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# A Companion to U.S. Foreign Relations

## Colonial Era to the Present

*Edited by*

Christopher R. W. Dietrich

*Volume II*

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## Chapter Fifty-One

# THE CHANGING HISTORY OF THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Sarah B. Snyder

As one of the defining features of the twentieth century, much has been written about the Cold War and its end. As one scholar who recently tackled the topic put it, the end of the Cold War “has attracted a massive literature” (Service 2015). Surveying the waves of remembrances and analyses in the nearly 30 years since, we can, nonetheless, identify several key narratives. This chapter discusses four of the most important. First, considerable debate exists surrounding periