan administration in 1987.⁷⁴ Conversely, any action taken by the USSR, especially those that challenged American objectives, could be defined as hostile to peace. Given Reagan's global focus in this area, his discourse about peace interacted with the spatial interpretation of Soviet Otherness. Soviet interference beyond its own borders was invasive, while Western adventures and interventions were framed as reluctant attempts to keep the threatening enemy at bay. Thus, Reagan used the discourse of peace both to mark the difference of the USSR and explain how that difference could, one day, be erased.

But what did Reagan actually mean when he talked about peace? While arms control was one component of his definition, it was not the only one. 'When we speak of peace,' he stated before the Geneva Summit, 'we should not mean just the absence of war. True peace rests on the pillars of individual freedom, human rights, national self-determination, and respect for the rule of law.'⁷⁵ Some of the components of peace that he named were free travel between countries and an uncensored mass media.⁷⁶ He also identified threats to peace — and these threats further defined what peace was. The threats included:

- '... state policies of intimidation, threats, and the constant quest for domination.'⁷⁷
- '... the long history of Soviet brutality toward those who are weaker.'⁷⁸
- '... espionage and state terror.'⁷⁹
- 'A government which does not respect its citizens' rights and its international commitments to protect those rights.'⁸⁰

74 Ronald Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy 4 March 1987', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 4 March 1987.

75 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 14 November 1985'.

76 Ibid.

77 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on National Security 26 February 1986'.

78 Ibid.

79 Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986'.

Reagan's definition of peace was framed by human rights and the norms of democratic governance. It was thus tailor-made to support his criticisms of the Soviet Union. After all, each of the peace-threatening behaviours that he described were Soviet ones. The West, he implied, indulged in none of them. Thus, while Reagan framed peace as global, he defined it according to criteria that were specifically Western.

Like Thatcher, Reagan had previously stated that the people of democratic countries were inherently peaceful.⁸¹ In his state of the union address in 1986, Reagan claimed that Americans epitomised this peaceful Western spirit. According to Reagan 'no people on Earth hate war or love peace more than we Americans.'⁸² Westerners in general, but especially Americans, supposedly had a special understanding of peace because of a characteristic that he described as innate to democratic governments: freedom. Reagan used his 1985 state of the union address to make explicit the connection between American freedom and peace in the wider world. The following claims from his address were typical of his discourse:⁸³

1. 'We're here to stand, and proudly so, for all who struggle to break free from totalitarianism, for all who know in their hearts that freedom is the one true path to peace and human happiness.'
2. 'The time has come to proceed toward a great new challenge — a second American Revolution of hope and opportunity; ... a revolution that carries beyond our shores the golden promise of human freedom in a world of peace.'
3. 'We're poised as never before to create a safer, freer, more peaceful world.'

80 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 14 November 1985'.

81 Thatcher, 'Press Conference at British Embassy in Washington'; Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 12 June 1984'.

82 Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986'.

83 Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union 6 February 1985'.

4. 'Harry Truman once said that, ultimately, our security and the world's hopes for peace and human progress "lie not in measures of defense or in the control of weapons, but in the growth and expansion of freedom and self-government.'"
5. 'Freedom is not the sole prerogative of a chosen few; it is the universal right of all God's children. Look to where peace and prosperity flourish today. It is in homes that freedom built. Victories against poverty are greatest and peace most secure where people live by laws that ensure free press, free speech, and freedom to worship, vote, and create wealth.'

Such claims were linked together by more than just references to peace and freedom. In all statements except the third, the relationship between freedom and peace was one based on motion and space. In the first example, Reagan portrayed those oppressed by totalitarianism as breaking free from constraints, and following a path at the end of which lay peace. In the second, he declared that the second American Revolution proceeded from the geographical boundaries of the US and carried the message of peace, breaking free from its own previous isolation in the process. In the fourth statement, Reagan explained that freedom grew and expanded. So, too, did self-government, an inverted form of the creeping growth of big government that Reagan claimed to detest. In the final example, Reagan said that if his audience looked around they would see the peaceful benefits of freedom. Implicitly, as (mostly) American citizens, they would see the US. Peace was a by-product of the American system of government, which itself could not be constrained. Unsurprisingly, Reagan connected the growth of freedom to the success of his administration. He had claimed upon his second inauguration that he had successfully answered a cry for freedom: freedom from big government, freedom from tax, freedom from the fear of Soviet weapons.⁸⁴ Thanks to these freedoms, he argued, the United States was uniquely able to carry peace into the world.

Even though free citizens were well-placed to promote peace, in Reagan's discourse, peace did not come from governments. Instead, it came from people's natural desires. Reagan's insistence that desire for peace was a universal part of human nature was on display especially

⁸⁴ Reagan, 'Inaugural Address 21 January 1985'.

in his speech to the UN General Assembly in October 1985. Taking the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as his cue, Reagan articulated a theory of human nature and its relationship with government. He insisted once again that freedom was ‘the universal right of all God’s children.’⁸⁵ Further, he claimed to have evidence that freedom was a universal right. This was because it was ‘practical and beneficial’, but also because Reagan could see the harm that was done to peace when governments tried to control people. In Reagan’s words:

Free people whose governments rest upon the consent of the governed do not wage war on their neighbours. Free people blessed by economic opportunity and protected by laws that respect the dignity of the individual are not driven toward the domination of others.

He presented this simply as a self-evident part of human nature. The metaphors of movement and space that he used here appeared also throughout his speech, as they later did in the 1986 state of the union address discussed above. The ideal relationship of government to the citizen, Reagan implied, was one in which the government was at rest according to the will of the people. On the other hand, an assertive state *drove* its citizens in ways that were harmful to them and to their neighbours. Throughout the speech, Reagan invoked the ‘human spirit’ that desired to be free and that created a better world when it was liberated. He argued that, when given freedom, including the freedom to travel, people were able to fulfil their peaceful natures.

Reagan portrayed communism, by contrast, as a system built on the glorification of the state. Given that the natural desires of people all over the world were so benevolent when left unchecked, such a system was a crime against God. In May 1985, to make this point in his speech to the European Parliament, Reagan used an implicit comparison between the Soviets and the Nazis. He described Western European resistance to communism — both after World War II and in the present — as similar to resistance against fascism. However, he only used the word ‘fascism’ once and the word ‘fascist’ not at all — as opposed to ‘totalitarian’, which he used four times. The first three instances of ‘totalitarian’ appeared in his speech before fascism reared its ugly head. In this speech, both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were totalitarian

⁸⁵ Reagan, ‘Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985’.

powers, although Reagan did not explicitly name the Soviet Union. The implied comparison was clear — Reagan’s depiction of the Nazis closely echoed his favourite criticisms of the Soviet Union. In the following excerpt from his speech, ‘Nazi Germany’ could easily be replaced with ‘Soviet Russia’:

We know they were totalitarians who used the state, which they had elevated to the level of a god, to inflict war on peaceful nations and genocide on innocent peoples. We know of the existence of evil in the human heart, and we know that in Nazi Germany that evil was institutionalized, given power and direction by the state and those who did its bidding. We also know that early attempts to placate the totalitarians did not save us from war. They didn’t save us from war; in fact they guaranteed war. There are lessons to be learned in this and never forgotten.⁸⁶

Reagan’s criticism of totalitarians in 1985 echoed his ‘evil empire’ speech of 1983. Speaking to the National Association of Evangelicals, Reagan had warned his audience against the institutionalisation of godless evil:

It was C. S. Lewis who, in his unforgettable *Screwtape Letters*, wrote: ‘The greatest evil is not done now in those sordid “dens of crime” that Dickens loved to paint. It is not even done in concentration camps and labour camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried and minuted) in clear, 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.’

Well, because these ‘quiet men’ do not ‘raise their voices,’ because they sometimes speak in soothing tones of brotherhood and peace, because, like other dictators before them, they’re always making ‘their final territorial demand,’ some would have us accept them at their word and accommodate ourselves to their aggressive impulses. But if history teaches anything, it teaches that simple-minded appeasement or wishful thinking about our adversaries is folly.

Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union shared a profound heresy in this narrative arc: they replaced God with the state. The state became a demonic force, like Lewis’s *Screwtape*,

⁸⁶ Reagan, ‘Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France 8 May 1985’.

magnifying humanity's potential for evil and pushing countries to make territorial demands. Thus, according to Reagan, the worship of the state resulted in the warped behaviour of the Soviets. Placing the state above God went against both the heavenly order of things and 'the nature of man.' In its flagrant disregard for the proper way of things, worship of the state made war more likely.⁸⁷

Although Soviet communism was a demonic force, Reagan repeatedly suggested that the everyday people living within it were much the same as anyone else. Whether they were Soviet citizens or Afghani people, Reagan described them as having fallen under the sway of a domineering force through no fault of their own. Whatever their system of government, these people — 'God's children' — deserved and desired peace. Reagan had used this thread previously, including in his fable from January 1984 about Anya and Ivan, the Soviet citizens who were not so different from their American counterparts.⁸⁸ Then, speaking in 1985 about the upcoming Geneva Summit, he reminded his audience that 'people don't start wars, governments do.'⁸⁹ Reagan even suggested to an audience of lawyers in July 1985 that the longing of the Soviet people for freedom and self-rule — a longing felt by all who suffered under totalitarianism — might soon result in their liberation.⁹⁰ The growth of freedom, in the Soviet Union as in America, was portrayed as a force that could not be defeated and could not be stopped.

The changes that took place in Reagan's discourse over the following years hinged on this definition of peace as a natural state that emerged when individuals expressed their freedom. This discourse brought to the surface key themes that shaped his changing depictions of the USSR after Geneva and throughout the last years of his presidency — the fundamental sameness of Soviet and American people, the superiority of Western norms, and critiques of the state. Becoming most obvious in 1985, Reagan's discourse about how to influence the USSR moved away from one of war and geopolitics towards one of personal encounters, reduced

87 Reagan, 'Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985'.

88 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations 16 January 1984'.

89 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 14 November 1985'.

90 Reagan, 'Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Bar Association 8 July 1985'.

distance and missionary work. These themes allowed Reagan one avenue to bypass the discursive failure of SDI to escape the Cold War paradigm, although this path had its own obstacles.

Central to this evolution was Reagan's definition of peace as more than the absence of war. Agreements, summits and 'balance' were not enough. Peace had moral and spiritual dimensions, in addition to spatial ones. To show this, Reagan discursively shrunk the distance between himself and Soviet people, as well as people in places like Afghanistan. He declared that everyday people all over the world were basically the same — the kind of people you might like to invite over for dinner. Because people were all basically the same, Reagan claimed that harm done to people anywhere in the world was a crime against one unified community — that of 'God's children.' Regardless of what country the victims of domineering governments called home or by what laws they were governed, Reagan insisted that he had the moral authority to respond to their suffering as he would the suffering of an American. As he said to the UN, 'a peace based on averting our eyes from trouble cannot be true peace. The consequences of conflict are every bit as tragic when the destruction is contained within one country.'⁹¹ Reagan went even further at the end of his speech, as shown in the following statement:

America is committed to the world because so much of the world is inside America. ... The blood of each nation courses through the American vein and feeds the spirit that compels us to involve ourselves in the fate of this good Earth. It is the same spirit that warms our heart in concern to help ease the desperate hunger that grips proud people on the African Continent. It is the internationalist spirit that came together last month when our neighbour Mexico was struck suddenly by an earthquake.

By claiming that the world was inside America, Reagan suspended the concept of spatial difference altogether. He implied that people were drawn together over vast distances by spirit. This did not just mean that Americans saw themselves in other people, but that other people saw themselves in the United States. It was a bi-directional relationship. In light of this, Reagan elsewhere described a letter smuggled from a Soviet 'labour camp' as evidence that the US was

⁹¹ Reagan, 'Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York 24 October 1985'.

the hope motivating the women who wrote it, and a hope for the world.⁹² The bond Reagan created between everyday people, like himself and the imprisoned Soviet women, transcended the rules of physical space.

Despite this metaphysical closeness to people, Reagan continued to claim that borders were still a problem. They exerted an oppressive force on people and their relationships. He often called for borders to be torn down and movement to be facilitated. For the sake of peace, Reagan said, ideas, people, money, and democracy needed to be able to move freely. When borders were removed, democracy could be nurtured. In opposition to these metaphors of nature, control and borders were always artificial. Soviet borders were the most egregious examples of the artificiality of control and it was especially important to Reagan that they be torn down. The partition of Europe into 'free' and Soviet was one such border. Thus, Reagan told the European Parliament that 'the United States is committed not only to a partnership with Europe, the United States is committed to an end to the artificial division of Europe.'⁹³ Borders around the Soviet Union itself were still problematic, according to Reagan, but they were more tolerable than the Iron Curtain. It was not the same kind of transgression. The violent division of Europe into West and East was imposed on something beyond the USSR and over which the Soviets had no claim to authority.

There was a significant tension within this discourse. Reagan called for the tearing down of all borders, but constructed strict discursive borders around the Soviet Union itself. Unlike democracy, the spread of communism was portrayed not as a natural movement but an invasive one. Furthermore, Reagan insisted that because communism was hostile to human nature, it could only spread through the use of force. This led to the USSR's illegitimate attempts to 'export its system' to other countries.⁹⁴ Reagan's televised address about Nicaragua demonstrated this theme, although it took place in March 1986. He described the conflict in Nicaragua as an indication of the horror caused when 'Soviet-bloc Communists' travelled beyond their borders and into 'our hemisphere.'⁹⁵ In Reagan's discourse, once Soviet influence

92 Reagan, 'Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Bar Association 8 July 1985'.

93 Reagan, 'Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France 8 May 1985'.

94 Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986'.

95 Ronald Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua 16 March 1986', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 16 March 1986.

had spread to Nicaragua it could metastasize and invade the body of the United States itself.⁹⁶ The objectives of the Soviet Union were obvious, he claimed, because of how close Nicaragua was to the United States ('two hours flying time from our own borders') and how far away it was from the USSR. Reagan asked his audience, 'what in the world are Soviets, East Germans, Bulgarians, North Koreans, Cubans, and terrorists from the PLO and the Red Brigades doing in our hemisphere, camped on our own doorstep? Is that for peace?'⁹⁷ Implicitly, they were preparing to invade or subvert. Soviet movement outside of the Soviet bloc could not be legitimate. Reagan gave no concession that the Soviets in Nicaragua might have shared a spirit with Nicaraguans in the same way that Americans shared a spirit with Mexicans. Because communists were involved, and because it was outside of Eastern Europe, the Soviets could only be acting in pursuit of self-interest.

Because the USSR was harmful to peace and ultimately self-interested, Reagan called for strict regulation of Soviet movement. In many ways this was the essence of the doctrines of containment and rollback. Containment was intended to stop the USSR from spreading and rollback, or the Reagan Doctrine, was intended to reverse Soviet gains. Both concepts were in line with the discourse of the CPD.⁹⁸ So, too, was Reagan's claim that there was a profound difference between the Soviet people and the Soviet state.⁹⁹ However, while Reagan echoed some components of the CPD discourse — the regulation of Soviet movement and an understanding of the Soviet Union as totalitarian — his articulation of these points diverged.

Despite Reagan's discursive attempts to confine the USSR to its Eastern prison, he gave permission for individual Soviets to move occasionally beyond those borders in very specific circumstances. Surprisingly, considering his vilification of the Soviet state, this involved reducing the space between the Soviet and American governments. Such reductions could only take place in environments that were regulated and heavy in ritual. Thus, Reagan called in his May speech to the European Parliament for ritualistic meetings of military agents. These included the exchange of military observers 'at military exercises and locations,' more high-level military contacts 'to develop better understanding,' and the creation of 'a permanent military-to-

96 Dudas, 'Subversives All!', 146.

97 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua 16 March 1986'.

98 Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 38–39.

99 *Ibid.*, 83–84.

military communications link.¹⁰⁰ But Reagan carefully pointed out that this was not a 'convergence'. Two societies were not coming closer, however, the people within those societies were. The Geneva Summit was one environment where it was permissible to Reagan, at least for a little while, for the Soviets to emerge from their den. This represented a discursive shift. While Reagan had argued for a coming together of American in Soviet people since January 1984, he did not meet a Soviet leader during his first term in office and had taken few actions to make such a meeting happen.

Reagan's most profound departure from hardline CPD discourse was his emphasis on the basic sameness of Soviet and non-Soviet people. Within Reagan's discourse, the warping of the human spirit caused by communism was entirely contingent on ideology. He did not once refer to the pre-Soviet past of Soviet cultures or countries in his major speeches from March 1985 to April 1986. This was in sharp contrast with the thesis put forward by Richard Pipes that Soviet domestic oppression was a result of Russian history and that aggressive Russian foreign policy was an inheritance from nothing less than the Byzantine Empire.¹⁰¹ Although it is outside the scope of this thesis to analyse Reagan's motivations, context is provided for his insistence on universal humanity by an encounter that Foglesong describes taking place between Reagan and Gorbachev. Foglesong writes:

At Geneva, Gorbachev praised God that there had been no war between the US and the USSR, observed that 'God provides information only very selectively and rarely,' and invoked a biblical injunction 'to gather stones which have been cast in the past.' In response, Reagan himself cited a biblical passage to the effect that 'we are all one blood regardless of where we live on Earth.'¹⁰²

As Foglesong argues, Reagan 'sought not merely to make deals with Soviet leaders but to convert them.'¹⁰³ Reagan, emphasising this missionary discourse, used Geneva to reduce dramatically the space that separated him from Mikhail Gorbachev, the new General Secretary of the USSR.

100 Reagan, 'Address to a Special Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France 8 May 1985'.

101 Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War*, 70–71.

102 Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 190.

103 *Ibid.*, 175.

Margaret Thatcher on Peace

Unlike Reagan, Thatcher claimed that, although nuclear weapons were terrible, the basic logic of deterrence was sound. She agreed with Reagan on one core point when it came to talking about peace: the USSR was dangerous and required containment. However, she disagreed about his fundamental distinction between the Soviet people and the Soviet state. She did not suggest that the Soviets could really be converted, although they could be pointed in the right direction. The purpose of summits was certainly not to attempt to cure them of their communism. Because the Soviet state was made up of Soviet people, oppression within the USSR was essentially self-inflicted. It was thus unfortunate, but not inherently an assault on peace. Instead, Thatcher described peace as being about relationships between governments.

The spatial dimension, rather than moral or spiritual ones, was dominant in Thatcher's discourse about peace. Her definition of peace meant leaving other countries more-or-less alone to conduct their own business. Her interview for the *WSJ* in May 1985 showed this approach. She told the interviewer that 'democracies are peace-loving by their very nature, because you know, in freedom you want to get on with your own lives and getting a better standard of living.'¹⁰⁴ The same idea of 'getting on' and getting a better standard of living suffused her discourse about peace with the Soviet Union. It was the restless and domineering spirit of the Soviet Union that made peace more difficult to achieve. In another interview, given to the *WP* in March 1985, Thatcher described the 'missionary' tendencies of the Soviets:

There is an evangelical element in their system and they are positive that both it's inevitable, and you have to help it to come about. That therefore makes them do things overseas to help that we perhaps don't do.¹⁰⁵

She claimed that the Soviet Union's evangelical tendencies, which stemmed from Marxism-Leninism, caused a lack of security in the world. To accept that the Soviets desired peace, she had 'to be convinced by [Soviet] actions beyond their own boundaries that they too recognise the right of other countries to live in peace and security, and to choose their own way of life.'¹⁰⁶

104 Thatcher, 'Interview for Wall Street Journal'.

105 Thatcher, 'Interview for Washington Post'.

106 Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech at Lord Mayor's Banquet', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 11 November 1985.

The West would never attempt to export its system, argued Thatcher, and that was what set it apart from the USSR.

In 1983, Thatcher's tone had been different. She had announced to the Canadian parliament in 1983 that 'freedom is on the march.'¹⁰⁷ But between 1984 and 1985 a missionary theme was largely absent in her discourse. She did express a desire for more Soviet officials to travel to the UK so that they could 'see a different way of life,' but it was not a significant theme in her commentary.¹⁰⁸ Reagan insisted that the United States had an evangelical responsibility to ensure peace around the world, whereas Thatcher in 1985 and 1986 defined the Western role as one of safeguarding sovereignty. Her basic pre-condition for peace was non-intervention, and she required it of the West as well as the USSR. She demonstrated this in the *WP* interview:

We believe in freedom and justice. We have not got a positive mission to convert the whole world to it. We certainly believe in fundamental human rights. ... But I think it's a mistake to think that we can export our system to the whole world. Our system depends upon our history, the character of our people, their education, their experience.¹⁰⁹

Thus, although she was vocal about her criticisms of the Soviet Union, Thatcher claimed to be uninterested in changing it. She even argued that democracy, which was designed to maximise the enjoyment of human rights, might not be appropriate for every country. It was up to governments to decide what worked best for their people. Sovereign governments, including that of the USSR, had the right to decide how they would govern. In this, Thatcher diverged sharply from Reagan. She likely would not have described Western attempts to interfere in Soviet affairs as negatively as she talked about Soviet meddling, but the logic of her discourse suggested that it would be inappropriate nonetheless. Soviet domestic policies were problematic, but for Thatcher that did not necessarily make them obstacles to peace.

While Thatcher, unlike Reagan, did not argue that the Soviet Union's domestic policies threatened world peace, she agreed that the restriction of freedom was ultimately destructive.

¹⁰⁷ Thatcher, 'Speech to the Canadian Parliament'.

¹⁰⁸ Thatcher, 'Interview for Wall Street Journal'.

¹⁰⁹ Thatcher, 'Interview for Washington Post'.

The Soviet system was based on fundamental misunderstandings about human nature and, as such, it did not work. In her *WP* interview, Thatcher expressed confusion at how centrally planned economies functioned. She explained with an anecdote about her time in Yugoslavia, but implied that the message was equally applicable to the USSR. According to Thatcher's story, she visited Yugoslavia at a time when there was a shortage of detergent. Every time she presented a solution ('tell your grocers to go out and buy some,' or 'there's plenty overseas'), her hosts explained that it would not work. Because none of her hosts thought this state of affairs was strange, she concluded that Westerners had special insight into human nature. Thatcher and her fellow democrats had 'some idea in theory of what a controlled society is like' and knew 'that it's not possible.'¹¹⁰ Echoing Reagan's argument that a lack of economic freedom was one of the USSR's great flaws, she also argued that 'because they have not got liberty, they have not got prosperity.'¹¹¹ If the Soviet Union allowed its people the economic freedoms that were their right, not only would standards of living improve, but the USSR might learn that the use of coercion in international relations was unacceptable.

Of course, while Thatcher maintained it was in the best interests of both Soviet leaders and the Soviet people to realise the error of their ways, she admitted that it was unlikely to happen. Because its system of government was based on such profound misunderstandings, the Soviet Union could not be made to work effectively. She described the 'fundamental dilemma of communism' as the knowledge that 'communism is not working, therefore we must do something different, but it must not deviate from that same thing.'¹¹² Even Gorbachev, one of the more cosmopolitan Soviets, could not be cured of his communism and there would be no point trying. Thatcher claimed that she could not convert him even if they both lived within 'a democratic society based on freedom and justice,' in which she could sway him with superior arguments.¹¹³ This was a significant departure from the totalitarian conception of the USSR advocated by the CPD, and even from Reagan. In contrast to Reagan, Thatcher did not describe communism as a near-demonic force. The difference between the 'free society' of the West and

110 *Ibid.*

111 Margaret Thatcher, 'Radio Interview for BBC Radio 3', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 17 December 1985, 3.

112 Thatcher, 'Interview for Wall Street Journal'.

113 Margaret Thatcher, 'Radio Interview for BBC (Visiting Moscow)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 13 March 1985.

the 'unfree Communist society' of the Soviet bloc was not the difference between good and evil. Unlike Reagan, Thatcher did not even use the word 'evil,' implicitly or otherwise, in reference to communism during 1985. Instead, as Thatcher said in a BBC radio interview in October 1985, the difference between societies was that 'the quality of life in the Western world and its prosperity is totally different from the quality of life in the Communist bloc.'¹¹⁴

Thatcher's insistence that the Soviets genuinely believed in their ideology, and that it was understandable they should do so, blurred Reagan's sharp distinction between the Soviet state and Soviet people. She made this point when she spoke to the International Democrat Union in July 1985. Thatcher argued that:

Those who are now in leading positions in the Soviet Union have never known anything but Communism. They do not think in any other terms. Their view of the world will remain dominated by their ideology.¹¹⁵

This was a claim that Thatcher had made several times. In this instance, her elaborate phrasing complicated her point, which was that no major ideological changes would happen within the USSR any time soon. Her use of the word 'dominated' implied that Soviet leaders (and thus the Soviet state) were just as misguided as the people over whom they ruled. The suggestion that the Soviets were all in it together — governors and governed — also corresponded with what she had said in Hungary in February 1984: 'I think Hungary is following the economic system which suits Hungary and I think it's very wise to follow an economic system that suits your own people.'¹¹⁶ Thatcher was frequently forthright in expressing a belief that the Soviet system was oppressive. However, that did not mean that it was artificially imposed. The Soviet people who lived under communism only did so because it worked for them.

For all that the USSR was dangerous, threatening, and unfree, Thatcher insisted on the possibility of '[doing] business' with the Soviets. They were collectively misguided, and had a poor understanding of her neoliberal depiction of the world, but they were basically rational actors. Both the Soviet state and individual Soviet people, especially Gorbachev, could be

114 Margaret Thatcher, 'Radio Interview for BBC (Visiting UN)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 24 October 1985.

115 Thatcher, 'Speech to International Democrat Union'.

116 Thatcher, 'Press Conference Visiting Hungary'.

negotiated with and persuaded. Gorbachev could not be convinced to tear up his Communist Party membership card, but Thatcher could make a political deal with him. Deterrence was an unpleasant part of the negotiating process, but Thatcher did not claim a desire to escape it entirely. Prior to the Geneva Summit, Thatcher expressed more comfort with the status quo of Cold War politics than Reagan. However, she did not adhere to the demonic totalitarian interpretation of the USSR. In consequence, she had less need than Reagan to restructure her discourse in order to express hope for the future of negotiations.

Geneva, Before and After

On 14 November, before flying to Geneva, Reagan outlined his expectations for the summit in a televised speech.¹¹⁷ He said that his ‘mission, stated simply, [was] a mission for peace.’ This was the speech in which he was bluntest about what ‘true peace’ involved: freedom of the individual, a Western democratic conception of human rights, respect for sovereignty, and so on. Reagan had always portrayed himself as a harbinger of peace, so this was not surprising. His address was peppered with other familiar claims. He referred to the importance of abolishing chemical weapons reducing nuclear arsenals (although he did not mention SDI), criticised the Soviet presence in places like Nicaragua and Afghanistan, and applauded the ‘special burden’ that drove Americans to stand up for freedom. Many of these claims were highly critical of the USSR, although for the most part he did not name it specifically. For example, it was not the Soviet Union that he said made the world a more dangerous place, but ‘distrust’ and ‘nuclear weapons.’ The fact that there was ‘no peace in Afghanistan’ did not derive from the Soviet army, but from ‘the use of force, subversion, and terror.’ Even though he did not name the Soviet Union, its presence haunted the world that Reagan described.

Buddy Wayne Howell notes that Reagan’s approach was simultaneously conciliatory and confrontational. Reagan had continued to make fundamental criticisms of the Soviet Union in a way that was less overtly hostile than previously.¹¹⁸ In this sense, although there had not been a radical shift in his discourse, its tenor had changed. Instead of claiming to use strength, he pursued ‘understanding’. Naturally, scholars have disagreed extensively about the significance

117 Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 14 November 1985’.

118 Howell, ‘The Rhetoric of Presidential Summit Diplomacy’, 77–111.

of these changes in Reagan's rhetoric and objectives, as discussed. However, this was not the level on which the most fundamental reconfigurations of Reagan's discursive framework were taking place.

Reagan's claim that 'we look to the future with optimism, and we go to Geneva with confidence' was enabled by an ongoing redefinition of spatial relations as secondary to personal relationships. While Reagan's mission was peace, he was 'going to Geneva' to meet the General Secretary. He planned to 'sit down across from Mr Gorbachev and map out, together, a basis for peaceful discourse even though our fundamentals will not change.' This proximity to Gorbachev would supposedly lead to the narrowing of differences between American and Soviet leaders (and peoples) and the elimination of barriers between them. Reagan explicitly rejected the signing of agreements as a measure of success at the summit. Instead, his priority was to discover whether he and Gorbachev had 'constructed a durable bridge to a safer world.'¹¹⁹

There were barriers to the construction of that bridge. These barriers were between two countries — the Soviet Union and the United States. Reagan conceptualised the relationship between states and ideologies using the language of grand distance. He continued to argue that Soviet movement into the world beyond its borders 'claimed hundreds of thousands of lives,' whereas American soldiers who died in Flanders and the Pacific were guilty only of 'advancing freedom.' The United States had 'gone the extra mile,' trying to move through space towards peace with the USSR, but had been rejected. To obtain peace, he claimed that it would be necessary to 'set a steady, more constructive course.' There was no convergence taking place, Reagan argued, and the 'deep differences' were not likely to be reduced. This geostrategic strand of Reagan's discourse remained highly critical of the Soviet Union, and continued his dependence on the spatial exclusion of the Other. The Other in question took the form of the Soviet state.

However, because Reagan could come closer to Gorbachev, so too could American people and Soviet people come closer to each other. They had been close in the past, as they were in the Second World War. Reagan acknowledged that 'Americans and Russians' (not the USA and the USSR) fought on separate fronts. But they had fought the same enemy, and there

119 Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Upcoming Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 14 November 1985'.

were even American soldiers buried in Russia itself. If that was in the past, and Reagan's encounter with Gorbachev was in the present, then the future contained even more opportunities that would allow personal closeness to negate the distance of physical space. The specific measures that Reagan described in the most detail were those that closed the distance between everyday Soviet and American citizens. Reagan declared to his audience that:

We can find, as yet undiscovered, avenues where American and Soviet citizens can cooperate fruitfully for the benefit of mankind. And this, too, is why I'm going to Geneva. Enduring peace requires openness, honest communications, and opportunities for our peoples to get to know one another directly.

He gave numerous examples of 'how much good could be accomplished' by American people meeting Soviet people. He also called for cultural exchanges in both directions, the creation of undergraduate scholarships, the development of 'sister cities,' even collaboration in outer space and medicine.

Reagan implied an underlying purpose in these calls for radically reduced distance between people. He argued that even Soviet people should be able to hear what American people had to say. The reason for the importance of personal communications was a missionary one, and it filled a role that political dialogue could not. The benefit of Soviet people going to America was so they could 'learn firsthand what spirit of freedom rules our land and that we do not wish the Soviet people any harm.' Americans going to the USSR would also get 'firsthand knowledge of life in the USSR.' But they also had another role — to learn 'that we're all God's children with much in common.' In this claim, Reagan explicitly extended his claims about the fundamental God-given bond between all people to include the Soviets, just as it included Americans and Afghans. The influence of the missionary theology that he had been immersed in since the age of eleven was clear in Reagan's discourse here.¹²⁰ The Americans he described were to play the part of Christian, democratic witnesses to the people of the USSR who were yet to hear the good word. Peace could thus be achieved by bringing missionaries and heathens together and letting the (holy) spirit of freedom turn their hearts towards goodness.

¹²⁰ Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 176.

Reagan resumed the theme of ‘meetings’ in his post-summit address, although with less of a missionary edge. He dubbed his meeting with Gorbachev ‘the fireside summit,’ and repeatedly described the long, cordial discussions he had with the General Secretary.¹²¹ Reagan also reminded viewers that his priority was still to develop ‘understanding’, one of the core objectives that he and Thatcher had identified in 1984. Improved understanding would let him see the USSR clearly without confusion or mistaken assumptions. Accurate perception of the opponent was essential to a relationship built on peaceful competition. Gorbachev and Reagan did not agree on ‘ideology or national purpose,’ he admitted, but at the end of the summit they understood each other better. The logic of Reagan’s discourse suggested that, because he had achieved some kind of personal understanding with Gorbachev, he had made a positive step and opened the door to more meetings in the future.

Any further progress, however, would have to be ‘step-by-step’ or ‘steady as we go’. The understanding that had been reached was, after all, between Gorbachev and Reagan themselves rather than between their countries. It was not that the USSR had changed or become more inclined towards peace. Indeed, Reagan insisted that that he was not truly praising the Soviets because ‘we cannot assume that their ideology and purpose will change.’¹²² Beyond his new relationship with Gorbachev, it was the American ability to perceive the Soviet Union truthfully that had improved — just as he had called for in 1984. Reagan called this the ‘new realism’ of his foreign policy. This echoed arguments that he had previously made about the importance of American strength and accurate knowledge about the nature of the USSR.

The changes that took place in Reagan’s assessment of the USSR immediately before and after Geneva were not fundamental, but they left the end of the story open to interpretation. Appealing to the hawks in his audience, Reagan emphasised that he would not foolishly trust the Soviets. But he described the USSR in an unusual way. Throughout his post-Geneva address, Reagan celebrated the achievement of a new partnership with the USSR that was enabled by his personal relationship with Gorbachev. Previously, he had blamed the absence of world peace almost entirely on the Soviets. Now, he claimed that he expected great things of both sides.

¹²¹ Reagan, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Following the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva 21 November 1985’.

¹²² *Ibid.*

Despite the ideological divide, Reagan said: 'We must be clear with each other and direct. We must pay each other the tribute of candor.'¹²³

The most striking facet of this narrative arc was that Reagan went beyond identifying with nameless, oppressed Soviet people. After Geneva, Reagan claimed a kinship with Gorbachev. The General Secretary was more concrete and more controversial than any generalised body of Soviet citizens, and Reagan now described him as part of a human 'we' instead of the Soviet 'them'. The process of conversion, he implied, had begun. Speaking to Gorbachev about the noble intentions of Americans had supposedly enabled this partnership, but it was not a relationship of equals. It was more like the relationship between minister and wayward parishioner. In Reagan's words, he had 'explained', 'reassured', 'described', and 'made clear' various realities to the General Secretary. Gorbachev, however, was largely voiceless — he was a supporting character in Reagan's post-Geneva speech whose role was to receive Reagan's wisdom. Reagan used the pronoun 'he' in reference to Gorbachev only three times. Two of these instances accompanied Reagan's assessments of Gorbachev, and only once did Gorbachev — 'he' — say something. By contrast, Reagan used the term 'we' to talk about himself and Gorbachev doing, agreeing, or knowing things 50 times, almost all of which were positive. His final use of the word 'we' to describe Gorbachev took place in the following claim:

[Gorbachev and I] know that peace is not just the absence of war. We don't want a phony peace or a frail peace. We didn't go in pursuit of some kind of illusory *détente*. We can't be satisfied with cosmetic improvements that won't stand the test of time. We want real peace.¹²⁴

Previously, Reagan had given the Soviets the opportunity to meet his criteria and show that they were capable of acting peacefully, but he had portrayed that possibility as unlikely. Now, the Soviet Union, or at least Gorbachev specifically, was described for a brief moment as enthusiastically in support of 'real' peace.

¹²³ Ibid. Emphasis is mine.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Despite this shift, within a few months Reagan returned to describing the Soviet Union in typically vitriolic terms.¹²⁵ Any time he identified positive change he attributed it to the use of American power. In his state of the union address in February 1986, Reagan described the Soviet state as a regime that ‘openly proclaims and practices an alleged right to command people’s lives and to export its ideology by force.’¹²⁶ Then, in his address on national security at the end of the same month, Reagan used the spectre of the USSR to explain why it was necessary to increase the American defence budget.¹²⁷ The Geneva Summit, for Reagan, was an American success, but not a Soviet transformation. Once again, it was the United States that had changed, had become more dynamic and more able to challenge rivals. The USSR had stayed the same.

It is unsurprising that, in effect, so little change had taken place in Reagan’s discourse. Within a narrative framework that posited communism as, inherently, a violation of democratic rights and cast the United States as bearing a responsibility to defend those rights, there was little scope for genuine rapprochement. Some scholars have argued that Reagan was less overtly hostile to the Soviet Union in this period.¹²⁸ He had ceased, after all, to demand the collapse of the USSR. In fact, he spoke as though the Soviet Union were likely to exist indefinitely and must be dealt with. That did not mean that it would persist in a recognisable form, or that Reagan’s stance towards communism had changed. While Reagan could claim a desire to work cooperatively with the USSR, he still constructed it as an active threat and an obstacle to his true objectives: liberty, democracy, freedom, peace. Reagan’s stated desire to ‘go forward to create our world of tomorrow in faith, in unity, and in love’ referred to a world in which the Soviet Union was no longer recognisably Soviet.¹²⁹ Reagan implicitly demanded the conversion of the Soviet Union to his preferred neoliberal model of society.

Thatcher was also positive about the Summit, although she was more cautious than Reagan. She made the more understated comment that ‘there is greater hope of resolution and

¹²⁵ Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation on National Security 26 February 1986’.

¹²⁶ Reagan, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986’.

¹²⁷ Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation on National Security 26 February 1986’.

¹²⁸ Farnham, ‘Reagan and the Gorbachev Revolution’, 235.

¹²⁹ Reagan, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union 4 February 1986’.

greater hope of peace and stability than there was perhaps before the meeting took place.¹³⁰ Geneva had made the world 'a more hopeful place.'¹³¹ She went so far as to say that one day the USA and the USSR might even see eye-to-eye on SDI.¹³² Given Thatcher's praise for SDI as a means to continue deterrence, the more hopeful world she identified was necessarily one in which the same rules of Cold War were in place. She did not argue that the Soviet Union was open to conversion, but that the United States and USSR had achieved an 'excellent basis' for securing meaningful arms control agreements.¹³³

After Geneva, Thatcher explained why she was hopeful in a way that portrayed it as a Western victory. The reasons she gave also pointed towards the evolutions that later took place in her discourse. The 'alchemy' between Gorbachev and Reagan had played an important role, Thatcher said, but so had:

The historic stage that we have reached, both with nuclear weapons and perhaps the economic stage that the Soviet Union has reached; that undoubtedly, the leadership of the Soviet Union would very much like to have enough economic room to raise the standard of living of the Soviet people.¹³⁴

Thatcher's comment about the economy and its relationship to arms control was one that the journalist William Safire might have applauded, given his insistence that Soviet reforms were purely economic in purpose. Thatcher implied that Western strength and the promise of SDI had successfully pushed the Soviet Union to the point where it had little choice but to try and shift the paradigm of international relations away from an arms race. In this storyline, Thatcher suggested that the flawed system that defined the USSR was beginning to show its cracks, even to the people living within it. Western strategists had successfully identified and attacked those weaknesses.

¹³⁰ Thatcher, 'Press Conference on Geneva Summit'.

¹³¹ Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference for American Correspondents in London', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 10 January 1986.

¹³² Thatcher, 'Press Conference on Geneva Summit'.

¹³³ Thatcher, 'Press Conference for American Correspondents in London'.

¹³⁴ Thatcher, 'Press Conference on Geneva Summit'.

Even so, Thatcher was still not willing to describe Soviet reform as a serious possibility. She stated in January 1986, 'I believe that the Soviet Union will continue to be Communist during my lifetime. I recognise that is what we have to deal with.'¹³⁵ By acknowledging that persistence, and by understanding Gorbachev fully as a devoted communist, she could do business with the Soviet Union. Business, in this context, meant negotiating treaties governing arms control, developing SDI, and pressuring the USSR to withdraw from its Third World entanglements. Her cautious optimism did not assume a change of heart or even redemption, but rather an ability to do business together despite profound disagreements. Even her conception of peace was framed in the language of economics. One did not need to like one's competitor to sit peacefully at the table with them and negotiate for a better world.

Conclusion

The discourses about security, arms control and the Soviet Union championed by Reagan and his advisers in his first term always existed in a delicate balance. They were the product of historical events and political hegemonies on local and global scale, rather than the objective, 'realistic' assessments of world events that they were portrayed to be. Because these discourses were not inherently rational or true, latent tensions existed within them. For example, doctrines of nuclear strategy and a conception of the USSR as an essentially threatening Other justified the endless perpetuation of the Cold War that foreign policy was supposed to overcome. These tensions were vital to the logic of international relations as it was practiced in the 1980s and could not be easily calmed.

This was the background for Reagan's claim, first made in 1983 and then again in 1985, that he wanted to transcend the violence of the Cold War. His tools of choice were the still-hypothetical technologies of SDI. He disavowed the morality of nuclear strategy and attempted to redefine discourses of defence. However, the discursive structures upon which Reagan relied to explain international relations and foreign policy remained intact. The Soviet Union remained evil, SDI remained an untested idea, and Reagan continued to describe the world using the

¹³⁵ Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference for American Press (CSIS Group)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 13 January 1986.

language of bombs. The logic of SDI, as Reagan constructed it, could not negate Cold War competition, only propagate it.

Even Thatcher, Reagan's ally and confidante, openly rejected SDI as a way to escape the arms race. According to her, SDI was simply the latest iteration of an eternal competition to develop the next best weapon. She agreed that nuclear weapons were horrific and ought to be neutralised, but embraced the underlying logic that justified their existence. Her discourse departed from that of Reagan in another way: Thatcher rejected depictions of communism as a demonic possession. She thoroughly disapproved of it, but explained that the Soviets were allowed to conduct business in whatever way they wished as long as they did so in the privacy of their own backyard. This acceptance meant that she could interpret the Soviets as rational actors and thus 'do business' with them.

Reagan failed to reach a similar point of equilibrium. His discourse revealed other attempts to escape from doctrines of cataclysmic war and achieve 'real peace.' This primarily took the form of attempts to redesign the USSR entirely, thus negating the existential threat that it presented. Reagan did not reject his claims that the Soviet Union was totalitarian. In fact, he insisted that for peace to be obtained the USSR would have to stop being Soviet in any way that he understood it. However, he began to construct the linguistic infrastructure that later allowed him to deny his 'evil empire' claim altogether. Reagan undermined the strict demarcations of space between 'us' and 'them' that were foundational to the practice and language of international relations. Thus, he suggested that, ideological and geopolitical differences aside, it was possible for Americans to reach out and act as Christian, democratic witnesses to the Soviet people — even to someone like Gorbachev.

Reagan's discourse here shared parallels with Michel Foucault's narrative about the development of psychiatry in *Madness and Civilization*. Although it would be misleading to say that the two narratives correlate, there are striking similarities in the processes they outline. According to Foucault, the changing meanings of madness in Western Europe over the last 400 years facilitated an increasing confinement of 'the mad' to designated institutions. This became a self-fulfilling prophecy: confinement was made necessary by madness and madness was defined by confinement. This spatial confinement created and became evidence for the idea

that there was a difference between madness and civilization. The ultimate end point of this process of demarcation was the relationship between psychiatrist and patient. As Foucault wrote:

In the patient's eyes, the doctor becomes a thaumaturge; the authority he has borrowed from order, morality, and the family now seems to derive from himself ... The doctor had found the power to unravel insanity; and increasingly the patient would accept this self-surrender to a doctor both divine and satanic, beyond human measure in any case.¹³⁶

Gorbachev no doubt experienced his Otherness from Reagan very differently. Yet it is possible to see Reagan donning the mantle of the thaumaturge, at least within his own discourse. He implied that once the space inhabited and moved through by the Soviet Other was fully regulated, by consent or coercion, the Westerner could then speak directly to his patients and cure them of their communist disease.

¹³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, Routledge Classics (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 261–62.

Chapter Four: Understanding Gorbachev: Newspaper Discourses of Anxiety, Optimism and Masculinity, March 1985-April 1986

This chapter assesses the initial incorporation of Gorbachev into the discourses of three journalists: Martin Walker, Ian Davidson, and William Safire. It asks how he was positioned within storylines about the USSR and how gender language was used to explain his position. The focus of this chapter is the same time period as the previous chapter — from the death of Konstantin Chernenko to the Chernobyl disaster. By investigating the commentary of these writers, I can examine some of the challenges presented by Gorbachev to discourses about the USSR and how they were addressed.

Commentators like Walker and Safire placed Gorbachev at the centre of the strategies they used to navigate and justify the discursive changes that took place from 1985 onwards. Davidson used Gorbachev in a similar way, but placed far less emphasis on him. Gorbachev took on a different role in each of these stories. He could be a protagonist, antagonist or supporting character. The positioning of Gorbachev raises other questions. Did the commentators in question depict him as exceptional? Was he a heroic protagonist, an especially devious villain, or just the usual Soviet fare?

This chapter also asks: how was the imagery of gender used to mark Gorbachev as unique? The discourses in question were rich with gendered metaphor. For Walker, Davidson and Safire, as it is and has been for many others, the language of masculinity and femininity provided a powerful toolkit for constructing national differences. Thanks in part to the historical exclusion of women from public life and the creation of national identity, the nation has tended to be a masculine artifice. It is shaped by and reflecting the interests of men.¹ During the Cold War the status of international relations as a masculine domain was strengthened further.² Characteristics that were constructed as manly — energy, strength, rationality, violence — were projected onto the USSR and the West, enabling commentators to tell parables about national

¹ Sebastian Jackson, 'Gendering the Nation and Empire: Anthropological Investigations in Retrospect', *Nexus: The Canadian Student Journal of Anthropology* 22, no. 1 (November 2014): 21–23.

² Craig N. Murphy, 'Seeing Women, Recognizing Gender, Recasting International Relations', *International Organization* 50, no. 3 (1996): 513.

identity.³ But Gorbachev defied definitive explanation, and so those writing about him created narratives that defined, assessed and categorised him by these standards. Attempts to read and write Gorbachev with gendered language speaks to deeper assumptions about gender politics and national identity.

Gorbachev and Geneva

When Gorbachev became General Secretary, his future significance was highly contested. He could be a cause for hope, a dangerous manipulator, or nothing really new at all.⁴ Thatcher may have been willing to do business with him, but some writers were more circumspect. Journalists like Serge Schmemmann, the Moscow bureau head of the *NYT*, noted that the new General Secretary was both appealing and threatening, and that either perspective might turn out to be valid. ‘Who is the real Gorbachev?’, he asked a week before the death of Konstantin Chernenko:

The Soviet politician poured from the same mold as his dark comrades, except for a bit more polish and pizzazz and a knack for public relations? Or the nice man who did the sights of London with his lady, bantered easily with the high and mighty, and charmed the British?⁵

Schmemmann established two versions of Gorbachev, depicting in the process a dichotomy that condemned the Soviet Union more broadly. In the months that followed, those who wrote about Gorbachev tended to place him somewhere between these two poles.⁶

³ Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 12; Frank Costigliola, “‘Unceasing Pressure for Penetration’: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan’s Formation of the Cold War”, *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 4 (1997): 1309–39.

⁴ Patrick Cockburn, ‘Gorbachev Is New Soviet Leader’, *Financial Times*, 12 March 1985, Factiva; Frederick Kempe, ‘Kremlin’s Boss: Gorbachev, New Chief Of Russia, May Make It a Tougher Adversary’, *Wall Street Journal*, 12 March 1985, Factiva; Anthony Lewis, ‘Abroad at Home: Opening for Gorbachev’, *New York Times*, 14 March 1985, Factiva; Stephen S. Rosenfeld, ‘Gorbachev: The Easy Life Is Over’, *Washington Post*, 15 March 1985, Factiva; Colin Welch, ‘Centrepiece: No New Flower Generation in Gorbachev’s Kremlin’, *Spectator*, 27 July 1985, Periodicals Archive Online.

⁵ Serge Schmemmann, ‘The Emergence of Gorbachev’, *New York Times*, 3 March 1985, Factiva.

⁶ ‘The Kremlin’s New Guard’, *Washington Post*, 12 March 1985, Factiva; ‘Experts on Soviet Differ on How Much of an Impact Gorbachev Will Have’, *New York Times*, 12 March 1985, Factiva; Michael White, ‘Kissinger Doubts Value of Youth’, *Guardian*, 13 March 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; ‘Where the Thinking Has to Start’, *Guardian*, 14 March 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; ‘Gorbachev’s Power Play’, *Financial Times*, 3 July 1985, Factiva;

Upon becoming General Secretary, Gorbachev became the central figure in discourse about the USSR. If he was as friendly as he seemed, it boded well for the relationship between the Soviet Union and the West. But Gorbachev's apparent openness and pragmatism might also mean that he was simply more cunning than his colleagues. If he was just another Soviet leader — albeit one with a gift for public relations — he was potentially more dangerous than his predecessors.

The Geneva Summit was one focus for this discourse. Like Reagan himself, reporters portrayed the summit as a critical moment for the relationship between the US and the USSR. It was especially significant for Reagan and Gorbachev themselves, whose successful enactment of foreign policy objectives had significant consequences for domestic affairs.⁷ But the media approached the events taking place in Geneva differently to Reagan. Writers had different objectives. Journalism about the summit was typically framed as analysis of the approaches taken by the people and parties involved in the negotiations, especially Reagan and Gorbachev. While Reagan and Thatcher were using the Geneva Summit to shape their assessments of the Soviet Union and their own countries as seen in Chapter Three, journalists used the summit to critique these assessments. Commentary about the negotiations acted as a vehicle for debates about how to influence the USSR and whether it could exist in peaceful cooperation with the West.

Gender and Metaphor

The gendered similes and metaphors used by Walker, Davidson and Safire to describe Gorbachev were not simply cosmetic. Any metaphorical language, including that of gender, is more than decoration. The use of metaphor is integral to human communication. Hayden White considers metaphor to be, in part, the creation of meaning through the assertion of similarity

Serge Schmemmann, 'Having It His Way; Gorbachev Shakes up the Kremlin and Sets a Date with Reagan', *New York Times*, 7 July 1985, Factiva.

⁷ James Reston, 'Washington: The Talk of Geneva', *New York Times*, 13 March 1985, Factiva; Ian Davidson, 'This Is Just Round One: Soviet Opinions on the Geneva Superpower Summit', *Financial Times*, 18 November 1985, Factiva; Bernard Gwertzman, 'Toward the Summit: On Road to the Summit', *New York Times*, 15 November 1985, Factiva; Martin Walker, 'Commentary: The Kremlin Arms Itself for Disappointment', *Guardian*, 13 November 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

and difference between two seemingly disparate phenomena. According to White, metaphor has two consequences: a relationship is constructed between two objects that may not have any innate connection, and one set of meanings is transferred from one onto another subject.⁸ By adopting or rejecting certain metaphors, commentators convey complex series of events in ways that are understood to have more meaning than the basic definitions of the words used. The Cold War was not literally cold, nor was it a war, but the use of that phrase provided a conceptual framework for understanding the late twentieth century.

One function of metaphor is the legitimisation of discourses that are challenged or in crisis. Chilton gives the example of ‘the Minuteman’. It was a nuclear missile justified by reference to the American militias who fought against the British in the American Revolutionary War — a more socially acceptable institution than weapons of mass destruction themselves.⁹ None of this is to say that symbolic language has universal meaning. As with any feature of language, the meaning of metaphors are contingent upon historical and cultural contexts. They are not understood in identical ways by every audience, and the extent to which they influence or emerge from cognitive processes is poorly understood.¹⁰ Regardless, the use of metaphor discursively frames events and stories in specific ways. Macgilchrist gives the example of the ‘nation-as-family’ metaphor and its applications:

A widespread discursive metaphor articulates the nation as a family, with words and phrases such as ‘patriot’, ‘fatherland’, ‘motherland’, founding ‘fathers’, Big ‘Brother’, ‘Uncle’ Sam, and sending ‘our lads’ to war. These are more than mere linguistic expressions — they lead to further discussion about the role of the state. If the nation is a family, the government is a parent, and the citizens are the children. The role of the government is to protect its citizens; it is responsible for them, and has authority over them.¹¹

⁸ Hayden V. White, ‘Interpretation in History’, in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 51–80.

⁹ Paul Chilton, ‘Metaphor, Euphemism and the Militarization of Language’, *Current Research on Peace and Violence* 10, no. 1 (1987): 10–16.

¹⁰ Matthew S. McGlone, ‘What Is the Explanatory Value of a Conceptual Metaphor?’, *Language & Communication* 27, no. 2 (April 2007): 109–26.

¹¹ Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political*, 81.

Many of these nation-as-family phrases are familiar to anyone with a passing interest in the Soviet Union or the Cold War. But countless other metaphors appeared in Anglo-American discourse about the Soviet Union. As we have seen, this included metaphors of combat (Cold War, defence, champions) and space (containment, convergence, 'our own doorstep').¹² Portrayals of the Soviet Union in the US and the UK can hardly be comprehended without reference to this comparative language. Although they have historically received less critical attention, gendered metaphors also played a role.

Gender is much more to modern society than a set of metaphors. It has been understood in various ways: as a set of social relations, a system of exploitation, and a performance of roles.¹³ Whatever it is, gender is deeply embedded in the dominant cultures of the UK and the US. Indeed, since the late twentieth century, most of human society has been assimilated into a global gender order defined by the West.¹⁴ In consequence, alternative conceptions of human relationships — those that prioritise women or that go beyond the categories of man and woman — have been marginalised.¹⁵ These categories may seem universal and obvious. But transgender, feminist and queer theorists have shown that they are socially constructed, and that their meaning is far from fixed.¹⁶ Despite their constructed nature, notions of manhood or womanhood continue to provide the basis of strict demarcations between people. As gender theorist Raewyn Connell notes, in many societies women do most of the unpaid domestic labour, while men make up a disproportionately high number of CEOs and parliamentarians. These differences are justified on the basis of assumptions about the personalities of men and women that are reinforced throughout our lives, from school through to the workplace and the mass media.¹⁷

¹² The latter appearing in Reagan, 'Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua 16 March 1986'.

¹³ Connell, *Gender*, 11; Martha E. Gimenez, 'Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited', *Science & Society* 69, no. 1 (2005): 11–32; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 1999), XV.

¹⁴ Connell, *Gender*, 92–93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁶ Lynda Johnston, 'Gender and Sexuality I: Genderqueer Geographies?', *Progress in Human Geography*, 2015, 1–11.

¹⁷ Connell, *Gender*, 2–3, 95–104.

Because of the thorough integration of gender into everyday life, it is a tool for creating meaning. It can also be used to obscure processes of Othering and exclusion by portraying them as natural. As such, modern feminist thought has challenged scholars to look beyond the assumption that gender is a common sense phenomenon and instead to analyse its functions.¹⁸ In pursuit of this goal, international relations theorist Sungju Park-Kang discusses the use of gender as an analytical 'lens'. In his words, this is 'a way of thinking that is sensitive about social-power relations between and among manness, womanness and any non-binary/heteronormative categories one might want to associate with.'¹⁹ The analysis described by Park-Kang is an attempt to discover relationships of power that exist beneath, within and beyond those that are explicit. These relationships exist in political discourse as much as they do the home or the workplace.

There are many possibilities for projects that investigate the uses of gendered discourse in the context of Anglo-American interactions with the USSR. Studies in this field reveal not only the narratives used to define the Soviet Union, but the ideologies of gender by which they were enabled. For example, *The Myth of American Diplomacy* (2008), by diplomatic historian Walter L. Hixson, explores the masculine imagery that accompanied expressions of American national identity in the twentieth century. He argues that the masculine self-image of the United States played a role in shaping US foreign policy.²⁰ Taking a different approach, Dana Heller points out that American national imagery in Hollywood films conveyed masculine anxiety in response to the disobedient Soviet woman. She writes:

In the iconography of 20th-century US popular culture, the other has long been powerfully represented by a potentially contaminating Soviet empire over which is mapped the equally contaminating but ultimately susceptible figure of woman. The cultural rhetoric of Cold War Hollywood film often performs a particular

¹⁸ The diversity of these projects can be seen in the following examples: Louise Blake, 'Chasing Eliza Miles: An Archive Story', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 21 (2015): 78–92; Sara Ahmed, 'Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35, no. 3 (2010): 571–594; Jackson, 'Gendering the Nation and Empire: Anthropological Investigations in Retrospect'.

¹⁹ Sungju Park-Kang author, *Fictional International Relations: Gender, Pain and Truth, War, Politics and Experience* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 8.

²⁰ Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 261.

displacement, whereby Soviet Russia is positioned as dangerously feminine, in stark yet alluring opposition to a courageously masculine America.²¹

Even in those cases when positive female characters appeared in films, standing in for the Soviet Union, their role was as lovers and defectors. These women were portrayed as susceptible to the rugged masculinity of Americans.²² By contrast, K. M. Fierke considers it counter-intuitive that the Soviet Union would have been placed into a feminine role given its superpower status. But she argues that in post-Soviet discourse both Russia and NATO assumed roles and dynamics that replicated gendered social relations. This re-enactment came about in response to strategic concerns but was expressed through gender language.²³

I take a path between Heller and Fierke, and argue that the Soviet Union resisted any straightforward gendering. Commentators in the 1980s attempted to reduce the USSR into one role or the other, and to make it explicable within the rules of gender, but this was not an easy task. Conflicting masculine and feminine metaphors often appeared in Cold War discourse, and this suggests that it was an area of contention or uncertainty. As noted by Connell, 'the efforts to maintain strong divisions are themselves strong evidence that the boundaries are none too stable.'²⁴

In 1985, Gorbachev made his formal entrance into the gendered field of Anglo-American discourse about the USSR. As seen above, he was a controversial figure because he challenged claims about Soviet nature. Uncertainty about the character of Gorbachev provoked expressions of anxiety and questions about his true identity. Gender provided a language that could be used by journalists in attempts to resolve these tensions. Gorbachev's vigour could be interpreted as a manly challenge to Western masculinity or his charm could be portrayed as feminine dissembling. Journalists like Safire accused Gorbachev of appropriating femininity in order to seduce the West. As feminist international relations theorist Kimberley Hutchings argues,

²¹ Dana Heller, 'A Passion for Extremes: Hollywood's Cold War Romance with Russia', *Comparative American Studies* 3, no. 1 (1 March 2005): 93.

²² *Ibid.*, 93–94, 96–97; Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War, Culture, Politics, and the Cold War* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 23.

²³ K. M. Fierke, 'Besting the West: Russia's Machiavella Strategy', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1, no. 3 (1 January 1999): 403–34.

²⁴ Connell, *Gender*, 6.

discourses of spatial exclusion are complemented by discourses of gendered exclusion. Because nationalism is primarily identified with masculine traits, traits associated with femininity (like 'emotion'), must be 'kept at bay'.²⁵ These conflicts played out in the stories Walker, Davidson and Safire told about Gorbachev, who represented the gendered Other.

Walker on Gorbachev as Protagonist

Martin Walker, the head Moscow correspondent for the *Guardian*, wrote prolifically about Gorbachev in 1985 and 1986. The new Soviet leader featured as protagonist in many of the articles Walker wrote about life and politics in the USSR. Walker's narrative about Gorbachev had the General Secretary face many obstacles, but ultimately emerge as a heroic and masculine figure. Because of Walker's extensive journalistic output, my analysis centres on two parts of his corpus: his reporting about Gorbachev's accession in March 1985, and his regular 'Commentary' column, which started in May of that year. 'Commentary' was an opportunity for Walker to write in a longer-form opinion style about big-picture issues, like Soviet political affairs and the economy. These two parts of Walker's discourse represent a rich narrative about Gorbachev and his characteristics, unique and familiar.

Prior to Gorbachev's ascendancy, Walker defined political culture in the USSR as stagnant. It was a 'gerontocracy, a country ruled by old men.'²⁶ The central Soviet leadership was made up of men who were dying or too old to lead. Fear of change resulted from collective leadership, which was itself a response to Khrushchev's 'impetuous and personal style of rule.' Against that background, Gorbachev was part of a generational shift that had the potential to rejuvenate the USSR and put it on a new course. He was one of the rising stars in a group of energetic younger men who represented a challenge to the implicitly impotent leadership of the 'invalids' in the Politburo.²⁷

With Chernenko's death in March 1985 and Gorbachev's accession, Walker ceased to talk about Gorbachev as part of a 'ruling group' and instead began to focus on Gorbachev as an

²⁵ Kimberley Hutchings, 'Cognitive Short Cuts', in *Rethinking the Man Question: Sex, Gender and Violence in International Relations.*, ed. Jane L. Parpart and Marysia Zalewski (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2008), 25–26.

²⁶ Martin Walker, 'Moscow Cracks the Old Boy Network', *Guardian*, 1 March 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁷ Ibid.

exceptional individual. Repeatedly, Walker contrasted Gorbachev with his immediate predecessors, the typical features of Soviet political culture, and even Western leaders. These were the dragons that Gorbachev would have to fight in order to reform the USSR. Walker's first article about Gorbachev's accession cemented his potential heroism with a dual comparison to two Western icons. Gorbachev's rise had inaugurated 'a Soviet glimpse of Camelot' — simultaneously the mythical home of King Arthur and a euphemism for the Kennedy Administration.²⁸ The metaphor evoked a chivalric golden age that, according to Walker, the Soviet people awaited. Whether or not Gorbachev could create a Soviet Camelot — a possibility about which Walker expressed scepticism — his intention was to be 'a leader strong enough, and above all young enough, to drive the country on a new course.'

Gorbachev's personal characteristics were impressive, too. Walker's initial description of the new Soviet leader was positive and enthusiastic:

By recent Soviet standards Mr Gorbachev is a breath of fresh air. His easy public manner, his affability, his willingness to listen and his ability to show interest in the people he meets mark him out. He has the support of the party intelligentsia as well as the technocrats. ... Mr Gorbachev has the intelligent efficiency of a self-assured manager. ... His taste for honesty in public — at least in least on non-essential issues — shone through ... he has a chance of winning popular respect for the leadership again.²⁹

These factors emphasised that Gorbachev represented something new. Walker increasingly presented them as the keys to reform in the USSR, characteristics that would equip Gorbachev well to change the system. They were not necessarily all Western in style — would Reagan or Thatcher ever have been described as having the support of the intelligentsia and the technocrats? — but neither were they typically Soviet. Gorbachev's unique managerial characteristics set him apart from his peers, and became the criteria against which Walker could measure him.

²⁸ Martin Walker, 'A Soviet Glimpse of Camelot', *Guardian*, 12 March 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Bruce A. Rosenberg, 'Kennedy in Camelot: The Arthurian Legend in America', *Western Folklore* 35, no. 1 (1976): 52–59.

²⁹ Walker, 'A Soviet Glimpse of Camelot'.

Walker's discourse worked on the assumption that there was a strong continuity between the Russian past and the Soviet present, and that the problems of the former were also those of the latter. His emphasis on continuity was far from original. Interpretations of the USSR as simply a new facade for the Tsarist empire had existed for a long time, and similar comparisons are still being made in 2016. Malia called this trope 'Eternal Russia'. He addressed its uses in *Russia Under Western Eyes*:

The riddle the Red Sphinx posed to Western wayfarers, therefore, was often facetiously resolved by declaring the spectre of Communism to be little more than the new face of eternal Russia. For those hostile to the experiment, Communism was simply a mutation of tsarist autocracy and thus an enduring menace to Western freedoms. For those friendly to the brave new Soviet world, its difficulties, its shortcomings, and at times its crimes were to be explained away by the same tsarist heritage.³⁰

Walker did not neatly fit into either of Malia's categories, but he made use of the trope nevertheless. He was clear that the problematic aspects of Soviet political culture were inherited from the Tsars.³¹

One of Gorbachev's greatest challenges would be inertia, supposedly an inescapable fact of the Russian and Soviet experience. Political inertia was caused in part by the vast territories over which the USSR was stretched and which made it difficult to govern. 'The only governments which have made this country function,' Walker wrote, 'have been ruthless, driving and suspicious.'³² But inertia was also inherent to the Soviet economy.³³ Moreover, these were not new problems. In writing about them, Walker evoked the problems faced by earlier waves of social and industrial reform — in 1917, the 1940s, the 1950s and the 1960s.³⁴

³⁰ Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 3.

³¹ Martin Walker, 'Gorbachev's Russia: The Red Tsar with Limitless Horizons', *Guardian*, 13 March 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Martin Walker, 'Commentary: Tsar or Soviets, It's Summit Business as Usual', *Guardian*, 20 August 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Martin Walker, 'Commentary: How Britain Missed the Soviet Bus yet Again', *Guardian*, 11 December 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³² Walker, 'The Red Tsar with Limitless Horizons'.

³³ Martin Walker, 'Gorbachev's Russia: The Men of Iron That Moscow Doesn't Need', *Guardian*, 14 March 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁴ Martin Walker, 'Commentary: The Lesson of Two Decades for Mr Gorbachev', *Guardian*, 12 June 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Martin Walker, 'Commentary: The Time Bomb at the Heart of the Politburo', *Guardian*, 16

More recently, the economic and geographic flaws of the USSR were compounded by the political culture instituted by Brezhnev. Walker argued that Brezhnev's system was actively designed to resist change.³⁵ These struggles against inertia, which Walker wrote about frequently, centred the story on the conflict between Gorbachev and Russia itself.

Echoing the archetypical journey of the mythic hero, Walker wrote that Gorbachev's success depended on leaving the comfortable stagnation of the post-Brezhnev USSR and upsetting the status quo.³⁶ This meant considering 'heretical' economic ideas, fundamentally rethinking foreign policy, and somehow overcoming 'the slow permafrost that crept across the bureaucracy' under Brezhnev at the very least.³⁷ These were modern solutions to uniquely Soviet problems, but they required methods that had been perfected by a lineage of absolute rulers. Walker predicted that Gorbachev would achieve the most success in his mission if he took up the mantle of his autocratic forerunners and forcefully shaped his country. Thus, Gorbachev would attempt to use methods of central control pioneered by Ivan the Terrible and perfected by Stalin. Ivan the Terrible had been the first to realise that brutal centralism was the only way to govern a country as vast as Russia, and Stalin had perfected his methods. Their approaches had come at a terrible cost, but they had also been terribly effective.³⁸

Western observers had been fascinated with Russia's so-called absolute leaders long before Walker called Gorbachev the 'Red Tsar'. Indeed, Western fascination with Russian autocracy can still be seen today in the titles of countless books and articles.³⁹ Walker might not

October 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Martin Walker, 'Why Gorbachev Makes the Russians Feel Safer', *Guardian*, 2 January 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁵ Martin Walker, 'Gorbachev's Russia: The Might of the Generals', *Guardian*, 15 March 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁶ For a very different manifestation of a mythic hero narrative that demonstrates its applicability to modern politics, see: Darren Kelsey, 'Hero Mythology and Right-Wing Populism', *Journalism Studies* 0, no. 0 (25 March 2015): 1–18.

³⁷ Walker, 'The Men of Iron That Moscow Doesn't Need'; Martin Walker, 'Commentary: Why the Kremlin Is Facing Both Ways', *Guardian*, 15 May 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Walker, 'The Lesson of Two Decades for Mr Gorbachev'; Walker, 'The Time Bomb at the Heart of the Politburo'.

³⁸ Walker, 'The Red Tsar with Limitless Horizons'.

³⁹ For example, see Angus Roxburgh, *The Strongman: Vladimir Putin and the Struggle for Russia*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013); Kathryn Stoner, 'Whither Russia? Autocracy Is Here for Now, but Is It Here to Stay?', *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (2012): 969–977; Boris Kagarlitsky, *Russia Under Yeltsin and Putin: Neo-Liberal Autocracy* (London and Sterling, VA.: Pluto Press, 2002); William Zimmerman, *Ruling Russia: Authoritarianism from*

have expressed the same infatuation with Gorbachev as Voltaire had for Catherine the Great, but the two depictions were similar. Walker's Gorbachev was embarking on a heroic campaign to impose his will on the Soviet Union, using the mechanisms of absolute control to achieve his aims. Similarly, Voltaire had praised Catherine the Great for her use of absolute power to impose civilisation and to mould the geography of Russia.⁴⁰ However, Walker was more cautious about the human cost of grand plans than Voltaire. He implied that Gorbachev's call for a level of political dedication, last seen in the five-year plans of the 1930s, had sinister overtones. Dedication 'may have just been a phrase to win the support of the old hardliners, or it may have been a warning.'⁴¹ Despite its ominous implications, Walker's argument that 'absolutism is a constant factor in Russian history' made assumptions about Russia, and the role of central power, that echoes those made by Voltaire.

Somewhat paradoxically, Walker was also enthusiastic about Gorbachev's seemingly liberal reforms. Official enthusiasm for the news media, critiques of 'the Soviet way of life' from top officials and a friendly new approach to international relations, were just a few examples of the developments that Walker identified as liberal and Western.⁴² His most critical piece of writing in this period, a March 1986 article in which he stated that some orthodox Communists had been quietly returned to their posts, still argued that Gorbachev's achievements were already greater than those of any Soviet leader since Stalin.⁴³ Gorbachev was important not only because he had the same capacity as Lenin or Stalin for prompting change, but because he was creating a different kind of change from his predecessors. He used tools that were more urbane

the Revolution to Putin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Thomas Lowe, 'Russia's Last Dissenting Voice in Parliament Stands up to Strongman Putin Ahead of Election', *ABC*, 13 October 2016.

⁴⁰ Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 210–11.

⁴¹ Walker, 'The Red Tsar with Limitless Horizons'.

⁴² Martin Walker, 'Commentary: Can Gorbachev Change Reality as Well as the Image?', *Guardian*, 27 November 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Martin Walker, 'Commentary: The Wind of Change Sweeping Through Moscow', *Guardian*, 29 January 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Martin Walker, 'Commentary: How Gorbachev Steals the Show from Rambo', *Guardian*, 2 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴³ Martin Walker, 'Commentary: Delays Likely in Mr G's Dash down the Fast Lane', *Guardian*, 19 March 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

— the fraud squad instead of a bullet, a ‘cleansing’ instead of a purge.⁴⁴ These methods were more palatable to Walker, more Western. Gorbachev stood out as someone with the potential to break the Soviet Union and remake it in a Western image.

Gendered language provided a discursive framework for Gorbachev’s struggles to be played out, whether they were against Russian inertia, Soviet despotism, or Western antagonism. Walker depicted Gorbachev’s strengths, including his personal authority, through a masculine lens. He was a ‘strong man’, ‘a thrusting young fellow,’ and the ‘master of his own house.’⁴⁵ Gorbachev was a manly mover and shaker who hoped to ‘use the sheer power of centralised planning to bulldoze the country into a new industrial era.’⁴⁶ In comparison, Andropov and Chernenko lacked virility.⁴⁷ The Soviet present in Walker’s storyline was a place of uncertainty, but also one that was passive and receptive to Gorbachev’s masculine vision.

The gendering of Gorbachev’s narrative arc was exacerbated by the characters Walker chose to appear in it. Women appeared infrequently in his writing. Despite Walker’s references to Tsars and Soviet leaders and their relevance to Gorbachev, including Peter the Great, Catherine II only appeared as a historical footnote.⁴⁸ When Walker mentioned Gorbachev’s wife, Raisa, it was only to comment on her charm and fashion.⁴⁹ Women like Raisa were in the background of his story while the leaders — and the supporting characters — were overwhelmingly men. Like Gorbachev, these men often took on heroic proportions, as in the case of one man who had been a part of the ‘vast national effort’ to build a second Trans-Siberian railway. Walker described this man, Leonid Khazakov, as ‘tall and fit with very clear blue eyes,’ and wrote that ‘he was an imposing figure who could have stepped from a Komsomol recruiting poster.’⁵⁰ Notably, the heroic exertions undertaken by men like Khazakov were

⁴⁴ Martin Walker, ‘Faithful Climbers’, *Guardian*, 19 February 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Martin Walker, ‘Leaps and Bounds’, *Guardian*, 7 March 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁵ Walker, ‘The Red Tsar with Limitless Horizons’; Walker, ‘How Britain Missed the Soviet Bus yet Again’; Martin Walker, ‘Commentary: Will the Real Mr Gorbachev Please Stand Up?’, *Guardian*, 8 January 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁶ Walker, ‘Leaps and Bounds’.

⁴⁷ Walker, ‘Moscow Cracks the Old Boy Network’.

⁴⁸ Martin Walker, ‘Heaven Below Zero’, *Guardian*, 19 October 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Walker, ‘The Red Tsar with Limitless Horizons’.

⁴⁹ Martin Walker, ‘Debut for Gorbachev Family’, *Guardian*, 2 May 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁰ Martin Walker, ‘The Taiga Tamers’, *Guardian*, 24 April 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

consistently located in faraway places. The settings in which Walker placed courageous Soviet men were frontiers: the inhospitable countryside, the frozen landscapes of Siberia, or the past. In contrast to these times and places, Walker described modern, metropolitan Soviet society as stagnant, aimless, and unable to achieve the feats of great strength to which it aspired.

Passivity and inertia were not the only challenges facing Gorbachev in Walker's story. For all his vigour, he was threatened by other men, particularly the High Command of the Soviet armed forces. Walker's Gorbachev was less manly than the generals and war heroes in the High Command, or he was at least a less violent kind of man. The following simile, about Soviet foreign policy, drew the lines clearly between them:

It is starting to feel like one of those interrogation sessions where the tough guy kicks you off the chair, clips you round the ear and says you could swing for this one. And then the soft guy comes in and gives you a cup of tea and a clean hanky.⁵¹

Gorbachev was the 'soft guy', identified as such because of his charm and serenity in foreign policy. The aggressive hardliners in the armed forces were the tough ones, and they were more typical of Russian and Soviet culture. This differentiation is essential to discourses of masculinity, which rely on the contrast between man and woman or man and lesser man.⁵² In comparison to war heroes, Gorbachev was less of a man. The Soviet generals represented a warrior masculinity that Walker described as threatening. Gorbachev's heroism, while it matched the generals' militarism in vigour, was that of a new-money industrial man. His true concerns were economic rather than militaristic, and SDI only concerned him because it could disrupt his managerial transformations of the Soviet Union.

It was Gorbachev's builder-mentality that Walker praised, not the violence of the generals. He made a distinction again between these two types of men in his comparisons between Gorbachev and Reagan. The headline of one such article, written in April 1986, claimed to reveal 'How Gorbachev steals the show from Rambo'. In contrast to Rambo, Gorbachev was

⁵¹ Walker, 'Will the Real Mr Gorbachev Please Stand Up?'

⁵² Hutchings, 'Cognitive Short Cuts', 28; R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 5–6.

depicted in this article as long-suffering, patient, and 'responsible.' Reagan, on the other hand, was playing the part of the action star. In fact, Walker wrote, 'the Russians are starting to appear as the good guys, and the Americans as the macho gang who are throwing their weight around the world.' The metaphors in this article contained gendered overtones and sexual imagery. President Rambo was not a serious threat in this story. With his manly exertion, Reagan was likely to wear himself out and climax prematurely. There would be an election in a few years, and Star Wars would have little impact in the intervening period. The true threats to Gorbachev's masculine authority were the hardline generals with whom he would have to continue dealing long after Reagan had faded away. Reagan was combative but, in comparison to the hawkish Soviet hard-men, ultimately over-enthusiastic.⁵³

The Geneva Summit was the initial climax of Walker's storyline, and Gorbachev was its protagonist. It was the 'first real test in the superpower relationship that will dominate the rest of his life.'⁵⁴ Beforehand, Walker worried that American troublemaking would doom the meeting to failure alongside Gorbachev's promises.⁵⁵ However, once the summit had taken place he interpreted it as a Soviet victory rather than an American one. Success was thanks to Gorbachev. With impeccable style, 'Mr Gorbachev' had given a 'solo TV spectacular [that] had shifted the balance of summit power in a remarkable way.'⁵⁶ Reagan, charmed by Gorbachev's panache, had undergone a 'transformation' from an implacable anti-communist into someone who would willingly praise a Soviet leader. Implicitly, a transformation of similar magnitude had taken place inside the Kremlin.

But Walker's account of the summit was not actually about the summit itself. It was about Gorbachev, and itself contained a discrete narrative arc. The first sentence described Gorbachev's weak hand when he had arrived at the summit, but by the end of the article Walker wrote that 'Geneva also deserves to go down in history as the Gorbachev debut.'⁵⁷ Even

⁵³ Walker, 'How Gorbachev Steals the Show from Rambo'.

⁵⁴ Martin Walker, 'Commentary: Some of My Best Friends Aren't Spies', *Guardian*, 18 September 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁵ Walker, 'The Kremlin Arms Itself for Disappointment'.

⁵⁶ Martin Walker, 'Gorbachev Strides on to the World Stage', *Guardian*, 22 November 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the article's title, 'Gorbachev Strides on to the World Stage', framed the summit in terms of its relevance to Gorbachev, not Gorbachev's relevance to the summit. The Geneva Summit, in Walker's telling, was a part of a narrative about the new General Secretary differentiating himself from other Soviet leaders and showing that the Soviets were not irredeemable after all.

In the course of his hero's journey, Walker's Gorbachev revealed many tensions. He was unique, but part of a collective. He was a Leninist true believer, but also Western-facing. His weapons were charm and bureaucracy, but he needed to rely on the monumental displays of strength for which his predecessors were famous. Walker alleviated these tensions somewhat by his insistence that the inherent flaws of pre-modern Russian culture could be combated through the use of the thoroughly modern Communist Party, with Gorbachev at its helm. It was the Party, under Brezhnev, that had inaugurated a new state of Russian stagnancy. But Walker argued that it was Gorbachev's custodianship of the same Party that could turn Russia into a modern state. Beneath these apparent contradictions and Walker's attempts to reconcile them lay the outlines of a deeper narrative. Fittingly enough for a Moscow-based correspondent, it was not about Reagan or arms control or any one issue in which the West was directly involved. It was, instead, a tale about Gorbachev and the USSR. In this story, Gorbachev took on the role of a new type of Soviet man who combined the absolutism of Stalin with the worldliness of the industrial West. He was a man of whom Voltaire might have been proud.

Embedded in this story was a gendered storyline that also explained Gorbachev's unique nature. His manliness was a counter to the Russian femininity of the Soviet Union, the people, culture, and geography of which were passive but fertile. Gorbachev could drag the Soviet Union out of indolence and into an industrial future defined by heroic undertakings and strength. By Walker's standards, Gorbachev successfully performed gender. He acted firmly and physically towards the feminine, and was unafraid to play the part of the patriarch for the good of his home. When he was forced into confrontation with another masculine figure, however, he did not sink to the level of wrestling in the mud. Instead, Gorbachev denied Reagan the violence that he sought and responded to aggression with rationality and charm. In so doing, he proved that his rational, economic maleness was superior.

Davidson on Gorbachev as Foil

In contrast to Walker's narration of these events, Davidson portrayed Gorbachev as a supporting character. It was only later that Gorbachev revealed himself as an important character in his own right, and when he did, his role was to highlight the characteristics of the other characters. Overall, Gorbachev appeared less often in Davidson's discourse than he did in that of Walker or Safire. Gorbachev was both interesting and threatening because he was an unknown quantity, an ambiguity that was explained using the language of gender transgression.

It was not until September 1985 — a full six months after the appointment of Gorbachev as General Secretary — that Davidson mentioned Gorbachev in his 'Foreign Affairs' column. Even then, in an article at the beginning of September, Davidson's reference to Gorbachev was only for the sake of naming the 'Gorbachev-Reagan summit in November.'⁵⁸ In his other reporting before September, Davidson referred to the General Secretary in only two articles.⁵⁹ After September, on the other hand, Gorbachev's name appeared in almost all of Davidson's writing about the USSR. The tipping point was a particularly thrilling performance that Gorbachev gave, as discussed below, and in which he was revealed to be a star in his own right. After this, however, he was still not the protagonist of the story, but neither was he a sinister and threatening enemy. He was a foil — a literary figure whose contrast showed the West at its best, and occasionally at its worst.

Before September, however, Davidson was sceptical that any changes would take place in the American-Soviet relationship. Following the resumption of the Geneva talks in March 1985 his stance on arms talks remained much the same as previously. He suspected that it was all an exercise in propaganda for the Soviets, who would use Geneva to attack SDI and undermine the Western coalition.⁶⁰ In the lead-up to the Geneva Summit, Davidson called for Western unity and insisted that Soviet expansionism was the only real threat to Europe.⁶¹ This

⁵⁸ Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: The Silly Season Excels Itself', *Financial Times*, 2 September 1985, Factiva.

⁵⁹ Ian Davidson, 'Now It's Up To Mr Gorbachev: Analysis of US-Soviet Nuclear Arms Negotiations', *Financial Times*, 20 May 1985, Factiva; Ian Davidson, 'Straws in the Russian Wind: Soviet Leader Gorbachev's Foreign Policy Options', *Financial Times*, 22 July 1985, Factiva.

⁶⁰ Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs (Arms Control): The Russians Have Problems, Too', *Financial Times*, 5 March 1985, Factiva.

⁶¹ Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Maginot Line Dogma Comes Under Assault', *Financial Times*, 29 April 1985, Factiva; Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: 40 Years Of Frozen Problems', *Financial Times*, 7 May 1985, Factiva.

was a storyline of dissatisfaction. Not only was the USSR a threat to real peace, but the status quo, based on the threat of nuclear war, was entirely unsatisfactory. Davidson forecast little chance of change.

When he did write about Gorbachev, Davidson argued that Gorbachev would achieve nothing at Geneva unless he brought something drastically new to the table. With this, he hinted at the later promotion that he would bestow upon Gorbachev from minor role to a leading role. After all, Reagan had staked his career on SDI and could not suddenly abandon it. Davidson also cautioned against making too many positive assumptions about Gorbachev. He accused other commentators of projecting their hopes onto the General Secretary, as had happened with Yuri Andropov.⁶² Gorbachev's capabilities were unknown, and 'his pronouncements so far have been erratic, veering from the conciliatory to the offensive, from the intriguing to the banal.'⁶³ But Davidson also suggested that Gorbachev might be able to make a difference and 'start the Geneva ball rolling in a new direction.'⁶⁴ There was an important implication in Davidson's uncertainty: that Gorbachev, if he were clever enough, if he were different enough, conceivably could break the stalemate and make progress. Tension and conflict did not have to be a permanent state.

For the moment, however, the world existed in a delicate balance defined by anxiety on all sides. If the research required to make Star Wars a reality went ahead, the renewed arms race it would prompt could have wrecked the Soviet economy and sabotaged any attempts at domestic reform. Worse still, it might have resulted in the 'unleashing [of] an uncontrolled arms race by both sides.'⁶⁵ Davidson claimed that each side had an almost psychological need to match the military power of the other. The Soviets were strong and thus unconcerned. The Americans, however, experienced 'anxieties' that their technological prowess lagged. Therefore, Davidson predicted, NATO would try to 'compensate for [its] conventional inferiority.'⁶⁶ Davidson's criticism of this competitive machismo revealed the thread of anxiety woven into his

⁶² Davidson, 'Straws in the Russian Wind'.

⁶³ Davidson, 'Now It's Up To Mr Gorbachev: Analysis of US-Soviet Nuclear Arms Negotiations'.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Meanwhile Back In The Kremlin', *Financial Times*, 17 June 1985, Factiva.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

own discourse. When the USA and the USSR were at each other's throats, showing off their might and refusing to back down, the world became a more dangerous place. One or both of the superpowers would have to take a softer approach of compromise or collaboration lest the arms race eventually escalate.

The first blip of change on the radar of Davidson's discourse appeared at the end of September 1985 when Gorbachev and his negotiators made one of their most confusing moves yet. In an act of showmanship, anonymous Soviet officials had been dropping hints that their negotiators in Geneva would propose a 30% to 40% reduction in the size of nuclear weapons arsenals.⁶⁷ Davidson interpreted this as an unprecedented attempt to gauge American interest. It was at this point that Davidson's discourse explicitly adopted gendered imagery. His metaphor of choice was of a strip-tease:

Of course, the live performance has not started yet. The drums are rolling, but when the curtain goes up, we may discover that this ostensibly alluring strip-tease artiste is just the good old Politburo with sequins and a feather boa, all talk and no action. On the historical record, that is more or less what one would expect.

But this time, the advance publicity has been so titillating and so insistent, that it has become impossible to believe that there will be no follow-through.⁶⁸

Here, Davidson portrayed Gorbachev as a cross-dresser or transgender woman. Both figures are amongst the most famous archetypes of gender transgression and confusion. Inability to interpret gender signs, especially when transgender women are concerned, is frequently accompanied in the West by expressions of anxiety.⁶⁹ Transgender women are constructed as deceptive, just as Gorbachev might have revealed himself to be. Such deception breaks the rules of gender and sexuality. Likewise, Gorbachev challenged the rules of Cold War discourse.

⁶⁷ Ian Davidson, 'It's A Sin, A Double Sin To Tell A Lie', *Financial Times*, 7 October 1985, Factiva.

⁶⁸ Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: A Vamp Act In Sequins And A Feather Boa', *Financial Times*, 30 September 1985, Factiva.

⁶⁹ Cynthia Lee and Peter Kwan, 'Trans Panic Defense: Masculinity, Heteronormativity, and the Murder of Transgender Women', *Hastings Law Journal* 66 (2015 2014): 109; Graciela Slesaransky-Poe and Ana María García, 'Boys with Gender Variant Behaviors and Interests: From Theory to Practice', *Sex Education* 9, no. 2 (1 May 2009): 205; Moya Lloyd, 'Heteronormativity and/as Violence: The "Sexing" of Gwen Araujo', *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (1 November 2013): 818–34.

The common solution to such gender crises is to try and discern the true identity of the subject.⁷⁰ Using similar logic, Reagan and Thatcher had emphasised the importance of accurately understanding the Soviets before tensions could be reduced. It is significant, then, that Davidson used this metaphor at a time when Gorbachev appeared to be disrupting the given truths about the relationship between the Western and Eastern blocs. The contrast between the beautiful feather boa facade that Gorbachev put forward and the ‘good old politburo’ who could lie beneath it was a source of discomfort that emphasised Otherness and danger.

Gorbachev’s sudden show of femininity caused Davidson’s tone to shift. Previously, Davidson had constantly reminded his readers that the Soviet Union did not like to play nicely, and that its primary means of interacting with the world was through bullying and violence. His striptease metaphor portrayed them as taking a seductive and feminine approach rather than an aggressive, masculine one. Davidson had called for a change in the dynamic between the US and the USSR, and Gorbachev’s ambiguity was potentially one such change.

Ultimately, however, Davidson found Gorbachev to be genuine after all, and more important than he had initially depicted. The Soviets proposed an even larger cut in weapons than he expected — approximately 50% rather than the 30% or 40% that he had first expected.⁷¹ Now that Gorbachev actually had followed through on his teasing, any suggestion of effeminate deception vanished. Instead, Davidson portrayed him as a confident leading man in ‘political theatre’ who had just given a ‘star turn’. The true Gorbachev had finally been revealed as a consummate performer, and one who had proven himself worthy of review.

Despite his new perspective on Gorbachev, Davidson still had questions about whether the Soviet offer was serious or not. Was it a stunt or a proposal made in good faith? Davidson asked, ‘does he mean it? Is he really willing to deliver on an equitable arms deal, or is this just superb public relations designed to embarrass the US?’⁷² Even though the Soviet proposal seemed ground-breaking on the surface, Davidson pointed to a range of reasons why it might

⁷⁰ Judith Halberstam, ‘Techno-Homo: On Bathrooms, Butches, and Sex with Furniture’, in *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life*, ed. Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 184–86.

⁷¹ Davidson, ‘It’s A Sin, A Double Sin To Tell A Lie’.

⁷² Ibid.

not amount to much. The language of uncertainty and chance suffused his article about the proposal.⁷³ The feather boa had not yet been discarded entirely.

The Geneva Summit put many of the concerns expressed in Davidson's writing to rest. In 1984, Davidson had been very clear that the Soviets needed to take the initiative and make some significant concessions in order for peace to be viable. In the first part of 1985, he had emphasised that both powers needed to change their thinking. In the wake of the Geneva Summit, however, Davidson argued that the Soviet Union did not need to do very much at all. He predicted that all the Soviet Union should do was avoid being 'too unreasonable in the Geneva negotiations,' and there might be some beneficial outcomes as a result.⁷⁴ This reflected a shift away from the evil empire narrative that Davidson had evoked only months before. He even critiqued the phrase 'Soviet trouble-making,' despite the fact that he had used it frequently himself. He used the phrase several times in his post-Summit article, but then pointed out several lines later that — when Reagan used the words — they were a 'crude oversimplification'.⁷⁵

In Davidson's story about the summit, Gorbachev had abandoned the foolish (or even histrionic) machismo that made the world such a dangerous place. He had shown himself to be sincere rather than effeminate and dishonest. Davidson's Gorbachev had settled into the role of the civilised, rational technocrat. This distinction is reflected in Terrell Carver's thesis that the discursive division between the successful man, who is civilised and rational, and the inferior barbaric man is enabled by the absence of a gendered Other. The difference between these two masculinities emerges when two men come into conflict with no third party present.⁷⁶ Without the presence of the feminine, distinctions cannot be made between men and women. It becomes necessary to make distinctions between types of masculinity. Thus, once the spectre of Gorbachev's transgressively feminine dissembling had been abolished, Davidson defined the clash of powers in terms of appropriate masculinity. Gorbachev filled the role of a foil for Western men, provoking and prompting them to be their best and worst.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: Writing History Backwards', *Financial Times*, 25 November 1985, Factiva.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Terrell Carver, 'The Machine in the Man', in *Rethinking the Man Question: Sex, Gender and Violence in International Relations.*, ed. Jane L. Parpart and Marysia Zalewski (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2008), 82.

Safire on Gorbachev as Antagonist

Unsurprisingly, William Safire was sceptical about Gorbachev. For Safire, if Gorbachev's reforms succeeded — a possibility he found unlikely — then they would herald new threats to the West. Even when the two journalists ostensibly agreed about the meaning of particular event or reform, Safire used different language that constructed Gorbachev and Gorbachev's Soviet Union as threats. Although he did write about Soviet domestic politics, it was in the realm of international relations that his anxieties about Gorbachev emerged most strongly. As with Davidson, Safire expressed them with gendered language, although he applied an added dose of homoerotic imagery.

Safire's gendering of Gorbachev sharply contrasted with Walker's. While Walker's Gorbachev was a Russian strong-man, Safire argued that Gorbachev had to rely on deception and dissembling to achieve his ends. The dominant theme in this discourse was dependence. The Soviet system was one in which state and ideology, rather than people, were in control. Thus, Gorbachev's failures were framed as emasculation. He needed to rely on other weak men to rule effectively, and was constantly stymied by forces that were outside of his control but inherent to Communism.⁷⁷ The USSR took on the role of a bad parent, especially in contrast to the young American man. However, despite its paternal failure, the USSR threatened to undermine the independence of the US. Unlike Davidson, who portrayed himself as an external observer to Soviet-American interactions, and Walker, who told a story about Gorbachev's ascendance, Safire placed the United States at the centre of his discourse.

Safire's Gorbachev was cynical, dishonest, and hungry for domination — hardly different from the old men who had preceded him. This reading of Gorbachev had a more ambitious and cynical vision than Walker's. The first article Safire wrote addressing Gorbachev's domestic reforms, published in July 1985, was about the promotion and firing of officials. Other commentators had characterised this as a generational shift but Safire disagreed with their analysis. Grigory Romanov was one of those who had been removed from the politburo, and he was around the same age as Gorbachev. This indicated to Safire that the changes could not 'be

⁷⁷ William Safire, 'Essay: The Silent Purge', *New York Times*, 11 July 1985, Factiva.

explained as the replacement of the gerontocracy by a new generation of Russian leaders.⁷⁸ With claims like this, Safire undermined the narrative that Gorbachev and his cohort represented a faction within the Soviet government that was defined by youth and innovation. He proposed another way of understanding the changes: 'This is no mere shake-up; a purge is under way, nonetheless systematic and far-reaching for being dull and bloodless.'⁷⁹ Safire's suggestion that a purge was taking place echoed Walker's comparisons between Gorbachev and Stalin but, in this form of the tale, the new General Secretary was less of an individual. Like any other Soviet leader, he had to rely on interdependence rather than strength of will.

Furthermore, Safire disagreed with Walker's assessment that the Soviet system could be made to work through cleverness, innovation and the use of brute strength. According to him, the Soviet Union did not function at all and never would. In this, he closely echoed Thatcher's claims that the Soviet economy was broken. The USSR was a failed parent that could not even feed its own people. It failed in the role of a father because it could not produce enough resources and had allowed its pioneering social experiment to fall into stagnation. But the USSR also failed the test of motherhood. It could not nurture or feed its children. Safire wrote:

It is news to nobody that the Soviet system does not work. After 70 years of Communism it is hard to keep blaming the weather for a nation's inability to feed its people. The Andropovites now in charge at the Kremlin know that the ignoble experiment of central direction has failed, and that great chunks of the party apparat and its present leaders must follow yesterday's Mensheviks to history's ash heap.⁸⁰

Thatcher had claimed that it required the special insight of a Westerner to see the flaws of the USSR. Safire, on the other hand, wrote that even the Soviets could now see the damage. However, they could not respond. Gorbachev recognised that the basis of the Soviet economy was profoundly flawed, but he was not allowed to say that publicly. To do so would doom him politically, and possibly the USSR alongside him. Instead, Gorbachev could do as his predecessors had done and blame human failings rather than ideological ones. According to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Safire, Gorbachev was as tightly bound by the domineering Soviet state-mother as the people he lorded over. The General Secretary was subservient to the state and its mechanisms, unlike Reagan who served ideals. Gorbachev needed to wear a cloak of orthodoxy while he made his changes. This conception of Gorbachev as a craven schemer was a vastly different one to Walker's Leninist true believer.

When it came to international relations, the differences between Gorbachev and Reagan were sources of anxiety and excitement for Safire. He had set the benchmark for his judgements of Gorbachev when he wrote 'Mind-Reading Gorbachev' in 1984. In this article, he had predicted Gorbachev's accession and argued that it would usher in a time of renewed danger rather than genuine rapprochement with the United States.⁸¹ Even an unlikely *détente* would be threatening and subversive. The anxiety that Safire expressed about this threat was more visceral than that of either Walker or Davidson. Both British writers positioned themselves as observers to the Soviet-American liaison. They were broadly aligned with the West, and implicitly with the US, but both suggested that collaboration rather than conflict would keep their European home secure.

Unlike his British colleagues, Safire was an enthusiastic advocate of America's muscular claims to world leadership. He assessed diplomacy in terms of the threat that it presented to the self-image of his country. American self-description in the Cold War was permeated with gender language and gendered dynamics, particularly of the masculine kind.⁸² Safire epitomised this rhetorical tendency. Foreign policy, one of his favourite topics, was the realm of men pursuing their patriarchal duty to the nation-home.⁸³ But it was also a dangerous place where the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', masculinity and femininity, were threatened. Before Gorbachev's accession, Safire's regular refrain had been that Reagan should push harder in negotiations and not let himself be charmed, let alone soften his stance for the sake of public relations at home. When 'the Soviet Union's cagey new leader' became a factor to seriously

⁸¹ Safire, 'Essay: Mind-Reading Gorbachev'.

⁸² Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*; Costigliola, 'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration'; Michael Snyder, 'Crises of Masculinity: Homosocial Desire and Homosexual Panic in the Critical Cold War Narratives of Mailer and Coover', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 48, no. 3 (2007): 250–277; Michelle Mart, 'Tough Guys and American Cold War Policy: Images of Israel, 1948–1960', *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 3 (1996): 357–380.

⁸³ Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*; Geoffrey S. Smith, 'Commentary: Security, Gender, and the Historical Process', *Diplomatic History* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 79.

account for, Safire insisted that this remained true.⁸⁴ It was now, perhaps, even more vital that Reagan stand firm against the Russians.

The gender politics that were implicit in Safire's analysis of Gorbachev on the home front became harsh and overt when he wrote about diplomacy. In March 1985 he inaugurated his discussion about the coming Geneva Summit with harsh criticism of Reagan's 'uncharacteristic begging for the pleasure of another superpower's company.'⁸⁵ By framing Reagan's gestures as evidence of love, Safire echoed his 1984 depiction of Thatcher's school-girl crush on the 'Smiling Russian'.⁸⁶ Geneva was a story about Reagan asking Gorbachev on a date. It was thick with romantic language, as the following excerpts show:⁸⁷

- 'Mr. Reagan fairly got down on his knees.'
- 'His hots to hold hands has led to a significant weakening of his position on Russian violations of past arms agreements.'
- 'The killing of a U.S. Army major, coldly justified by the Kremlin in its jet-shootdown mode, does not cool the suitor's ardour for a summit session.'

Reagan's declarations of love were unreciprocated. In what Safire considered a less than dignified response to being 'rebuffed', Reagan promised that Gorbachev could set the date of their meeting for any time. The President, begging, eventually rolled 'to a supine fallback position'.⁸⁸ Reagan's besotted pleading was unacceptable to Safire. It was unmanly and lacking in vigour. His actions did not represent the uncompromising President who had previously made it his goal to see communism fall. Instead, it seemed as though he had suddenly gone against all of his previous promises. Meanwhile, Gorbachev played the part of the silent heartthrob. As Reagan was portrayed begging and rolling submissively, the Gorbachev-character said and did nothing. He met Reagan's overtures with impassive silence, playing hard-to-get. With this

⁸⁴ William Safire, 'Essay: Begging for a Summit', *New York Times*, 28 March 1985, Factiva.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Safire, 'Essay; Maggie Likes Mike'.

⁸⁷ Safire, 'Essay: Begging for a Summit'.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

juxtaposition, Safire implied that Reagan was so eager to fall on his knees that Gorbachev did not need to do anything at all.

This was a sharp reversal of roles. Despite his emasculation at home and dependence on others, Gorbachev suddenly took the role of the tougher man. Safire gave several reasons for his concerns, including the suddenness of Reagan's change of heart and the continuing Soviet record of poor behaviour. The last reason Safire gave was that begging was poor strategy because 'the side that presses for a meeting weakens its position at the start.'⁸⁹ He explained that impatience would give the Soviets a psychological victory. Safire portrayed it as matter-of-fact that showing too much anxiety to close a deal would be harmful in the balance. But despite his pretensions to psychological analysis, the essence of Safire's argument closely mirrored the clichéd popular wisdom that, in pursuit of a romantic engagement, the pursuer should not show their enthusiasm. Thus, the romantic metaphor was continued.

Reading this narrative with a gendered lens reveals further dynamics at work. Safire's criticisms expressed anxiety about a sudden breakdown in the ideal of masculinity to which he insisted Reagan should aspire. Safire explained that Reagan was putting himself in a feminine position, which he equated with falling for the other man. This threatened not only the identity of the US, but its political objectives. Femininity was not an appropriate way to pursue foreign policy because it was cosmetic and shallow. It elevated 'smiles over substance', and threatened to beautify the ugly reality of the USSR. Using another gendered term, Safire claimed that Reagan's submissiveness 'nourished' misunderstandings about the differences between Americans and Soviets.

Therein lay the other threat. Reagan was not quite acting like a Soviet by begging, but he was blurring the differentiation between 'us' and 'them'. As Safire had also demonstrated in 1984 when he attacked Reagan's Soviet-style lying, the idea that the differences between the two powers might not be clear was intolerable.⁹⁰ Michael Snyder detects similar dynamics in American discourses of the 1950s and 1960s that linked communism and homosexuality and

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Safire, 'Essay: Truth in Crises'.

constructed both as subversive threats to American identity.⁹¹ Safire's criticism of Reagan contained a strong theme of homosexual panic, described by Snyder as:

a pervasive paranoia about homosexuality — that one might be a homosexual, that others might try to seduce or convert one — that obliges a continual renunciation of same-sex desire.⁹²

Safire's story was ultimately a repackaging of these homophobic discourses. Reagan's flirtation was not just with anyone, but with someone who desired sexual and ideological domination. More than any of his recent predecessors, Gorbachev was someone who might actually succeed in seducing Reagan.

Safire picked up this narrative thread again in September 1985. He described the Soviet response to Reagan's begging as a 'barrage of publicity' that rocked the president back on his feet. Although the article was more focused on policy than metaphor, the imagery of sexual threat continued. Safire wrote that the Soviets insisted on superiority in warheads, which was a challenge to the explosive manifestation of American manhood. Criticising the Soviet response to SDI, Safire wielded classically phallic tropes when he stated that 'space is "militarized" by an ICBM traveling through it, not by a shield to stop that missile.'⁹³ SDI was Safire's preferred counter to perverse Soviet subversion. It was strong, noble and, just like his idealised image of Reagan, would not compromise. He praised it enthusiastically throughout 1985 and 1986.⁹⁴

However, there was also a tension in Safire's discourse about international relations. Safire was critical of summits. They could not accomplish very much at all, except for the cosmetic progress that he disdained. Not only were they pointless, but they were also sites of potential subversion and sexual tension. Yet Safire's praise for SDI was predicated on the fact that it had convinced the Soviets to negotiate. In September 1985 Safire wrote that 'Star Wars is

⁹¹ Snyder, 'Crises of Masculinity', 252.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 254.

⁹³ Carol Cohn, 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals', *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 687–718; William Safire, 'Essay: The New Summitry', *New York Times*, 5 September 1985, Factiva.

⁹⁴ William Safire, 'Essay: The Year of Dee-Fense', *New York Times*, 19 September 1985, Factiva; William Safire, 'Essay: Krasnoyarsk Chutzpah', *New York Times*, 31 October 1985, Factiva; William Safire, 'Essay: Shield-Sharing', *New York Times*, 14 November 1985, Factiva; William Safire, 'Essay: The Fireside Summit', *New York Times*, 21 November 1985, Factiva; William Safire, 'Essay: Reagan's Dark Side', *New York Times*, 26 December 1985, Factiva.

already a brilliant success because it has induced the Russians to talk of arms reductions.⁹⁵ Star Wars was the only reason that Reagan had been able to ask Gorbachev for a date in the first place. Safire's enthusiasm was not for engagement itself. He was enthusiastic because SDI had re-established the proper (gendered) order of things. SDI put America, and thus Reagan, back in the dominant position. Not only did Star Wars make new negotiations possible, but it had helped to create a Western advantage against the Soviets in both current negotiations and the ones to come. SDI was a symbol of American masculinity, one that was far less susceptible to disabling flights of fancy than was Reagan.

Safire's approach to the Geneva Summit further revealed discursive assumptions about the relationship between the Soviet Union and the West. His writing was permeated with imagery and implications that combined violence and sexuality. The metaphor of 'tensions' provided the foundation for this imagery. Safire claimed that he was unconcerned if tensions were reduced. He instead wanted to 'get at the cause of tension' so that it could be properly relieved, or at least managed. According to Safire, judging a summit by whether it reduced tensions was an 'admission of the impotence of impatience. We're tense for cause.'⁹⁶ The conflicted relationship with the USSR that caused this tension involved the two sides 'pressing' against one another but rarely contained breakthroughs. It would only be possible to 'relax' when the liaison was complete and there was no more conflict between Soviets and Americans. Other, secondary, images sustained the sexual implications of Safire's writing. Relations could only be improved up to a point, Safire wrote, because 'the rape of the Afghan people goes on.'⁹⁷ In addition, he reminded his readers, the Soviets were upset that they were not allowed to point their new missiles at Europe.

What is the significance of this sexual subtext? As gender and international relations scholar Henri Myrtinnen points out, it is not enough to look at this sexual language purely in terms of 'pop psychological' terms.⁹⁸ Safire's use of metaphor and gendered dynamics does not necessarily reflect some real psychosexual desire on his part. But it is useful to explore the

⁹⁵ Safire, 'Essay: The New Summitry'.

⁹⁶ William Safire, 'Essay: How to Judge Summit XIV', *New York Times*, 17 November 1985, Factiva.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Henri Myrttinen, "'Pack Your Heat and Work the Streets" — Weapons and the Active Construction of Violent Masculinities', *Women and Language* 27, no. 2 (2004): 30.

interlinking of these metaphors and how they enabled the logic of his discourse. This language of sexual violence articulated a framework for the acceptable coming together of the American Self and the Soviet Other. In sharp contrast to Reagan, Safire argued that it was not possible for Soviets and Americans to come together as humans in the hope that they might understand each other better. Safire's depiction of the relationship assumed that both sides acted in the pursuit of manly, competitive urges. These urges were instinctual, and the sexual-ideological tension they engendered could not be ignored or 'reduced'. It could only be relieved with endurance, the constant pressing of force against the other party, and ultimately a breakthrough. As long as Reagan understood this to be the case, Safire suggested there was not too much to worry about. The USSR was weak, after all. Reagan's begging had been a problem because it represented an unmanly attempt to ignore the instinctual urges that propelled him into close proximity with Gorbachev. Diplomacy could not be romance, implied Safire, but it could be sex.

In Safire's world of international relations, and especially arms control, the truest peril was not Soviet belligerence and manipulation. It was the risk that someone like Reagan might be seduced by Gorbachev's sweetness, thus threatening the nation and its identity. The US was defined by not being Soviet. The solution to subversion was Western conviction and refusal to compromise. It followed that when Safire was highly critical of what he described as Reagan's inordinate enthusiasm about meeting with Gorbachev. It was only when Reagan resisted his inclinations and had 'faith in his travelling hawks' that the Soviet Union was reminded of American power and could be reasoned with. For Safire, Gorbachev's role on the world stage was little different to those of his predecessors. Any positive outcomes could be attributed to the United States and Ronald Reagan's renewed certainty, not to any changes that might have taken place in the USSR.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Walker, Davidson and Safire had questions to ask about Gorbachev. Was he a true Soviet? Was he dangerous? Was he an illusion? The answers that they gave to these questions sometimes

⁹⁹ Safire, 'Essay: The Fireside Summit'.

appeared contradictory. Walker was critical of Soviet repression, but portrayed a positive image of Gorbachev as a latter-day Stalin. Davidson insisted that the USSR was an expansionist and trouble-making power. But he blamed the US, not the USSR, for causing it to lash out. In the story constructed by Safire, the Soviet Union was ultimately a failed experiment that was still a threat to American hegemony. These contradictions were enabled by the logics that defined the discourses of the three journalists. Their depictions of Gorbachev and the USSR are summarised in Table 4.

	Walker	Davidson	Safire
Storyline	Heroic protagonist	Supporting character	Charming antagonist
Gorbachev	Energetic and heroic Like a tsar, Stalin, or Khrushchev But not too manly More rational than Reagan	Initially unknown, in the background Threatening ambiguity Revealed to be a 'confident leading man' after all	Conspiratorial villain Strong and silent Threateningly seductive A more despicable kind of man
USSR	Feminine Passive Receptive to Gorbachev's vigor	Usually brutish and barbaric Something that the West needed to live with	Communism caused stagnancy and interdependence Hostile to American masculinity, defined by individuality and strength

Table 4. Gendered depictions and roles of Gorbachev and the USSR

To Walker, Gorbachev was typically Soviet and more Russian. His domestic policy was characterised by astounding strength and individuality that made him stand out from the feminised landscape he inhabited. But unlike other Soviet leaders, and even Western ones like Reagan, he was a man of industry rather than war. He was confident and in control, and Walker explained that this was the key to success in both the Soviet Union and Geneva.

Gorbachev initially played an unimportant role in Davidson's commentary, but he became threatening because he could not be properly parsed. He wore a mask of feminine glamour (and potential deception) that made him difficult to predict. He may have even been the 'good old Politburo' in a wig — the ultimate (gendered) betrayal. When Gorbachev was

revealed to be exactly who he claimed to be, these fears were calmed. He emerged as a rational man of business, much more like Thatcher than the dangerous macho man that was Reagan. Gorbachev's embodiment of ideal Western norms, implicitly masculine, made him more like the Self than the Other he might have been. All of these developments served, however, to prove that it was only by imitating the best elements of Western culture that Gorbachev could break the nuclear stalemate.

Safire expressed much more anxiety about Gorbachev. In this storyline, the General Secretary was clearly emasculated by the cloying nature of the Soviet system, but somehow Reagan took this for gentility and charm. If Reagan fell too much in love with Gorbachev, he would forget that international relations was all about rough-and-tumble masculine sexuality. The taint of softness might then spread from East to West. In defence of American identity, Safire passionately criticised transgressions against the gendered norms of international diplomacy.

At the heart of these slippages and tensions were questions about whether the Soviet Union could change in a meaningful way, and whether that change would come from the strength of Gorbachev or of the West. The commentators discussed in this chapter were engaged in a process of explaining why the Soviet Union could become, at least contingently, part of the Self, or why it would remain an Other. According to Safire, the USSR was still an evil empire and a present danger. For Davidson and Walker, the Soviets were still dangerous, but perhaps less so than they had been before. Gorbachev's ambiguity challenged simple explanations and forced commentators to justify their discourses when he defied them. Safire only expressed such confidence when he could be sure that correct gender etiquette and dynamics were being observed. Only Walker really made a case for significant change on the horizon.

Chapter Five: *Glasnost* and the Chernobyl Disaster

This chapter argues that the Chernobyl disaster was a Critical Discourse Moment (CDM) — an event that challenged the foundations of a wide range of discourses. It achieves this through analysis of newspaper reporting in the first month following the disaster, and especially within the first few days. This early stage was critical in shaping storylines about Chernobyl. The disaster could have been narrated in many ways: as a story about the limits of technology or about heroism in a time of crisis, for instance. But it became, primarily, a story about secrecy and the cruelty — or incompetence — of the Soviet government. This chapter does not consider which story would be the most ‘accurate’, but at how one story came to dominate the narrative and how it was then subverted.

When the Chernobyl disaster took place in late April 1986, nobody at the time knew how serious the consequences would be. However, it was immediately apparent to everyone that Chernobyl was the worst accident in the history of nuclear power. As a consequence both of the uncertainty and the seriousness of the crisis, Chernobyl was explained primarily by reference to existing discourses about the USSR. But the crisis also called accepted truths into question. Sometimes it was used to reaffirm existing stories about Soviet despotism, but it could also be used to argue that Gorbachev was finally starting to implement the reforms that he had promised.

Many of the stories about Chernobyl intersected with discourses about *glasnost*. Literally translated, *glasnost* means ‘voiceness’, but it is usually translated as ‘openness’. In the context of nineteenth-century Russian politics, it connoted the freedom to speak openly and publicly.¹ In Gorbachev’s Soviet Union, where *glasnost* was articulated as a policy in 1985, the concept referred to increased accountability in government and freedom for Soviet citizens to criticise the state. It was originally intended to improve economic efficiency.² In April 1986, Western commentators were becoming increasingly aware of Gorbachev’s reforms, including *glasnost*. Because the Soviet government did not reveal information about Chernobyl

¹ Stephen Lovell, ‘Glasnost’ in Practice: Public Speaking in the Era of Alexander II’, *Past & Present*, no. 218 (2013): 131–32.

² Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D Steinberg, *A History of Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 587–88.

immediately, commentators questioned whether ‘openness’ was just an exercise in public relations. As such, the response of the Soviet government to the crisis became a way to measure whether the USSR had changed under Gorbachev.

The existence of at least two storylines about the disaster, and the dialogue between them, are key themes in this chapter. My objective is not to show that the initial Anglo-American reporting on Chernobyl was negative. This has already been decisively established, and the work of scholars in this field informs my own research.³ Nor is this chapter an attempt to analyse the failures of Soviet information management — another task that has been performed by the same investigators. Instead, my primary interest here is the process by which the Soviet response to the disaster became simultaneously a symbol of secrecy and also of openness. How did one of these storylines create the preconditions for the other, and where did that development sit in the broader context of Anglo-American discourse about the USSR?

The Disaster

For those who lived and worked around the V. I. Lenin Nuclear Power Station, near the cities of Pripyat and Chernobyl, the crisis started early in the morning of 26 April 1986. Several steam explosions destroyed the plant’s fourth reactor and blew a hole in the building which contained it. The wrecked reactor spewed a plume of radioactive particles into the atmosphere as its core melted and vaporised.⁴ The situation was brought under control over the next ten days as hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated from the area around the nuclear power plant.⁵ Thousands of volunteers covered the reactor in materials intended to suppress both the fire and the atomic reactions taking place, above ground and below. In the process, many sustained terrible radiation poisoning. Some died, but many still live.

³ Brian McNair, *Images of the Enemy: Reporting the New Cold War* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 130–54; Timothy W. Luke, *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 181–204; David M. Rubin, ‘How the News Media Reported on Three Mile Island and Chernobyl’, *Journal of Communication* 37, no. 3 (1 September 1987): 42–57.

⁴ V. Saenko et al., ‘The Chernobyl Accident and Its Consequences’, *Clinical Oncology, The Radiobiological Consequences of the Chernobyl Accident 25 Years On - April 2011*, 23, no. 4 (May 2011): 235.

⁵ United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, ‘Sources, Effects and Risks of Ionizing Radiation’, United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation 1988 Report to the General Assembly, with annexes (New York: United Nations, 1988), 29.

In human and environmental terms, Chernobyl remains the worst nuclear disaster yet to have taken place. Two technicians were killed immediately and five firemen died throughout the first night. 134 people sustained acute radiation poisoning, 28 of whom died within several months.⁶ The radioactive cloud itself spread over large parts of Europe, where it was detected at a nuclear power plant in Sweden two days after the explosion. Eventually, an increase in background radiation was detected as far away as the UK. The long-term consequences in the region around Chernobyl were stark. In a survey of scientific papers, the World Health Organisation reports that there could be up to 9,000 additional cancer-related deaths caused by the disaster: 4,000 deaths amongst the people who were present at the site, and up to 5,000 deaths amongst those who were affected by fallout in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia.⁷

Chernobyl as a Critical Discourse Moment

Chernobyl was more than a series of events. It was a Critical Discourse Moment. As conceptualised by Paul Chilton, CDMs are ‘those acts in discourse that contradict the rights or beliefs or values of either the speaker or hearer or both.’⁸ The example that Chilton gives, in the context of nuclear discourse, is the news that atomic bombs had been dropped Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These attacks forced people to renegotiate the uses of nuclear power. According to Chilton, people in the armed forces were forced to ask: ‘what the hell is [nuclear power] for?’ Politicians were forced to ask: ‘who has the right to [nuclear power’s] ownership and use.’⁹ As identified by Felicitas Macgilchrist, another characteristic of CDMs is that they are debated extensively in the news media.¹⁰ Through media coverage, certain events are transformed into sites of tension wherein it is possible for significant discursive shifts to take place. Chernobyl meets the criteria set by both Chilton and Macgilchrist. Once it had been revealed in the West, the disaster quickly became a media spectacle that threatened to invalidate central assumptions about nuclear power and geopolitics.

⁶ Saenko et al., ‘The Chernobyl Accident and Its Consequences’, 235.

⁷ Elisabeth Cardis et al., ‘Cancer Consequences of the Chernobyl Accident: 20 Years On’, *Journal of Radiological Protection* 26, no. 2 (1 June 2006): 127–40.

⁸ Chilton, ‘Metaphor, Euphemism and the Militarization of Language’, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰ Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political*, 11.

The explosion at Chernobyl shook the foundations of numerous discourses. In a survey of Italian newspaper coverage, Anna Triandafyllidou points out that:

The nuclear accident at Chernobyl is in fact controversial by definition. The explosion in reactor 4 was not supposed to happen. Its very existence breaks the social contract on nuclear energy: it is supposed to be dangerous only when used in warfare.¹¹

Political scientist Timothy W. Luke similarly argues that the disaster challenged assumptions about technological progress and the safety of nuclear power. Because nuclear power was an institution shared by Westerners and Soviets, the violent demonstration of its danger revealed uncomfortable similarities between the two blocs. Both sides shared a reliance on nuclear power, a lack of concrete knowledge about what would happen if it went catastrophically wrong, and an inability to guarantee the safety of nuclear technology. These similarities were usually hidden by insistence on the Otherness of the opposing side. In response to the revelation that a Chernobyl could take place in the West, Luke argues, the disaster was used by political actors and the media on both sides of the Iron Curtain to reinforce ideologically correct stories. In the West, it was used to deride Soviet technology and reinforce the perception that nuclear power outside of the USSR was basically safe. In the USSR, Gorbachev used it to demonstrate his commitment to reform.¹²

Chernobyl also negated the discourses of spatial exclusion that gave the Cold War meaning. Unlike spies or soldiers, the poisonous gases and isotopes billowing out of the burning power plant could not be given orders, arrested, or negotiated with. They respected no borders. The source of the poison was within the USSR, but it had the potential to affect the entire planet. Thus, even though the ecological consequences were limited in the US and other faraway places, there were emotional consequences everywhere. Chernobyl was felt in the 'fear and terror' of Ukrainian immigrants in New York, mass purchases of iodine pills in Salt Lake City,

¹¹ Anna Triandafyllidou, 'The Chernobyl Accident in the Italian Press: A 'Media Story-Line'', *Discourse & Society* 6, no. 4 (1 October 1995): 518.

¹² Luke, *Screens of Power*, 181–201.

and a surge of enraged anti-nuclear activism across Europe.¹³ This radioactive invasion demonstrated the impossibility of totally excluding the Soviet Other. As the *Guardian* put it, Chernobyl was a ‘disaster without frontiers’.¹⁴

As a CDM, Chernobyl provided opportunities to establish new grounds for discourse about the USSR. In a world of global disaster, the lines of difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ needed to be redrawn or reconsidered. As mentioned above, Luke argues that some commentators responded by reasserting the lines of difference. But his analysis of Chernobyl coverage fails to take into account the use of the disaster not just to support the status quo, but to challenge it. Alternative ways of telling the story emphasised the basic similarities of Soviet and Western people, and portrayed *glasnost* as a growing force in Soviet life. The initial response to Chernobyl was overwhelmingly negative, but it also contained the seeds of more optimistic narratives about the USSR. A storyline about *glasnost* was present from some of the earliest reporting. From this, Chernobyl became both an object lesson in Soviet secrecy and a cautiously hopeful parable about Gorbachev’s reforms.

Methodology

This chapter takes a different approach to the previous chapters. Rather than focusing on a small pool of key figures and what they said or wrote, it examines a broader selection of newspaper coverage about the disaster over a shorter period of time. I have chosen two American newspapers, the *New York Times* (*NYT*) and the *Washington Post* (*WP*), and two British newspapers, the *Guardian* and *The Times*. This chapter is based on a survey of 650 articles published about Chernobyl in the four newspapers from 29 April 1986, when the disaster was first reported in the West, to 17 May, by which time the initial flurry of coverage had started to dwindle. Although this is only a short span of time, it was in this initial period that Chernobyl took firm narrative form as both a disaster and a turning point.

¹³ Sara Rimer, ‘For City’s Ukrainians, Ordeal of Waiting for Word on Disaster’, *New York Times*, 1 May 1986, Factiva; Michael Norman, ‘As Worry Over Accident Rises, So Do Sales of Iodide Pills’, *New York Times*, 2 May 1986, Factiva; ‘More Shocks From Chernobyl’, *The Times*, 27 May 1986, Factiva.

¹⁴ ‘A Disaster Without Frontiers’, *Guardian*, 30 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

There are a variety of differences and similarities between these newspapers, but they are all 'newspapers of quality'. They represent elite and influential discourse with great capacity to shape national and international conversations. The political stances of the newspapers span from the traditionally left-wing leanings of the *Guardian* through to the conservative voice of *The Times*, with the two American newspapers falling somewhere between them. However, they cannot be taken as indicative of all portrayals of Chernobyl. For instance, they do not shed a great deal of light on how it was described in tabloid newspapers, although a few examples of tabloid reporting are mentioned here.

The journalists discussed in previous chapters appear here, too. Martin Walker plays a prominent role. Living within the USSR, Walker was well placed to narrate the unfolding story. Ian Davidson had less to say, but his perspective provides an interesting counterpoint. He remained sceptical about Soviet policies, but took Chernobyl as a reminder that it was essential to consider Anglo-American nuclear culture more closely and critically. William Safire, on the other hand, used Chernobyl to restate his existing criticisms of the USSR.

Initial Responses, 28-30 April

Westerners first became aware of the disaster on 28 April when radioactive particles were detected at a nuclear power plant in Sweden. Analysis showed that the material came from a location within the USSR. Several hours after the Swedish government announced its discovery, the disaster was confirmed in a televised statement from the Soviet state news agency, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS). The first written reports about Chernobyl started to reach American and British audiences on 29 April and, at this stage, the coverage was highly speculative.¹⁵

The first few days after the explosion were chaotic and very little information was available. Journalists attempted to fill the gap with whatever they could find. Anglo-American reporters emphasised that there was a lack of official information beyond the first statement

¹⁵ Celestine Bohlen, 'Soviet Nuclear Accident Sends Radioactive Cloud Over Europe', *Washington Post*, 29 April 1986, Factiva; David Fairhall, 'Radioactive Russian Dust Cloud Escapes', *Guardian*, 29 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Serge Schmemmann, 'Soviet Announces Nuclear Accident at Electric Plant', *New York Times*, 29 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Thomson Prentice and Christopher Mosey, 'Huge Nuclear Leak at Soviet Plant', *The Times*, 29 April 1986, Factiva.

published by TASS, and another one the following day.¹⁶ Other Soviet sources, such as the state travel agency, were similarly uninformative, and on-site reporting was strictly prohibited.¹⁷ Western observers thus derived their first conclusions from a medley of second-hand evidence. The data used to analyse and mediate the disaster included: the quantity and type of atmospheric radiation detected in Scandinavia, knowledge about the Chernobyl plant's design, and anonymous sources claiming to be from the region around the plant.¹⁸ According to communications scholar Brian McNair, the absence of official Soviet sources directly contributed to rampant speculation by Western reporters.¹⁹

The tendency of journalists to create stories based on little concrete information is typical of reporting on disasters and large-scale accidents, and is exacerbated by the discursive practices used to create news about such events. Professional journalistic standards and methods for interpreting and representing disasters emphasise the importance of obtaining detailed information about casualties and destruction to property. But as these facts are often unknown, even by officials and emergency personnel on the scene, plausible-sounding assumptions take their place.²⁰ As with others disasters, the stories that emerged about Chernobyl were attempts, in part, to create information where there was little to be found.

Western experts, including scientists, played important roles in mediating the disaster in the first few days.²¹ Table 5 demonstrates typical examples of the sources described in typical articles about Chernobyl, published on 29 April.²² Although journalists did refer to the Soviet media and government, they attributed the most reliable and plentiful information to Western experts and officials.

¹⁶ Rubin, 'How the News Media Reported on Three Mile Island and Chernobyl', 44.

¹⁷ Ibid., 43–44; David Fairhall and Martin Walker, 'Russia Admits Blast as Death Fears Rise', *Guardian*, 30 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁸ Luke, *Screens of Power*, 187; McNair, *Images of the Enemy*, 150.

¹⁹ McNair, *Images of the Enemy*, 153.

²⁰ Joseph Scanlon, 'The Search for Non-Existent Facts in the Reporting of Disasters', *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 45–53.

²¹ McNair, *Images of the Enemy*, 150.

²² Complete lists of the sources referenced in selected articles on 29 April are located in Appendix 3.

Article	Publication	Date	Sources
Soviet Announces Nuclear Accident at Electric Plant	<i>NYT</i>	29-Apr	The Soviet Union
			Tass press agency
			Sweden, Finland and Denmark
			the Council of Ministers
			United States experts
			A British reporter
			reports from across Scandinavia
			Scandinavian authorities
Soviet Nuclear Accident Sends Radioactive Cloud	<i>WP</i>	29-Apr	The Soviet Union
			the news agency Tass
			Residents of Kiev
			United Press International
			western diplomats
			Officials in Sweden
			Denmark, Finland and Norway
			a spokesman for the Environmental Protection Agency's Radiation Alert Network
			White House spokesman Edward Djerejian
Scandinavian experts			
Radioactive Russian Dust Cloud Escapes	<i>Guardian</i>	29-Apr	a Swedish nuclear plant at Forsmark
			the Soviet authorities
			Tass news agency
			Helsinki ... Stockholm ... Oslo
			Swedish scientists
			Birgitta Dahl [the Swedish Energy Minister]
			The Protection Board
reports			
Huge nuclear leak at Soviet plant	<i>The Times</i>	29-Apr	Denmark, Finland and Norway
			Mr Ragnar Boge, of the Swedish Radiation Institute
			Soviet atomic energy authorities
			Tass
			Swedish scientists
			Some Swedish nuclear experts

Table 5. Examples of sources provided in articles about the Chernobyl disaster, 29 April 1986

International news is always shaped by the many people through whom it travels before and after publication.²³ But the lack of concrete information intensified this process at Chernobyl. Experts and observers told ideologically charged stories about what might have taken place in and around the reactor, even when they portrayed themselves as unbiased analysts. Journalists used a technique called ‘category entitlement’ to portray their sources as authoritative. Category entitlement involves the implication that a person or organisation, often unspecified, has accurate, expert knowledge on the basis of belonging to a category like ‘scientists’.²⁴ The experts who were consulted included Swedish scientists, White House spokesmen, ‘Western diplomats’, ‘United States nuclear experts’, and others with questionably relevant knowledge.²⁵ By emphasising the nuclear power credentials of these sources, reporters gave credibility to their conclusions about Chernobyl without having to provide evidence for how those conclusions were reached.

Unsurprisingly, the claims made by these experts — or attributed to them, at least — were much more ominous than the Soviet version of the story. Many of their accounts were speculative and vague. In one such example, Steve Lohr, a writer for the *NYT*, claimed on 30 April that ‘Swedish scientists’ had theorised that ‘the radioactive core of a Soviet power-generating reactor melted’ — a worst-case scenario.²⁶ However, Lohr did not explain the significance of a meltdown. Despite the fact that meltdowns had taken place previously, including at the Three Mile Island (TMI) nuclear plant in the US, he wrote that the melting core at Chernobyl made it ‘the worst nuclear power plant disaster in history.’ Likewise, a *Times* article that said there may have been 2,000 deaths referred to ‘Western scientists’ who believed that ‘a meltdown — the ultimate disaster — may have occurred.’²⁷ The initial reporting on Chernobyl was not formulated in response to hard facts. Instead, early commentary took on what Luke describes as mythological forms that confirmed negative images of the USSR.²⁸

²³ Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: Tauris, 1993).

²⁴ Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political*, 58.

²⁵ Bohlen, ‘Soviet Nuclear Accident Sends Radioactive Cloud Over Europe’; Malcolm W. Browne, ‘Some See No Danger Outside Soviet’, *New York Times*, 29 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁶ Steve Lohr, ‘Signs Point to a Meltdown, Scientists in Sweden Assert’, *New York Times*, 30 April 1986, Factiva.

²⁷ Thomson Prentice, ‘Fears of Huge Death Toll in Atom Disaster’, *The Times*, 30 April 1986, Factiva.

²⁸ Luke, *Screens of Power*, 182–83.

Subsequent reporting built on the foundations established between 29 April and 3 May. The narrative of Chernobyl had been given shape from the moment it was reported in the West and, to begin with, was remarkably similar in all the newspapers in question. It was a story about an enormous disaster — likely the worst nuclear accident in history — in response to which the Soviet government had provided very little information to anyone who might be affected. These initial reports about the disaster often sought to explain the event and its potential medical consequences, but they also immediately placed the disaster within other narratives. Soviet backwardness and secrecy became significant themes, and with them Chernobyl could be turned into a criticism of the USSR itself.

Chernobyl and Soviet Secrecy, 28 April-6 May

Chernobyl raised questions about nuclear power and the viability of enforcing geopolitical borders in a post-nuclear world. To answer these questions, commentators harnessed existing discourses about the USSR by placing Chernobyl in continuity with depictions of the Soviet past and present. Luke has shown that these depictions of the USSR as totalitarian and inhumane deflected critique from Western nuclear power industries and reasserted ‘images of the USSR as a barbaric slave state’.²⁹ These processes of rationalisation and differentiation served as attempts to show that methods for containing the USSR could prevent another Chernobyl in the future. But although the storyline of Soviet secrecy provided a straightforward and common-sense interpretation of what was happening at Chernobyl, it also contained tensions. It created the preconditions for a new way of talking about the disaster, and about the USSR. Outlining the secrecy storyline enables a subsequent discussion concerning how another storyline — about *glasnost* and Gorbachev — emerged from within the first.

My starting point is the acknowledgement that there were many possible ways to tell the Chernobyl story. Disasters before and after Chernobyl have been framed differently, despite striking commonalities in how they were managed. The most obvious examples are Three Mile Island, which took place in 1979, and Fukushima Daaichi, which took place in Japan on 11 March 2011. Criticism of the Soviet government was much more common following Chernobyl than

²⁹ Ibid., 190.

criticism of either the American or Japanese governments after their own disasters. In a content analysis of headlines following these disasters, Cassandra L. Koerner determined that:

the Chernobyl event garnered many more headlines in regard to trust for the government and the nuclear industry [than TMI or Fukushima]. The Three Mile Island and Fukushima headlines imply that the government response was more rapid and information was more readily available to citizens from nuclear administrators.³⁰

But this was not the only way that the story could have been told. While it is unsurprising that commentators were highly critical of Soviet responses to the disaster, this narrative was a subjective storyline — dependent on poorly understood information, misrepresentation and assumptions. Nor did it appear in a vacuum. The broader context of Anglo-American discourse about the USSR, and the discursive assumptions thereof, contributed to the unique progression of the Chernobyl story.

Neither TMI or Fukushima were handled perfectly by their governments. As Koerner goes on to explain, ‘formal commission reports at Fukushima suggest that information was withheld from the public to prevent panic in the populous.’ She refers to an article from the *Economist*, published a year after the disaster, that catalogued the mismanagement of the disaster and its consequences. ‘For years, safety breaches were covered up and regulators looked the other way’, claimed the article. It goes on to claim that information on radiation and its danger was held back from the public, and perhaps even the Japanese Prime Minister at the time, Naoto Kan.³¹ An article about Fukushima from the *NYT*, published on 17 March, 2011, describes a similar course of events to those that followed Chernobyl. Officials ‘offered opaque, and understated’, explanations, ‘evasive news conferences followed uninformative briefings’, and the Japanese government ‘decided to limit the flow of information to the public about the reactors.’³² Similarly, officials at TMI may have been more willing to provide information than those at Chernobyl, but they also consistently expressed false optimism and withheld important

³⁰ Cassandra L. Koerner, ‘Media, Fear, and Nuclear Energy: A Case Study’, *The Social Science Journal* 51, no. 2 (June 2014): 246.

³¹ ‘The Death of Trust’, *Economist*, 10 March 2012.

³² Hiroko Tabuchi et al., ‘In Tokyo, a Dearth of Candor’, *New York Times*, 17 March 2011, Factiva.

facts.³³ Despite these similarities, the three disasters were framed very differently. The narratives about them were built up from a combination of available information, discursive practices regarding the selection and representation of that information, and the context of existing discourses.

With this in mind, we can see that the storyline of Soviet secrecy was not an objective and factual description of events. It was built up in the first few days of reporting, using tropes and narrative arcs typical of the reporting about the USSR that I have discussed previously. The first few days of official silence provided the impetus for Chernobyl to become a story about secrecy, but this was not isolated from discourses about the USSR. From the beginning, commentators contextualised the failure to announce the disaster, not as a misjudgement, but as a typically malicious example of Soviet behaviour.

Everything that took place within and after the first few days could be assessed within this context. For example, the reports of the first Soviet statement about the disaster encouraged further criticism. On 29 April, *The Times*, amongst other papers, portrayed the statement as a cynical attempt to deflect Western ire. The newspaper's Moscow correspondent, Christopher Walker, wrote:³⁴

The TASS statement was seen as a quick propaganda move ordered by the Kremlin to counter any international criticism of safety measures taken inside the Soviet Union, which has traditionally surrounded details of its nuclear programme with secrecy.³⁵

Walker left his sources vague and gave no indication who had 'seen [the statement] as a quick propaganda move'. It was, implicitly, an obvious conclusion that anyone could reach. In another article, he portrayed the Soviet government as duplicitous by claiming that the 'Soviet Atomic Energy Authority' had announced the same morning that they had no knowledge of an accident.³⁶ Leaving aside the fact that there was no government department by that name,

³³ Rubin, 'How the News Media Reported on Three Mile Island and Chernobyl', 47–50.

³⁴ Christopher Walker is of no relation to Martin Walker.

³⁵ Christopher Walker, 'Soviet Comment on Chernobyl Nuclear Plant Leak', *The Times*, 29 April 1986, Factiva.

³⁶ Christopher Walker, 'Kremlin Sets up Accident Inquiry', *The Times*, 29 April 1986, Factiva.

Walker provided little evidence for his insistence that the statement was purely cynical. His implicitly common-sense reading of these events was that the Soviets had no intention of announcing the disaster and that the TASS statement was probably inaccurate.

During this early period, the *WP*, *NYT*, and *Guardian* similarly contextualised Chernobyl in terms of the Soviet Union's culture of secrecy.³⁷ Their criticisms invoked the 'evil empire'. According to Martin Walker in the *Guardian*, the disaster was 'an object lesson in the dangers of the Soviet system of secrecy, compartmentalising information, and trying to convince superiors that all is well.'³⁸ An *NYT* editorial agreed, claiming:

[T]hose who live by secrecy can also perish by it ... the stifling of internal debate may be in large part to blame. A closed society, where only the highest circles are permitted to debate, hears only its own voice. Secrecy is a disease and Chernobyl is its symptom, a threat both to the Soviet Union and its neighbours.³⁹

Walker explained this failure as a result of 'the Soviet system of secrecy' that led people to hide information from their superiors.⁴⁰ In so doing, he placed Chernobyl within other storylines about Soviet political culture but de-emphasised the role of individuals. A further *NYT* article, by Flora Lewis, a diplomatic and foreign correspondent, stated:

It is obviously more important to the Soviet leadership to hide as much as possible from its own people than to give them and neighbouring countries adequate reports on the extent and nature of the risk.⁴¹

By contrast to Walker, Lewis described Chernobyl as a consequence of the state 'stifling internal debate'.⁴² According to Lewis, the Soviet leadership had made a deliberate decision to cover up the disaster. She contrasted this decision with Gorbachev's promises of *glasnost*.

³⁷ Alex Brummer, 'Reagan Offers Us Help', *Guardian*, 30 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Bohlen, 'Soviet Nuclear Accident Sends Radioactive Cloud Over Europe'.

³⁸ Martin Walker, 'Ukraine Kept Kremlin in the Dark', *Guardian*, 3 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁹ 'Mayday! And May Day', *New York Times*, 1 May 1986, Factiva.

⁴⁰ Walker, 'Ukraine Kept Kremlin in the Dark'.

⁴¹ Flora Lewis, 'Moscow's Nuclear Cynicism', *New York Times*, 1 May 1986, Factiva.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Walker, however, portrayed the 'Soviet system of secrecy' as an obstacle the General Secretary needed to overcome. Both writers agreed that Chernobyl was a story about secrecy.

The growth of the secrecy narrative was further fostered by intense scrutiny of any information the Soviet government did release. For Philip Taubman, a Moscow-based correspondent for the *NYT*, every piece of information that the Soviet government had revealed was evidence that there was still more being hidden. He told his readers on 30 April that 'the statements have not explained what happened or how extensive the danger of contamination may be.'⁴³ Taubman also interpreted a ban on journalists travelling to Kiev as evidence that there was much more to the story. According to his diplomatic contacts these issues were 'consistent' with Soviet attempts to deny or hide other disasters. Other commentators depicted statements made by Soviet officials as obviously untrue, thus implying officials were acting dishonestly.⁴⁴ Eye-witness accounts were a powerful mechanism for casting doubt on official narratives, as the scale of the disaster was always worse in anonymous reports than official ones.⁴⁵

McNair argues that the Western media showed a 'preference for anonymous sources, and an underlying assumption that the Soviet authorities were lying about casualties.' Official accounts that differed from external or non-official sources were 'routinely dismissed' by journalists.⁴⁶ This willingness to reject Soviet reports led to hugely inflated claims about the number of people who died in the accident. According to the second Soviet statement, published by TASS on 29 April, the explosion had caused two immediate deaths. This figure was greeted with nearly universal scepticism. Journalists advanced a range of alternative stories, many of which lacked specificity regarding the number of casualties and the identity of the

⁴³ Philip Taubman, 'Soviet Keeps Lid on News Coverage', *New York Times*, 30 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁴ Christopher Walker, 'Chernobyl - Fuelling Gorbachov Reform', *The Times*, 15 May 1986, Factiva; Christopher Walker, 'Kremlin Tries to Reassure Britons', *The Times*, 1 May 1986, Factiva; Michael White, Martin Walker, and Alex Brummer, 'US Estimates up to 3,000 Victims from Satellite Information', *Guardian*, 1 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Gary Lee, 'Soviet Lid on News of Chernobyl Reflects Cost, Security, Image Concerns', *Washington Post*, 2 May 1986, Factiva.

⁴⁵ Alex S. Jones, 'Press Sifts Through a Mound of Fact and Rumor', *New York Times*, 1 May 1986, Factiva.

⁴⁶ McNair, *Images of the Enemy*, 149–50.

source(s) from whom the stories derived.⁴⁷ One especially outrageous claim, published in Rupert Murdoch's tabloid *New York Post*, was that 15,000 people had been buried in mass graves following the disaster.⁴⁸ More widely reported was a claim published by United Press International (UPI), an American press agency. Based on an anonymous source, UPI reported on 30 April that 2,000 people were dead or dying.⁴⁹ This assertion was quickly repeated in all four of the newspapers considered here.⁵⁰ The rapid dissemination of the unverified claim indicates the extent to which it was uncontroversial to portray the Soviets as involved in a vast cover-up.

These anonymous reports were used further to emphasise the secrecy storyline by critiquing the accuracy of official statements. The level of credibility attributed to the extraordinary claim varied, but the *NYT* — citing UPI — insisted on its veracity most enthusiastically:

The source of the report was as Kiev woman who has long provided accurate information, according to Sylvana Foa, the foreign editor of UPI. 'This source has never proved to be unreliable,' she said.⁵¹

The reliability of the unknown woman from Kiev was then contrasted with the noticeable absence of detailed official accounts. The Kiev woman had 'long provided accurate information'. The same could not be said of the Soviet media. This technique was similar to that used by Martin Walker in an article he co-wrote with David Fairhall for the *Guardian*, in which they implicitly gave the figure credibility by undermining the official report. The rumour of 2,000 deaths was quickly discredited, but by that point it had already played its role in undermining Soviet attempts to manage media coverage of the disaster.

Conservative commentators were particularly quick to claim that Chernobyl revealed basic, unchanging truths about the USSR. George F. Will, William Safire's conservative

⁴⁷ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁸ Timothy W. Luke, 'Chernobyl: The Packaging of Transnational Ecological Disaster', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 4, no. 4 (1987): 364.

⁴⁹ 'U.P.I. Says Toll May Pass 2,000', *New York Times*, 30 April 1986, Factiva.

⁵⁰ Fairhall and Walker, 'Russia Admits Blast as Death Fears Rise'; 'U.P.I. Says Toll May Pass 2,000'; Prentice, 'Fears of Huge Death Toll in Atom Disaster'; Celestine Bohlen, 'Soviets Seek West's Help to Cope With Nuclear Disaster', *Washington Post*, 30 April 1986, Factiva.

⁵¹ 'U.P.I. Says Toll May Pass 2,000'.

counterpart at the *WP*, portrayed Chernobyl on 4 May as having vindicated his warnings against trusting the Soviets. It was taken as evidence of what he had already said many times: that the USSR was immoral, and would always be so. According to Will, Chernobyl was not a freak accident or something that took place for complex and poorly understood reasons; it was an object lesson that ‘illuminated a fundamental fact of Soviet culture’. The fact was that ‘throughout its dark history, the Soviet regime has been willing, even eager, to trade human lives for forced-draft economic development.’⁵² That similar nuclear accidents had taken place at TMI, and in the UK (at the Windscale facility in Cumberland), was not mentioned.

For Safire, writing on 5 May, the Chernobyl story was about more than the Soviet regime — it was about Russians. The core of his argument was that, ‘in the wake of the world’s worst nuclear accident, the Russians acted like the Russians.’⁵³ It was unsurprising to him that they would be deceptive and lacking in compassion, given their past conduct. He claimed that ‘the world’s professional innocents’ struck

a pose of horror at a closed society’s suppression of news, as if the Russians were disposed to reveal casualties, broadcast warnings and expose the regime’s new leaders to uncontrolled internal criticism. ... The Kremlin leadership is reacting in character; this is the brutal way they deal with embarrassment. ... The Russians cannot afford to let a charm offensive interfere with the harsher requirements of internal control. Hence the traditional hunkering down and lashing out.⁵⁴

Safire’s language reiterated the image of the USSR as dangerously secretive. Like Will, he took the Chernobyl disaster as evidence of what he had already said about the Russians. Safire also used the disaster as a stick with which to beat those who advocated different approaches to his own — the ‘European neutralists, moral equalizers and evenhanded disarmament activists’. Soviet attempts to hide Chernobyl had to be understood as the actions of:

the same Russians who relentlessly murder tens of thousands of resistant Afghans, admitting no casualties on either side; who shoot down a civilian airliner

⁵² George F. Will, ‘OP/ED: Accident at Chernobyl Mendacity as Usual’, *Washington Post*, 4 May 1986, Factiva.

⁵³ William Safire, ‘Essay: The Fallout’s Fallout’, *New York Times*, 5 May 1986, Factiva.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

that strays across their border and put out the lie that it was on a spy mission; who isolate and torture a dissident in Gorky, turn would-be emigrants into hounded refuseniks, and then complain that anyone protesting these violations of human rights is contributing to the world's tension.

The conclusions that Safire drew from this analysis were ones that he had come to before. The Soviet Union was paralysed, unchanging and defined by fundamental differences from the West. Europeans should trust the Americans who defended democratic values rather than the Soviets who betrayed, double-crossed, and who would 'subordinate human life to the power of the state'.⁵⁵

Although they are not the focus of this chapter, politicians like Reagan and Thatcher also used the secrecy storyline when they talked about Chernobyl. On 4 May, following a summit between representatives of advanced industrial states, Reagan made a typical criticism of the USSR:

The contrast between the leaders of free nations meeting at the summit to deal openly with common concerns and the Soviet Government, with its secrecy and stubborn refusal to inform the international community of the common danger from this disaster, is stark and clear. The Soviets' handling of this incident manifests a disregard for the legitimate concerns of people everywhere.⁵⁶

Thatcher agreed with Reagan, and pointed out the following day that Chernobyl could only have happened in a country without 'a properly managed nuclear power industry' and safeguards in place.⁵⁷ Both leaders also used Chernobyl to cast doubt on Gorbachev's promises of progress in arms control negotiations. If the USSR could not be trusted to announce a nuclear disaster, how could it be trusted to abide by any verification agreements to which it was party?⁵⁸ These comments portrayed the USSR as problematic, but implied that change was possible if the Soviets were willing to work closely with the West.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ronald Reagan, 'Radio Address to the Nation on the President's Trip to Indonesia and Japan 4 May 1986', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, 4 May 1986.

⁵⁷ Margaret Thatcher, 'Press Conference after Tokyo G7', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 5 May 1986.

⁵⁸ Ibid.; Ronald Reagan, 'Statement on the Soviet-United States Nuclear and Space Arms Negotiations 7 May 1986', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 7 May 1986.

Although it is only possible to address a cross-section of articles about Chernobyl here, the above examples show the shape that the story took as it evolved between 28 April and 6 May. During this period, commentators overwhelmingly described Chernobyl as a uniquely Soviet disaster and an example of why the Soviets were no more tolerable under Gorbachev than they had been under his predecessors. In this storyline, the only real information and serious progress had come from Western intervention in the form of journalists, experts, and governments who were prepared to disprove Soviet lies. These journalists and other watchers took on the role of whistleblowers, filling the gap left by the Soviet 'failure to inform', and ensuring that information was disseminated to the people who needed it.⁵⁹ This was the USSR as depicted by Reagan, Thatcher, and Safire. The Soviet Union could only be taught through strength and would act without compassion unless it were forced to do otherwise. There were other ways of telling the story, even at an early stage, but it was no difficult task for commentators to place Chernobyl within hostile narratives about communist evil.

Chernobyl and *Glasnost*, 2 May-Onwards

Because Chernobyl took place in the middle of debates about the potential liberalism of Gorbachev's reforms, particularly *glasnost*, the disaster became an important part of that discussion. A different story about Chernobyl gradually started to emerge from within the one that emphasised secrecy and censorship. These two approaches existed in dialogue with one another, each threatening to delegitimize the other while sharing central assumptions. After the initial shock, commentators increasingly described the Soviet response to the disaster as evidence that openness was gradually taking hold. Some newspapers, like the *Guardian*, emphasised this new storyline in more detail than others, but it was present to some extent in all of them. The highly critical initial response to Chernobyl thus made possible positive reassessments not just of the disaster, but of the USSR as a whole.

⁵⁹ McNair, *Images of the Enemy*, 151; Tom Wicker, 'In the Nation: Following up Chernobyl', *New York Times*, 16 May 1986, Factiva; Irvin Molotsky, 'U.S.I.A.; Chernobyl and the "Global Village"', *New York Times*, 8 May 1986, Factiva.

The *glasnost* storyline, which began to take shape as early as 2 May, originated as a response to the secrecy storyline.⁶⁰ Both ways of talking about Chernobyl shared considerable content and themes, but they drew different conclusions about the prospects of *glasnost* for the USSR. Within both it was made clear that, starting on 6 May, the Soviet government became more willing to make disclosures about Chernobyl and its ongoing management. McNair identifies this as the turning point in the Soviet media management of the disaster.⁶¹ These disclosures took place at every level. Announcements about the disaster came from the official media, government press conferences, diplomats posted in Western countries, local officials, technical experts, and even Gorbachev, in a belated speech on 14 May. The meanings that were attributed to these disclosures in the two storylines were, however, different. One portrayed the increasing openness of the Soviets as propaganda — a kneejerk reaction to the loss of international credibility that the disaster had caused. In the other narrative, it was evidence of *glasnost* and a genuine attempt at reform.

In April 1986, the word *glasnost* was not yet in common use, but it was present in Chernobyl reporting. The *Guardian* used the word in three articles in the period from 28 April to 17 May. In the first of these instances, Martin Walker wrote ‘so much for *glasnost*, the Russian word that means “openness,” which Mr Gorbachev has said embodies his new policy of letting the locals know about bad news — officially.’⁶² Possibly in reference to Walker’s use of the word *glasnost*, Christopher Walker then wrote:

Correspondents here [in Moscow] noted that the handling of the incident — only publicized at all after pressure from the Nordic countries — demonstrated the strict limits on the drive for more *glasnost* (openness) previously demanded by Mr Mikhail Gorbachov[sic], the Kremlin leader.⁶³

Explicit references to *glasnost* were, however, few and far between. Neither the *NYT* nor the *WP* referred to openness at all by that name, even outside of Chernobyl coverage, until July.

⁶⁰ Harold Schmeck, Jr, ‘Moscow Accepts Foreign Doctors’ Help’, *New York Times*, 2 May 1986, Factiva.

⁶¹ McNair, *Images of the Enemy*, 145.

⁶² Martin Walker, ‘The Wilful Silence That Puts Life in Danger’, *Guardian*, 1 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶³ Christopher Walker, ‘Rumours Spread in Moscow’, *The Times*, 1 May 1986, Factiva.

However, commentary about Gorbachev's reforms engaged with the same concepts that would eventually become attached to the word *glasnost*. As such, I use *glasnost* here as shorthand for Gorbachev's reforms in the realms of openness and governmental accountability.

Most commentators initially took Chernobyl as a failure of *glasnost*. The first reports about the disaster enabled contrasts between Gorbachev's potential as a harbinger of openness and the sullen secrecy with which his Soviet Union communicated about the disaster.⁶⁴ Chernobyl renewed focus on Gorbachev's ambiguity, allowing commentators to counter uncertainty using their preferred discursive approaches. This was one of its functions as a CDM. Chernobyl could show that the General Secretary was slowly making progress in the face of obstacles, like those Walker had earlier described. But it could also legitimate anti-Soviet discourses and 'show that Gorbachev is as conventional and hidebound as his predecessors'.⁶⁵

The concept of *glasnost* was challenged by those cynical about Gorbachev's experiments. They legitimised their stances by portraying Chernobyl as harmful to Gorbachev's reputation, and thus his ability to take the USSR down a new path. Some of these articles framed Chernobyl as an embarrassment or a public relations disaster. According to the *NYT*, for instance, 'diplomats said the nuclear accident was an embarrassment for Mikhail S. Gorbachev, coming at a time when he has been talking of a style, more openness, less centralization, of more individual exercise of responsibility and more candor about failings'.⁶⁶ A writer in the *Guardian* argued that 'all Gorbachev's PR successes have been obliterated overnight — or in the time it took for the plumes to spread from the Ukraine to Sweden, Finland, Poland, and the Soviet Union's Baltic republics'.⁶⁷ *The Times* likewise pointed out that 'even without Chernobyl, the Soviet Union was facing an image problem'.⁶⁸ Chernobyl was, in this story, a failure of Gorbachev's image as someone who could guide the country towards a Western future.

Because discourse about Chernobyl was so heavily weighted towards condemnation, even those writers who emphasised *glasnost* started by acknowledging the failures of the Soviet

⁶⁴ Walker, 'Chernobyl - Fuelling Gorbachov Reform'.

⁶⁵ Mary McGrory, 'Credibility Meltdown', *Washington Post*, 1 May 1986, Factiva.

⁶⁶ Serge Schmemmann, 'The Soviet Secrecy', *New York Times*, 1 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁷ 'Safety Must Take Over from Silence', *Guardian*, 1 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁸ 'Nuclear Paranoia I', *The Times*, 30 April 1986, Factiva.

response. Rather than rejecting the secrecy storyline altogether, they took it as a starting point and reframed it, or changed its focus. Macgilchrist makes a distinction between two types of reframing, partial reframing and radical reframing. She defines partial reframing as follows:

Reframing can be defined as shifting an issue away from its conventional ‘location’ within one set of shared assumptions and reconstruing it within a different set of knowledges. In this way, the issue is assigned a different interpretation or evaluation; it is tied into a different configuration of meanings, as seen for example in the shifting valuation of queer from derogatory slur to affirmative proclamation.⁶⁹

The techniques described by Macgilchrist as contributing to a process of partial reframing include changing the context within which a story is explained (by talking about new *glasnost* rather than old secrecy, in this case), the use of novel comparisons and contrasts, and the use of new or reinterpreted source material.⁷⁰ Radical reframing differs from partial reclaiming because it does not just change the focus of a story, but it attempts ‘a negation of the mainstream view of the issue’.⁷¹ That is to say, radical reframing does not just seek to provide an alternative explanation for a story, but also to discredit the version of the story from which it diverges.

Some writers reframed the story to imply that the initial disclosures were attempts at openness rather than blatant deception or a public relations strategy. Thus, the first TASS statement could be portrayed in the pages of the *Guardian* as ‘a precedent, which may reflect Mr Gorbachev’s policy of greater openness’.⁷² Likewise, an article in the *NYT* described the statement as ‘the first official disclosure of a nuclear accident ever by the Soviet Union’.⁷³ Neither of these articles was uncritical. Both authors drew attention to unsatisfactory aspects of the disclosure, but their references to the novelty of the TASS statement opened the way for the disaster to be further considered in terms of ‘greater openness’.

⁶⁹ Macgilchrist, *Journalism and the Political*, 193.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷² Fairhall, ‘Radioactive Russian Dust Cloud Escapes’.

⁷³ Schmemann, ‘Soviet Announces Nuclear Accident at Electric Plant’.

The weeks and months that followed contained a number of other official actions and initiatives that commentators described as firsts, including a televised speech about the disaster by Gorbachev, official requests for assistance made to Western countries, and the dissemination of detailed information about what had caused the explosion. Some newspapers, especially *The Times*, disputed the significance of these firsts, but they were a significant characteristic of reporting about the disaster regardless.⁷⁴ Portrayals of Chernobyl as the first Soviet announcement of a nuclear accident placed the disaster within the discourse of *glasnost* in a positive way and allowed Gorbachev's policies of openness to be assessed through that lens.

Reframing of the Chernobyl story took place from an early stage, as some commentators claimed that the USSR was obeying its international commitments, not ignoring them. An article in the *NYT* on 30 April put forward one such claim. The short piece, titled 'Soviet Informs Agency', was written in Bonn on 29 April — the same day on which many other articles criticised the Soviet Union for not informing its neighbours about the accident. The author noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN body responsible for nuclear power and non-proliferation, had been informed of the disaster by Soviet officials on Monday 28 April. In contrast to reports that accused the USSR of contravening against its international obligations, the article suggested that the Soviet government had exceeded expectations. The Soviets had done 'all they were required to do, and slightly more'. They were only obligated by agreement to inform their Eastern European allies about the disaster, not other neighbouring countries, and a spokesman from the IAEA considered them to have done so.⁷⁵ It may not have been praising the USSR, but the article countered discourses that portrayed the Soviets as negligent.

After 6 May, interactions between the Soviet government and the IAEA became increasingly prominent. Discourse was centred on the fact that Hans Blix, the director of the agency, along with several deputies, had been invited to inspect Chernobyl in person. He arrived

⁷⁴ Nicholas Ashford, 'Russia Starts International Campaign to Repair Image', *The Times*, 16 May 1986, Factiva; Michael Binyon, 'America to Study Safety Proposal', *The Times*, 16 May 1986, Factiva; Christopher Walker, '50,000 Evacuated from Danger Zone', *The Times*, 5 May 1986, Factiva; 'Mr Gorbachov Speaks at Last', *The Times*, 16 May 1986, Factiva.

⁷⁵ 'Soviet Informs Agency', *New York Times*, 30 April 1986, Factiva.

in the USSR on 5 May.⁷⁶ Some reporters described this as an indication that the Soviet approach to the disaster had changed. In a *WP* editorial, the invitation to Blix was taken as ‘a signal that the Soviets do not consider the IAEA to be an adversary, and perhaps are preparing to use it as a conduit to give the rest of the world a better description of the accident.’⁷⁷ In this storyline, the Soviet Union seemed to be taking active steps to provide information about the disaster. Secrecy ceased to be the sole focus, and the novelty of *glasnost* became an important theme.

Positive mentions of the Kremlin’s interactions with Blix and the IAEA appeared consistently from that point onwards in all of the newspapers considered here. These comments drew an explicit connection between engagement with the IAEA and a higher level of openness regarding the disaster, as in the following examples:

- ‘A spokesman for the International Atomic Energy Agency said that Soviet authorities were being extremely cooperative with top officials of the agency.’⁷⁸
- ‘But Blix also said he was “emphatically” satisfied with the data and information that the Soviets eventually provided.’⁷⁹
- ‘Warnings of an immediate and catastrophic meltdown at the stricken Chernobyl nuclear reactor were discounted yesterday by leading members of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the first independent experts permitted into the disaster zone since the explosion there on April 26. ... They announced that from yesterday, the Soviet Union had agreed to provide reports from seven radiation monitoring stations to the agency.’⁸⁰

As always, these reports were not entirely uncritical. Some articles specified that key information had not been provided to the IAEA team, or quoted the officials contradicting

⁷⁶ Martin Walker, ‘Ukraine Farms Sow Their Crops as the Deadly Dust Settles’, *Guardian*, 6 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷⁷ ‘Editorial: On Nuclear Safety’, *Washington Post*, 7 May 1986, Factiva.

⁷⁸ Martin Walker, ‘Russians Become More Alarmed About Chernobyl’, *Guardian*, 8 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷⁹ Gary Lee, ‘U.N. Experts Say Chernobyl Site Is “Stabilizing”’, *Washington Post*, 10 May 1986, Factiva.

⁸⁰ Christopher Walker, ‘Experts Calm Worst Fears of Chernobyl’, *The Times*, 10 May 1986, Factiva.

Soviet reports.⁸¹ Still, the same writers who made these points also announced that the IAEA's 'mission had been a success, in that the Soviet authorities had agreed to establish a permanent radiation-monitoring station.'⁸² The position that was usually attributed to the IAEA as 'reassuring ... impartial referees' reflected well on the Soviet Union's own credibility.⁸³ The story of the Soviet Union's cooperation with the United Nations culminated in August 1986 following an international conference insisted on by Gorbachev, at which the causes of Chernobyl were thoroughly and self-critically analysed.⁸⁴ Although it was a very minor storyline to begin with, the *glasnost* narrative — specifically regarding cooperation between the USSR and the IAEA — was present from some of the earliest reporting.

Beyond discussions about the USSR's engagement with the IAEA, the *glasnost* storyline became much more prominent after 6 May. On that day an article appeared in *Pravda*, the newspaper of the CPSU, which the *NYT* described as 'the first detailed account of the accident'.⁸⁵ According to the *WP*, it was 'the fullest official account so far of what had happened'.⁸⁶ On the same day, Soviet officials gave a press conference to Soviet and foreign journalists. The press conference was led by Deputy Premier Boris Scherbina, the head of the committee for managing the disaster. Both the press conference and the *Pravda* article were more detailed disclosures than the ones that had come before. Subsequently, similar disclosures were given more attention.⁸⁷

Corresponding to the increased visibility of Soviet voices in discourse about the disaster, the types of sources that Anglo-American journalists cited changed as well. Westerners and

⁸¹ Martin Walker and Misha Glenny, 'Russians Build Concrete Tomb for Reactor', *Guardian*, 10 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Celestine Bohlen, 'Soviet Data on Accident Reassuring, Frightening', *Washington Post*, 11 May 1986, Factiva.

⁸⁴ Jack Barkenbus, 'Nuclear Power Safety and the Role of International Organization', *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (1 July 1987): 485.

⁸⁵ Serge Schmemmann, 'Soviet, in First Detailed Account, Tells of Raging Blaze at Reactor', *New York Times*, 6 May 1986, Factiva.

⁸⁶ Celestine Bohlen, 'Situation Called Still "Complicated"', *Washington Post*, 6 May 1986, Factiva.

⁸⁷ Tom Wicker, 'In the Nation: A New Attitude?', *New York Times*, 9 May 1986, Factiva; Bohlen, 'Soviet Data on Accident Reassuring, Frightening'; Martin Walker, 'Soviet All-Clear on Disaster', *Guardian*, 12 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Serge Schmemmann, 'Kremlin Asserts "Danger Is Over"', *New York Times*, 12 May 1986, Factiva; Christopher Walker, 'Officials Accused of Chernobyl Bungling', *The Times*, 13 May 1986, Factiva.

anonymous local sources were replaced by a variety of official Soviet sources.⁸⁸ The *WP* pointed out the transition explicitly, claiming: ‘until now, accounts of the accident have been pieced together from spare official statements, details provided by Soviet officials abroad and unofficial reports from the area.’⁸⁹ The author marked the *Pravda* article as the moment when the Soviet approach had changed to one of openness. Even an opinion piece in *The Times*, by Mary Dejevsky, praised the breaking of taboos that had taken place in the Soviet media following Chernobyl.⁹⁰ Up to this point, Soviet disclosures had almost entirely been discounted or described as deceptive. The Soviet government, and its motives for announcing the disaster, were maliciously secretive, or cynical at the very best. The quantity of information being released after 6 May, even if it was not all accurate, could be used by journalists to mark a turning point. After this, they argued, *glasnost* ceased to be treated as a hypothetical by the Soviet state and instead took on concrete form.

Walker on Chernobyl

Martin Walker’s reporting on the Chernobyl disaster provides a particularly compelling example of the growth of the *glasnost* storyline. As the *Guardian*’s correspondent in Moscow, Walker’s voice was present from the very first announcements of the disaster and he continued to write about it throughout the period covered by this chapter. Within this body of discourse, there was a clear turning point after which he began to write about *glasnost*. His articles blurred the lines between the Self and the Other, a technique that proponents of the secrecy storyline like Safire rejected. Some of Walker’s claims about Chernobyl and the Soviet response have already been touched on, but here I take a more focused approach that considers the overall evolution of his discourse from 26 April until 26 May.

Walker’s early reporting on Chernobyl, from 29 April to 6 May, was characteristic of most Anglo-American commentary about the disaster. He strongly criticised the USSR and official responses to the disaster, particularly in regards to secrecy. His first two relevant articles, both appearing on the front page of the *Guardian* on 30 April, were typical of reporting

⁸⁸ Martin Walker, ‘A Stroll Along Gogol Boulevard’, *Guardian*, 26 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸⁹ Bohlen, ‘Situation Called Still “Complicated”’.

⁹⁰ Mary Dejevsky, ‘A Good Disaster for Truth’, *The Times*, 12 June 1986, Factiva.

in the initial days. With David Fairhall he co-authored the newspapers' headline article, 'Russia Admits Blast as Death Fears Rise', which portrayed the official response as understated and unsatisfactory.⁹¹ The lurid language of Walker's other article, 'Silence Covers "Zone of Death",' has already been mentioned.⁹² In this article, Walker wrote about two kinds of silence: official silence, and 'the silence of the grave'. He brought them together with a single metaphor — a 'wall of silence' imposed by the Soviet government — that suggested the deaths caused by Chernobyl and the lack of accountability had a common origin. He drew the connection again on 1 May, when he argued that Soviet secrecy was actively putting lives in danger. Keeping a tight grip on the flow of information was one thing, but failure to inform people of danger in contaminated areas was another. The situation was about to become an example 'of a government's dereliction of duty to its own people. A docile press is one thing: a wilfully endangered populace is quite another.'⁹³

By contrast, Walker's 'Commentary' column published on 30 April primarily dwelt on the economic costs of Chernobyl.⁹⁴ It threatened the Soviet nuclear industry, which was undergoing 'breakneck expansion' as a part of Gorbachev's reforms. Walker used the opportunity to place Chernobyl within his broader discourse about Gorbachev and the USSR. 'The real problem is geography', he wrote, echoing his 1985 claim that Russia's geography was one of the major barriers to Gorbachev's plans. Without low-cost nuclear power, it was prohibitively expensive to move energy around the vast country. By touching on the geographical theme, Walker incorporated Chernobyl into the story of Gorbachev that we saw in Chapter Four.

At the same time, Walker introduced the concept of *glasnost* into the story. He wrote, 'the very fact that the Soviet authorities have already informed their own people of the nuclear accident on the TV news and admitted to casualties, is a significant change.' Walker drew a connection between this disclosure and the public protests about the pollution of Lake Baikal in the 1970s, which had involved open debate within the Soviet state. Just as the campaign to protect Lake Baikal had largely succeeded, Chernobyl might be a similar turning point. In this

⁹¹ Fairhall and Walker, 'Russia Admits Blast as Death Fears Rise'.

⁹² Martin Walker, 'Silence Covers "Zone of Death"', *Guardian*, 30 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁹³ Walker, 'The Wilful Silence That Puts Life in Danger'.

⁹⁴ Martin Walker, 'Commentary: The Vision Consumed in the Fire This Time', *Guardian*, 30 April 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

light, he portrayed the Soviet response to Chernobyl as ‘one slight glimpse of a silver lining’. Walker did not claim that *glasnost* had suddenly been achieved, but he did place Chernobyl within a storyline about the growth of civil society in the Soviet Union.⁹⁵

Despite Walker’s critiques of Soviet secrecy and lack of care for human life, he began to introduce different perspectives. On 3 May, for instance, Walker reported claims that the initial delay in announcing the disaster was partially caused by ‘local officials in the Ukraine and senior figures in Soviet ministries and organisations dealing with nuclear power.’⁹⁶ The Ukrainian officials, according to a Soviet statement, ‘misled the Kremlin by trying to minimise the nature of the Chernobyl disaster.’ Although these claims originated from ‘Soviet sources’, Walker did not particularly question or critique them. He introduced further complexity into the story by portraying the initial cover-up as the responsibility of an anti-*glasnost* faction. The ‘clampdown on information’ was the responsibility of Yegor Ligachev, ‘the party ideology chief’. It had apparently caused ‘considerable anguish among those officials in Moscow most closely involved in the new and more open information policy.’⁹⁷ With comments like these, Walker painted a picture of a Soviet Union that was not monolithic. He argued that no unified policy of secrecy or openness was to blame.

On 7 May, Martin Walker revealed a more significant shift in his discourse about the disaster when he wrote about the press conference given on 6 May by Scherbina and other officials. Walker had some reservations, but he argued that ‘Moscow’s first public attempt to explain what went wrong’ showed that the story was more than a simple tale of Soviet malice.⁹⁸ In the first sentence, he described the ‘image that emerged’ as one of ‘a tragic first two days of chaos, cover-up and desperate firefighting’. By framing the story this way, it still contained a ‘cover-up’, but it also placed more responsibility for the poor Soviet response on the chaos caused by the disaster. Walker also used the information revealed during the press conference to argue that the explosion was likely caused by human error. By de-emphasizing systemic

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Walker, ‘Ukraine Kept Kremlin in the Dark’.

⁹⁷ Martin Walker, ‘Exodus from Kiev’, *Guardian*, 5 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁹⁸ Martin Walker, ‘Moscow Reveals Chaos at N-Plant’, *Guardian*, 7 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

problems, Walker reduced the role of Soviet malice or technical incompetence. Instead, he implied, Chernobyl was a more universally human disaster.

Over the following weeks, Walker praised the Soviets who had been involved in the official response. The subjects of his praise included everyone from the firemen who helped to fight the ongoing fire in the reactor through to Scherbina — the ‘trouble shooter’ — to whom he devoted an article. Walker’s article on Scherbina, ‘A Red Star that Shines in Adversity’, was particularly positive. It depicted the ongoing Soviet management of the disaster as impressive to behold:

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster has shown the Soviet Union at its secretive, disinformation-prone worst. But as the work of damage limitation goes on, we are starting to see the occasional example of the place at its best. Once again, we are watching a system that is slow and uncaring as it lumbers into action, but once it does, it moves with awesome, single-minded effectiveness.⁹⁹

According to Walker, people like Scherbina and Gorbachev’s ‘personal scientific advisor’, Professor Yevgeny Velikhov, were in the vanguard of reform.¹⁰⁰ It was thanks to them that a new level of openness was being attained in discussion of Chernobyl. Despite ongoing concerns regarding the Soviet government’s willingness to speak openly and honestly, Walker could say that ‘at last, there are signs that the *glasnost* policy is starting to reappear.’¹⁰¹

Two articles in particular illustrate Walker’s attempts to make the Chernobyl story more complex than an us-against-them morality tale and to focus it on *glasnost*. One of these, ‘Times When Even Sensible Doves Make Hawkish Noises’, was published on 14 May. The other, ‘A Stroll Along Gogol Boulevard’, was published on 26 May, a month after the disaster had taken place. In both of these articles, Walker emphasised the basic similarities between Soviet and Western people, and undermined the idea that the differences that did exist were relevant to understanding Chernobyl. He transformed the dominant storyline of Soviet secrecy into one that was instead critical of the West.

⁹⁹ Martin Walker, ‘A Red Star That Shines in Adversity’, *Guardian*, 8 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Walker and Anthony Tucker, ‘Chernobyl “On the Brink of a Worse Disaster”’, *Guardian*, 9 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰¹ Walker, ‘A Red Star That Shines in Adversity’.

The first of these articles cautioned against simplistic explanations about behaviour, no matter from which side of the Iron Curtain they came. Mistrust was the problem, not Soviet nature, and everyone needed to have more patience:

The gravest consequence of Chernobyl has been to show yet again how bad we all are at crisis management ... It was the kind of incident that brought out the worst in both systems as we all reverted to type, the West over-reacting and the Russians under-reacting.¹⁰²

The consequences of that mistrust were potentially damning for both East and West. According to Walker, Western hostility had caused the Politburo to revert temporarily to a Brezhnevite style of collective leadership. Gorbachev had thus been marginalised, and the hawks in the Kremlin were on the edge of gaining the upper hand. In this storyline, over-enthusiastic Western reporters and aggressive Western governments were as much to blame for secrecy in the wake of Chernobyl as the USSR itself.

Walker picked up this theme once again in his article on 26 May, in which he wrote about a walk along Gogol Boulevard with a Soviet contact. Walker argued that it was Gorbachev's 'appointees and loyalists', not Westerners, who were standing against regression into secrecy and despotism. Soviet reformers had been responsible for all of the unprecedented disclosures of information, as faltering and occasionally problematic as those had been. Western commentary about Chernobyl, on the other hand, had been unhelpfully malicious. Walker's own reporting had fallen short of his standards, even he had observed far worse. He wrote that he and his colleagues 'ought to have done a better and more measured job.'¹⁰³ Sometimes the harshness of Western reports was an honest mistake, such as in the case of the claim that 2,000 people had died. Other stories, such as the *New York Post's* allegation that 15,000 corpses had been dumped in mass graves, he found less tolerable. Unlike the hostile alarmism of publications like the *New York Post*, Walker suggested that official Soviet responses

¹⁰² Martin Walker, 'Commentary: Times When Even Sensible Doves Make Hawkish Noises', *Guardian*, 14 May 1986, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰³ Walker, 'A Stroll Along Gogol Boulevard'.

to Chernobyl were simply flawed. As such, instead of deserving attacks, he maintained the USSR should be given some leeway and encouraged to respond differently in future.

In both of these pieces Walker came to the same conclusion: that Western behaviour was the factor most likely to undo Gorbachev and bring about the rise of a new Brezhnev. The two articles even used the same metaphor, an inverted version of one that had previously been used to criticise the Soviet response to Chernobyl. It was the metaphor of a poisonous cloud that drifted overhead and tainted whatever it touched. This cloud had taken various forms: 'an information cloud that still hangs over Chernobyl,' in the *NYT*, 'a dark cloud' over May Day and a 'cloud of confusion' in *The Times*.¹⁰⁴ By contrast, in the earlier article of Walker's two articles, on 14 May, he wrote that 'the rather different kind of clouds the West has been sending back towards Moscow' imperilled Gorbachev's ability to advocate *glasnost*.¹⁰⁵ In the latter, he finished by saying that 'newspapers can send their own kinds of poison clouds'.¹⁰⁶ By appropriating Chernobyl as a weapon against the USSR and thus sending poison clouds, Walker argued, Westerners had the power to renew the spirit of conservatism and repression. The Soviets were still uniquely problematic in these accounts, but Walker brought the growth of *glasnost* to the fore. For Walker, the fact that the Soviets had acted intolerably following Chernobyl was not indicative of innate political characteristics but of basic human failings. Blame lay with panic, miscommunications, defensiveness in the face of hostility, and the uncertainty of treading new ground, problems that could afflict people on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

A similar approach was taken by Ian Davidson in the *FT*. In the few articles he wrote in May that mentioned Chernobyl, Davidson remained highly critical of the Soviet authorities.¹⁰⁷ But he only dwelt briefly on Soviet shortcomings. Like Walker, Davidson used Chernobyl instead to point a finger at the West. He asked:

¹⁰⁴ 'Chernobyl's Other Cloud', *New York Times*, 30 April 1986, Factiva; Roger Boyes, 'Radiation Fears Put Even May Day Under a Dark Cloud', *The Times*, 1 May 1986, Factiva; Pearce Wright and Thomson Prentice, 'Medical Briefing Special (Radiation): Inside Chernobyl's Cloud of Confusion', *The Times*, 7 May 1986, Factiva.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, 'Commentary: Times When Even Sensible Doves Make Hawkish Noises'.

¹⁰⁶ Walker, 'A Stroll Along Gogol Boulevard'.

¹⁰⁷ Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: The Stick With A Point At Both Ends', *Financial Times*, 12 May 1986, Factiva; Ian Davidson, 'Foreign Affairs: The Choice That Still Faces Mr Gorbachev', *Financial Times*, 19 May 1986, Factiva.

Was it really prudent for the Western leaders, after a cursory expression of sanctimonious concern for the victims of the accident to have belaboured the Russians so enthusiastically? After all, these sticks are pointed at both ends.¹⁰⁸

Davidson argued that Chernobyl revealed not Soviet incompetence, but the danger of nuclear power and nuclear weapons everywhere — a danger that Western governments showed little willingness to address. Although Davidson was not sold on *glasnost* — he declared that Gorbachev’s speech on 14 May was ‘not, on the whole, worth waiting 18 days for’ — he reframed the disaster as a reminder of universal danger, not a uniquely Soviet failure.¹⁰⁹

Walker’s storyline, in which Chernobyl was proof of *glasnost*, was not the most typical way of talking about the disaster in the weeks and months that followed, but neither was it entirely unique. Today, it is difficult to find scholarly or journalistic analysis of the Soviet response to Chernobyl that does not mention *glasnost*. But, as it was unfolding, journalists beyond Walker were explaining Chernobyl as a milestone for openness. Like Walker, some found that Chernobyl revealed the processes of *glasnost* already taking place and the obstacles to their realisation. For others, the *glasnost* that followed Chernobyl came about as a result of Western agitation and the Soviet Union’s realisation that it was no longer possible to ignore the rest of the world. These latter commentators maintained that the flaws of Soviet engineering and economics were finally spilling over into catastrophe. In this storyline, the West was in its prime, and advanced technologies like satellite photography were stripping away what little ability the decadent Soviets had to deceive their own people. Chernobyl could thus become a parable about Western superiority, even when the growth of *glasnost* was discussed.

Conclusion

In the hands of journalists and politicians, Chernobyl was a discursive tool. The disaster inaugurated a Critical Discourse Moment that called existing stories about geopolitics, nuclear power and the USSR into question. Responses were formulated to contain these challenges, and different versions of the story emerged within days. Mainstream newspaper discourse between

¹⁰⁸ Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: The Stick With A Point At Both Ends’.

¹⁰⁹ Davidson, ‘Foreign Affairs: The Choice That Still Faces Mr Gorbachev’.

28 April and 16 May could be loosely categorised into two narratives. One of these storylines emphasised Soviet secrecy and reinforced old assumptions about Soviet evil. In the first days after the disaster, the disaster was almost exclusively viewed through this lens. The other approach described the Soviet response to Chernobyl as a critical moment in the development of *glasnost*.

In the version of the story that emphasised Soviet secrecy, the failure of the Soviet Union to disclose the disaster was unsurprising. Cynicism and lack of compassion were taken as natural consequences of the Soviet system that were reflected in the personalities of Kremlin leaders. There was broad agreement in the newspapers in question that the day had been saved by those journalists and experts who forced the USSR to openly talk about the disaster. This storyline recalled the evil empire and present danger narratives.

According to the other version of the story, Chernobyl said less about the USSR than it did about people. The problematic aspects of the Soviet response were explained as products of human error. The failures of the Soviet response were caused by a system designed by past leaders to resist the genuine efforts of reformers to change it. People like Gorbachev sincerely wanted to do right by their people, but they faced obstacles from within and from without — conservatism at home and vitriolic Westerners abroad. The advocates of this approach argued that not only were aggressive criticisms hypocritical, but that they were totally unhelpful.

Notably, the *glasnost* storyline framed the disaster as an issue that was global or human, not Soviet. The commentators making this argument called into question the harsh segregation of the world into East and West, or enemy and friend. The USSR had not handled the disaster well, writers like Walker and Davidson conceded, but the same thing could happen anywhere. This point challenged the foundations of discourses about the USSR by calling into question the fundamental differences from the West by which it was supposedly defined. More and more, *glasnost* appeared in discussions about the USSR and became a mechanism by which the Soviets could be portrayed not as ‘them’, but as ‘us’.

This way of talking about Chernobyl and the USSR was initially restricted in scope, but that soon changed. It was quickly adopted in the *Guardian*, and also appeared in the *NYT* and the *WP*. Eventually the *glasnost* storyline was even given grudging credibility in *The Times*,

although that newspaper generally continued to take a hardline approach. None of these newspapers ceased to criticise the USSR and its record of repression and violence, but the notion that genuine reform could take place gained new prominence in discussion about the USSR. Testifying to the successes of this reframing, thirty years after Chernobyl the disaster is still widely talked about as a turning point in a campaign of liberal reform spearheaded by Gorbachev.¹¹⁰ Responses to Chernobyl thus played an active role in enabling the discursive reassessments that would take place over the following years.

¹¹⁰ Mark Joseph Stern, 'Did Chernobyl Cause the Soviet Union To Explode?', *Slate*, 25 January 2013; Natalie Nougayrède, 'The Political Fallout of Chernobyl Is Still Toxic', *Guardian*, 16 April 2016.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Discourse plays a mediating role between cognition and action but, as this thesis argues, it also follows rules of its own. There are various influences to which discourses are subject, including power relations, historical context, and the internal logic of the discourses themselves.

But it is incorrect to speak of a simplistic hierarchy of cause and effect wherein thought leads to speech which leads to action. If we assume that there is a linear chain from thought to word, we risk neglecting the ways in which each of these processes, though interconnected, are also autonomous. The course of the Cold War in the 1980s was not influenced solely by the intentions of political actors and their actions, but by discourses that made certain actions and understandings of the world possible. By using the discourses of key individuals as case studies, I have identified some of the processes by which people adapted their discourses to changing circumstances.

Discourse analysis has been used by many historians from Michel Foucault to Hayden White. But discourse approaches have not yet been used by historians to investigate the last phase of the Cold War in significant detail. Studies of this period have overwhelmingly been the purview of political scientists and historians of international relations. However, there is a great deal to be gained through a focus on discourse. Close study of how people spoke about and discursively framed the USSR, and how this evolved over time, gives insight into their complex relationships with a changing world. It also reveals patterns of discursive change with significance beyond this period, and beyond the study of the Cold War. The insights offered by such an approach help us to understand the post-Cold War world.

Patterns and Concepts

Because this thesis has sought to investigate discourse, I have tried to apply methodologies and concepts drawn from discourse analysis (including the schools of Critical Discourse Analysis and Positive Discourse Analysis). The thesis has been informed more broadly by various methodological descendants of the linguistic turn, from post-structuralism through to post-foundationalism. However, a range of discrete analytical tools have been particularly useful. Application of these tools reveals discursive patterns and developments that would not be

visible if this material were viewed exclusively through the lens of international relations or foreign policy. Further investigation is required to determine the ubiquity of these patterns in mainstream political and media discourse, but their appearance in the discourses featured here suggests they were far from rare. From them, we can develop the broad outlines of a model for the analysis of discourses about the USSR in the 1980s but also for the exploration of discourses about Russia since that time.

Chapter One introduced the concept of attribution theory. The original advocates of attribution theory set out to analyse how people intuitively interpret the causes of each other's behaviour. According to Yehudith Auerbach, the model suggests that 'antagonists will explain their and their adversary's behaviour in a way that strengthens their moral position in the conflict.'¹ While attribution theory is primarily relevant to psychology, it can also offer some insight into discursive formations. As we are not interested here in internal beliefs, we can put aside questions about the cognitive processes of attribution and instead look at the way that behaviours are explained. In so doing, we see that the dynamic described by attribution theory was replicated in discourse about the USSR: the moral position of the Soviet Other was always in question, always positioned in relation to that of the West.

While no one in this period argued that Western countries were perfect or blameless, the failings of the West were usually described as aberrations. Injustices perpetrated by the US or the UK were portrayed as temporary quirks or misjudgements, not the result of any structural flaws of liberal democratic society. Dishonest or overly aggressive behaviour by politicians and governments was framed as typical of the Soviets, not of Western norms. On the other hand, when positive events took place in the West, or as a result of the actions of Western states, they were used as evidence of the inherent superiority of liberal capitalism. Commentary about Anglo-American politics, whether hostile or supportive, thus reinforced the dichotomy between Western and Soviet by portraying the former as basically good and the latter as inherently problematic.

Claims about the objectives and motivations of the Soviet state were central to attempts to conceptualise the USSR and its significance. Countless words were written in attempts to

¹ Auerbach, 'The Reconciliation Pyramid—A Narrative-Based Framework for Analyzing Identity Conflicts', 300.

define why the Soviets behaved in a manner that was so problematic. The writers and politicians considered in this thesis attributed the behaviour of the USSR to structural factors pertaining to the nature of Russia and/or the Soviet system. They gave different explanations — geography, history, ideology, psychology — but, whatever the specifics, they blamed the specific actions of the USSR on deeper, even fundamental flaws.

This double-standard served to differentiate the USSR from Western countries, especially the United States. Discourse about the natural origins of Soviet behaviour enabled claims that the USSR was inherently malicious. By contrast, whenever the USSR did something positive or constructive, it was explained in terms of either contingent factors or outside influence — especially the influence of the West. The rise of Gorbachev was one such development. The new General Secretary, who claimed to endorse openness and new thinking, was portrayed as an aberration. Some argued that Gorbachev was a fraud and others accepted his commitment to reform. But both his critics and his defenders agreed that his charm and reformist rhetoric were not typical products of the Soviet system. These characteristics marked him as exceptional — someone who represented a new stage of development for the Soviet leadership or who was altogether un-Soviet. There was thus a clear difference between the ways in which the personal characteristics of Gorbachev and those of his predecessors were explained. Above all, Brezhnev was portrayed as a personification of the dourness, the dogmatism, and the dullness of the Soviet system. By contrast, Gorbachev's liveliness, wit and openness were portrayed as axiomatically un-Soviet.

Chapter Two dealt with discursive tensions — points of conflict or dissonance arising from logical shortcuts and inconsistencies in the discourse. Some scholars, including Macgilchrist and Kress, have argued that these weak points are to be found in all discourses, and prevent them from becoming all-encompassing. The identification of discursive tensions can allow a discourse to be interrogated and can render it susceptible to radical change. In specific circumstances, when a discursive structure is placed under pressure by new developments that are difficult to incorporate, these tensions can become ruptures. When this takes place, discourses are rapidly reinforced or reconfigured around new foundational assumptions.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, 1984 was a time of considerable discursive tension. Anglo-American commentators were preoccupied with the question of whether the USSR could change and what the consequences might be if it did. Their discourses contained conflicting assumptions about whether the USSR might one day become like the West. Both Reagan and Thatcher explicitly stated that they expected to be dealing with the USSR for the foreseeable future, yet they also called for its total transformation and spoke as though this were on the horizon. The arrival of Gorbachev offered a possible way forward through the creation of storylines about genuine change.

In Chapter Three, we saw the contradictions inherent to the discourses about international relations and arms control endorsed by Reagan and Thatcher. The foundations of these discursive tensions were provided by a set of claims about proximity, geography and space. Security, the ultimate goal of nuclear weapons, was predicated on the ability to exclude perceived external threats like the USSR. Commentators like Reagan and Safire claimed that, if the West could not create and enforce borders, communist subversion and aggression was certain. By drawing clear spatial demarcations between the West and the East, it was possible to reinforce distinctions between the Self and the Other. The exclusion of the Soviets from the West was grounds for the USSR to be portrayed as dangerous, and it was also a response to this danger. In this sense, as writers like Campbell and Dalby have established, the tension and uncertainty of the Cold War emerged as much from discursive logic as it did from a clash of ideology and great-power interests. Given the continued eminence of deterrence as a concept in the post-Soviet world, identification of these tensions may help to identify sites of discursive rupture in our own time.²

The logic of arms control in the mid-1980s provided striking examples of discursive tension. Notably, it was difficult to reconcile the practice and theory of arms control with the kind of world that leaders like Reagan and Thatcher claimed to seek. This was true at every level, from the nature of the tools used to the discursive assumptions made about human nature and competition. Attempts to negate these tensions included the discursive transformation of massively destructive weapons into shields and portrayals of a perpetual

² Michael Singh, 'Trump Should Focus on Deterring North Korea', *Foreign Policy*, 17 October 2017.

state of conflict as peacekeeping. But deterrence could not result in a world truly free of threat from nuclear weapons. Like the Cold War, it depended on the constant development of more and better bombs.

Reagan put forward a number of potential solutions to these contradictions, although he did not escape them altogether. Using SDI, he proposed the neutralisation of all nuclear weapons as a means to end the stand-off between the US and the USSR. But Star Wars was not so different from deterrence. The discourse of SDI assumed that both sides would always be opposed and that the only solution was to build missile shields over each. Thus, as with deterrence, SDI conceptually depended on the existence of international conflict and an arms race. But Reagan also began to place more emphasis on closeness with his Soviet enemies. The 1985 Geneva Summit became a destination to which Reagan could travel as a missionary and preach directly to the Other. By positioning himself as a lone representative of the West on a mission into dangerous territory, Reagan could maintain the integrity of the borders between 'us' and 'them' while also pointing to the possibility of salvation. The enemy could thus be kept at a safe distance and converted at the same time.

Thatcher's discourse was not without tensions of its own. She argued that the USSR was dangerous, but also that it was possible to live happily alongside the Soviets. The key, she suggested, was defence supplemented by an accurate understanding of the foe. Thatcher also embraced the features of nuclear politics that Reagan claimed to disavow. She explicitly rejected the possibility of building a nuclear-free world. Her argument depended on a deterministic explanation of human interaction. She claimed that a new and better weapon would always be built, and that the solution was not to deny this, but to make peace with that fact and ensure that her preferred side came out on top. However, within this framework she was still open to partnership with the USSR.

Gorbachev was at the centre of the discursive tensions discussed in Chapter Four. He was a relatively new figure on the international scene and something of an enigma. His divergence from traditional assumptions about Soviet leaders provoked new discursive tensions and intensified debates about Soviet change. As a result, he destabilised discourses about the USSR that had hitherto been well established. In response, journalists engaged in enthusiastic

debates about what Gorbachev signified. They explained him as friendly, deceitful, and everything in between. They asked if he was a new-age liberal saviour, a new Peter the Great, or another conniving Soviet. But it took time to make sense of Gorbachev, and there was little certainty at this early stage.

As discussed in Chapter Four, one of the languages used to make Gorbachev comprehensible, and to articulate the challenges he presented, was that of gender. Occasionally this was explicit. Safire wrote about budding romance and Davidson wrote about strip-teases. But the gendering of this discourse also took place at structural and textual levels. By using gender as a lens through which underlying conflicts can be viewed, it becomes possible to see gender dynamics played out even where they were not explicit. Approaching commentary about Gorbachev with this in mind showed that metaphors and dynamics derived from gender discourses were mapped onto international relations and discussions about the USSR. Walker, Davidson and Safire attributed particular characteristics to Gorbachev both as a man and as a representative of the USSR. These characteristics sometimes threatened the masculine self-identity of the West. Gorbachev could be understood by Safire as a competitor who emasculated Reagan, or by Walker as a manly hero who could conquer the passive femininity of Russia. In these depictions, gender functioned to draw distinctions between East and West, peaceful and warlike, and dangerous or cooperative. It allowed commentators both to incorporate Gorbachev into their discourses and to reassess the nature of the USSR.

If anything, international relations discourses have become even more explicitly gendered. In late 2016, an edited image of Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, in drag and make-up, was widely used in the West to critique Russia and its leader.³ Then, in 2017, the alleged political relationship between Donald Trump and Putin was satirised with illustrations and edited photos of Trump performing oral sex on his Russian counterpart. The latter trend, in particular, raised issues of power, dominance, and gendered dynamics. Trump's supposed weakness was represented by his taking of a feminine, queer, role in these images.⁴

³ Elena Cresci, 'Russia Bans Picture of Vladimir Putin in Drag', *Guardian*, 6 April 2017.

⁴ German Lopez, 'Your Trump-Putin Slashfic Isn't Funny. It's Homophobic.', *Vox*, 11 July 2017.

Chapter Five explored the concept of a Critical Discourse Moment through the lens of the Chernobyl disaster of April 1986. Like the rise of Gorbachev, the explosion at the Ukrainian nuclear power plant undermined traditional discourses by bringing their foundations into question. Chernobyl initiated widespread interrogation of discourses about nuclear power and weapons, the environment, and international relations. It also presented challenges that were directly relevant to this thesis — to Gorbachev’s image as a reformer, and to attempts to create impermeable boundaries between the Soviet Union and the West.

In response to the destabilisation of the discourse that was provoked by Chernobyl, some commentators attempted to reassert prior assumptions. Others used the opportunity to challenge popular discursive frameworks about the USSR. Two interwoven narratives about the disaster appeared. In the first, Chernobyl was construed as a typically Soviet catastrophe — indicative of everything that was wrong with communism and the USSR. The management of the disaster by the Soviet government was interpreted as dishonest and cruel, and it was assumed that the worst outcomes had been brought about by systemic mismanagement or conscious decisions. In the other narrative, which was enabled by the former, the Chernobyl disaster was described instead as a human catastrophe that could conceivably take place anywhere. Rather than concentrating on initial failures to disclose the disaster or its magnitude, this storyline emphasised the positive aspects of the Soviet response. Chernobyl became, in part, a story about *glasnost*. The storylines established following Chernobyl provided a framework for many of the events that came later. Even today, the story of the late USSR is usually explained as one about the clash between despotic traditions and genuine liberal reform.

Application of these theoretical concepts reveals mechanisms of discursive change that are not visible when the field of analysis is reduced to politics or personality alone. The mechanisms in question show the gradual development of a discursive context in which central assumptions about the USSR could be critiqued and reassessed. Even though politicians like Reagan and Thatcher remained highly critical of communism, they were more positive about the USSR itself at the end of this period. Exploration of their discourses, and those of journalists, shows that there was no single instant when approaches to the USSR changed. But neither did

these individuals slavishly and deliberately follow pre-determined strategies. They engaged in complicated dialogues with themselves and others in attempts to navigate the problems of discourses about the USSR. By 1986, claims about the present and predictions about the future had shifted considerably from where they had been in 1984. Significantly, however, the discourses of national identity discussed here had remained largely unchanged. Before Chernobyl, the discursive changes that took place did not undermine the notion that Western ways were superior. Instead, these changes were justified by claims that the West was best, and that it was plain for everyone to see. Table 6 demonstrates the mechanisms underlying these changes and the analytical tools used to investigate them.

Concept	Explanation	Relevance to USSR	Relevance to Discourse
Attribution theory	People tend to attribute responsibility in ways that reinforce existing paradigms of Self and Other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanations of Soviet change suggested failings were structural. • Positive change attributed to West. • Gorbachev included somewhat within 'us'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates fluidity of boundaries. • Changing them reinforces supposed characteristics of each group. • Significant positive change explained as exceptional.
Discursive tensions	Discourses are defined by inconsistencies and contradictions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No discourse about the USSR was entirely free of contradiction or inconsistency. • Discursive change driven by attempts to resolve these tensions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discursive renegotiation is constant on personal and political levels.
Spatial 'Otherness'	Excluding the Other from the space occupied by the Self defines national identities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial separation was precondition for 'defence', etc. • Impossible to entirely exclude the Soviets. • Reagan claimed closeness was good as long as it took place on Western terms, like summits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows some ways people might attempt to overcome tensions: strengthening Self/Other division, renegotiating boundaries, or rejecting them entirely.
Gender as a lens	Gender contains similar mechanisms of exclusion and Otherness to other discourses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourses about USSR deeply gendered. • Especially when traditional categorisations failed, as with Gorbachev. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through gendered discourse can see discursive change. • Particularly useful for understanding gendered dimensions of national identity.
Critical Discourse Moments	Events that challenge widely held assumptions and create significant discursive change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several took place in 1980s, prompting attempts to reinforce Western/Soviet difference. • Offered opportunities to subvert these assumptions. • Chernobyl a particularly impactful example. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDMs provide impetus for marginal interpretations of situations to gain prominence. • Offers particular utility for understanding disasters and other unfathomable events.

Table 6. Summary of theoretical concepts discussed in thesis

The Consequences of Discursive Change

The discursive shifts and reconfigurations that took place between 1984 and 1986 were not short-term anomalies. This was a transitional moment in the reconsideration of Western identity and the challenges it faced from alternatives like Soviet communism. While the speeches and articles written during this period may not have defined the events that followed,

they were part of the process by which those events were enabled. Discourses have a degree of autonomy from political calculations or the beliefs of writers and politicians, but there is a connection between political action and discourse. Although it is impossible to trace a direct causal connection between discursive changes in this period and the events that followed, it is likely that evolving policy after 1986 was facilitated to some extent by the evolutions identified in this thesis. Thus, I ask: what was different after Chernobyl, and what did it mean for the world? By answering this question, we can see that the continuities — in discourse and in politics — were as profound as the changes

In the period between 1984 and 1988, a transformation took place in the discourses of Reagan and Thatcher. Both began to claim that they no longer saw the Soviets as enemies. Thatcher even announced to American reporters in November 1988 that the Cold War was at an end.⁵ Similarly, at the 1988 Moscow Summit, Reagan admitted to a reporter that he no longer saw the USSR as an evil empire. ‘That was another time, another era.’⁶ Alongside Reagan, Gorbachev was widely applauded as a genuine peacemaker. He was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990 for ‘for his leading role in the peace process which today characterizes important parts of the international community.’⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, a prominent contributor to the historiography of the Cold War, narrates that in 1989, ‘the point at issue no longer seemed to be “how to fight the cold war” at all, but rather “is the Cold War over?”’⁸

After 1986, the politics of the relationship between the US, the UK, and the USSR evolved in a way that complemented Reagan and Thatcher’s discourses of cooperation. Treaties were signed that a few years earlier would have been inconceivable, such as the *Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty* (INF). INF, which required the US and the USSR to retire certain classes of missiles, was finalised at the 1988 Moscow summit between Reagan and Gorbachev. Gorbachev was every bit as insistent as Reagan that nuclear weapons should be abandoned as instruments

⁵ Margaret Thatcher, ‘Press Conference for Washington Post and Newsweek’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 17 November 1988.

⁶ Ronald Reagan, quoted in Foglesong, *The American Mission and the ‘Evil Empire’*, 192.

⁷ ‘The Nobel Peace Prize 1990’, *Nobelprize.Org*, accessed 2 December 2016.

⁸ Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States*, 337.

of security and politics.⁹ In 1988, the USSR started to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, ending the Soviet role in a conflict that had provided justification for the rejection of *détente*. New initiatives were launched to improve relations between the USSR and the West. These included exchanges of people, experts, culture and art. There was companionable dialogue in many areas. Although Reagan, Thatcher, and Gorbachev were not alone in their efforts, they helped to create a new discursive space in which cooperation with the USSR could be conceptualised in a way that it never had before.

These popular discourses and political initiatives indicated that a profound shift had taken place, but the foundations of the Cold War remained intact. Conflict and tension continued beyond 1986. The mutual concessions made in the INF treaty did not deter criticism of Soviet defence policy or resolve all disagreements between the two sides.¹⁰ The *Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty* (START), more sweeping than INF, continued to be a point of contention between the Americans and Soviets, as well as within NATO and within the US itself.¹¹ Likewise, until the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was declared, it continued to complicate negotiations.¹²

As we have seen, Soviet reform was portrayed as the result of Western military and diplomatic strength. According to some advocates of this strategy, it had now been vindicated. Thus, in his farewell address, Reagan insisted that the basic American approach had to remain the same:

I want the new closeness to continue. And it will, as long as we make it clear that we will continue to act in a certain way as long as they continue to act in a helpful manner. If and when they don't, at first pull your punches. If they persist, pull the plug. It's still trust but verify. It's still play, but cut the cards. It's still watch closely. And don't be afraid to see what you see.¹³

⁹ R. Craig Nation, *Black Earth, Red Star: A History of Soviet Security Policy, 1917-1991* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 291.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

¹¹ James Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*, 135–40.

¹² Artemy Kalinovsky, 'Old Politics, New Diplomacy: The Geneva Accords and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan', *Cold War History* 8, no. 3 (August 2008): 390–93.

¹³ Ronald Reagan, 'Farewell Address to the Nation January 11, 1989', *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 11 January 1989.

Other commentators, especially conservative journalists like George Will and William F. Buckley. In the eyes of these writers, the signing of the INF treaty was a betrayal of everything Reagan for which Reagan had worked — a ‘suicide pact’ as it was put in the *National Review*.¹⁴ Ideological and discursive conflict between East and West may have entered a new phase, but it had not ended.

Deterrence and nuclear weapons remained central to the practice and discourse of international relations. The astronomically expensive institutions that maintained, supported, and reproduced the apparatus and logic of nuclear warfare could not be dismantled without a significant political and discursive challenge. In *The Imaginary War: Understanding the East-West Conflict* (1990), Mary Kaldor argues that Gorbachev initiated such a break by calling for the total abolition of nuclear weapons with or without the safeguard of SDI to fall back on.¹⁵ But, soon after the publication of that monograph, the fall of the USSR and the events leading up to it interrupted Gorbachev’s project. After INF, and even after the fall of the USSR, bickering states continued to threaten one another with enough nuclear weapons to annihilate entire countries many times over.

Furthermore, rapprochement between the US and the USSR did not render institutions like NATO meaningless or cause them to be abolished. If anything, the role of NATO as a tool for dividing the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’ continued to grow as new Eastern European states decided whether their future lay with the West or somewhere else. These organisations have powerful discursive foundations and significance in addition to their political ones. They shape language and create new languages to justify themselves. NATO was justified by conflict with the USSR, but it also ensured the continuation of that conflict. The idea that a trans-Atlantic treaty should exist to exclude and defend against threats from the East was common sense by the 1980s, as was the problematic nature of the USSR. However positive Western policymakers were towards the USSR by 1988, there was never any question about whether NATO was no longer necessary.

¹⁴ Samuel, ‘Conservative Intellectuals and the Reagan–Gorbachev Summits’, 147–49.

¹⁵ Kaldor, *The Imaginary War*, 230.

At the end of 1988, the balance of powers had shifted considerably in favour of the West, but the fundamental structures that had shaped the Cold War persisted. Why was there not a sharper break from the past? One possible explanation is that the events of the late Cold War were used not to dismantle Western discourses of identity but to reinforce them and proclaim them victorious. From 1984 onwards, Reagan and Thatcher put forward straightforward, sentimental storylines about the terrors of the past and their personal role in creating a better future. Reagan had swept into the presidency with promises to address the loss of American pride and vigour caused by Vietnam and the Iran hostage crisis.¹⁶ Thatcher, similarly, had staked her career on promises that she would empower her country in a seemingly hostile world. Within these storylines, the USSR was essentially a prop. Anything Soviet could be slotted neatly into these discourses and explained as either a new challenge to overcome or as proof of Western goodness. It was storylines like this, that brought Reagan and Thatcher into power and could easily be adapted to fit any circumstances, that helped to avert crises of Anglo-American identity. As a result, tensions within discourses about the West and its place in the world abated for a time. But the first decades of the twenty-first century showed that Western hegemony was as unstable as it had ever been.

¹⁶ Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 258–59.

Appendix 1: Past, Present, and Future in Reagan's Major Speeches, January 1984-March 1985

Speech	Date	Past	Present	Future
Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union	15/1/1984	On the international scene, we had an uncomfortable feeling that we'd lost the respect of friend and foe. Some questioned whether we had the will to defend peace and freedom.	America's new strength, confidence, and purpose are carrying hope and opportunity far from our shores.	Together, we can continue to advance our agenda for peace. We can establish a more stable basis for peaceful relations with the Soviet Union; strengthen allied relations across the board
Speech on Soviet-American Relations	17/1/1984	We've come a long way since the decade of the 70's, years when the United States seemed filled with self-doubt and neglected its defenses while the Soviet Union increased its military might and sought to expand its influence by armed forces and threat	Three years ago, we embraced a mandate from the American people to change course. And we have. With the support of the American people and the Congress, we halted America's decline. ... America's deterrence is more credible, and it is making the world a safer place.	We must and will engage the Soviets in a dialogue as serious and constructive as possible, a dialogue that will serve to promote peace in the troubled regions of the world, reduce the level of arms and build a constructive working relationship.
Address to the Nation on United States Policy in Central America	9/5/1984	There are those in this country who would yield to the temptation to do nothing. They are the new isolationists, very much like the isolationists of the late 1930's who knew what was happening in Europe, but chose not to face the terrible challenge history had given them.		If our political process pulls together, Soviet- and Cuban-supported aggression can be defeated
Remarks Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination	23/8/1984	In the 4 years before we took office, country after country fell under the Soviet yoke.	Since January 20th, 1981, not 1 inch of soil has fallen to the Communists.	Let us ask for their help again to renew the mandate of 1980, to move us further forward on the road we presently travel, the road of common sense, of people in control of their own destiny; the road leading to prosperity and economic expansion in a world at peace.

Table 9. Past, present, and future in Reagan's major speeches, January 1984-August 1984

Speech	Date	Past	Present	Future
Address to the 39th session of the United Nations General Assembly	24/9/1984		America has repaired its strength. We have invigorated our alliances and friendships. We are ready for constructive negotiations with the Soviet Union.	
Debate Between the President and the Former Vice-President Walter F. Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri	21/10/1984	The Soviet Union has been engaged in the biggest military buildup in the history of man at the same time that we tried the policy of unilateral disarmament, of weakness, if you will.	And now we are putting up a defense of our own. And I've made it very plain to them, we seek no superiority. ... I just thought when I came into office it was time that there was some realistic talk to and about the Soviet Union. And we did get their attention.	We simply are going to provide a deterrent so that it will be too costly for them if they are nursing any ideas of aggression against us.
Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Fairfield, Connecticut	26/10/1984	The power of the Federal Government, that it had over the decades, created great chaos -- economic, social, and international. And our leaders were adrift, rudderless, without compass.	I'm proud to say that during these last 4 years, not 1 square inch of territory in the world has been lost to Communist aggression. And the United States is more secure than it was 4 years ago.	And if we make sure that America is strong and prepared for peace, then we can begin to reduce nuclear weapons and one day banish them entirely from the Earth. And that is our goal.
Inaugural Address	21/1/1985	Yet history has shown that peace does not come, nor will our freedom be preserved, by good will alone.	We've made progress in restoring our defense capability. But much remains to be done.	these will be years when Americans have ... helped preserve peace in a troubled world; when America courageously supported the struggle for individual liberty, self-government, and free enterprise throughout the world and turned the tide of history away from totalitarian darkness and into the warm sunlight of human freedom

Table 10. Past, present, and future in Reagan's major speeches, September 1984-January 1985

Appendix 2: Number and Distribution of Articles Referencing Chernobyl, 29 April 1986-16 May 1986.

Date	Guard.	Times	NYT	WP	Major events reported
29 April	1	7	7	2	First news of the disaster; Soviet statement released
30 April	16	15	23	11	Second Soviet statement released; exaggerated claims circulated about number of deaths
1 May	15	17	33	12	
2 May	15	15	26	15	Western doctors enter USSR
3 May	11	11	23	13	
4 May			23	12	Criticisms of Western media in Soviet press; Tokyo Summit opens
5 May	12	7	15	7	Delegates at Tokyo Summit adopt statement concerning nuclear accidents
6 May	9	6	16	8	Soviet press conference about disaster
7 May	12	8	15	14	
8 May	14	2	10	5	
9 May	20	4	11	4	
10 May	14	6	5	4	
11 May			10	6	
12 May	6	3	3	2	Announcement regarding casualties
13 May	4	3	5	6	
14 May	7	5	1	2	Gorbachev makes televised statement about consequences and management of the disaster
15 May	5	5	2	2	
16 May	3	6	3	2	
17 May	4	2	1	1	

Table 11. Number and Distribution of articles referencing Chernobyl, 29 April 1986-17 May 1986

Appendix 3: Sources provided in initial articles about the Chernobyl disaster, 29 April 1986.

Article	Publication	Date	Sources
Soviet Nuclear Accident Sends Radioactive Cloud	WP	29-Apr	The Soviet Union
			the news agency Tass
			Residents of Kiev
			United Press International
			The Tass statement
			western diplomats
			western diplomats
			Officials in Sweden
			Denmark, Finland and Norway
			Sweden
			Swedish Energy Minister Birgitta Dahl
			a spokesman for the Environmental Protection Agency's Radiation Alert Network
			White House spokesman Edward Djerejian
			One western diplomat
			UPI
			The Soviets
Scandinavian experts			
A later Tass story			
Tass			
Partial Core Meltdown Suspected	WP	29-Apr	American scientists
			Swedish scientists
			James McKenzie, senior staff scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists
			McKenzie, a physicist
			Ed Zebroski, chief nuclear scientist for the Electric Power Research Institute in Palo Alto, Calif.
			the official Soviet statement
			The American scientists

Table 12. Sources provided in initial articles about the Chernobyl disaster, *Washington Post*, 29 April 1986

Article	Publication	Date	Sources
Soviet Announces Nuclear Accident at Electric Plant	NYT	29-Apr	The Soviet Union
			Tass press agency
			the Soviet announcement ... the first official disclosure of a nuclear accident by the Soviet Union
			Sweden, Finland and Denmark
			the Council of Ministers
			United States experts
			A British reporter
			reports from across Scandinavia
			Scandinavian authorities
			Scandinavian officials
			In Sweden, an official at the Institute for Protection Against Radiation
			In Finland, officials
			The Norwegian radio quoted pollution control officials
			Swedish Embassy officials
			Swedish officials
			A Swedish diplomat
			the Swedish Minister of Energy, Birgitta Dahl
Tass, the Soviet Government press agency			
Western experts			
Soviet authorities			
a Tass dispatch			
Some See No Danger Outside Soviet	NYT	29-Apr	United States nuclear experts
			scientists
			Officials at the Defense Nuclear Agency and Department of Energy
			Dr Robert Wilson of Harvard University
			Dr Marvin H. Dickerson

Table 13. Sources provided in initial articles about the Chernobyl disaster, *New York Times*, 29 April 1986

Article	Publication	Date	Sources
Radioactive Russian Dust Cloud Escapes	<i>Guardian</i>	29-Apr	a Swedish nuclear plant at Forsmark
			the Soviet authorities
			Tass news agency
			Helsinki
			Stockholm
			Oslo
			Swedish scientists
			the Soviet announcement
			Birgitta Dahl
			The Protection Board
			reports

Table 14. Sources provided in initial articles about the Chernobyl disaster, *Guardian*, 29 April 1986

Article	Publication	Date	Sources
Overheating of nuclear fuel raises fear of possible meltdown	<i>The Times</i>	29-Apr	Swedish nuclear experts
			A spokesman for the Swedish Nuclear Power Plant Inspectorate
			Birgitta Dahl
Huge nuclear leak at Soviet plant	<i>The Times</i>	29-Apr	Finland
			Denmark, Finland and Norway
			Norway
			Mr Ragnar Boge, of the Swedish Radiation Institute
			Soviet atomic energy authorities
			Tass
			Swedish scientists
			Some Swedish nuclear experts
			Tass

Table 15. Sources provided in initial articles about the Chernobyl disaster, *The Times*, 29 April 1986

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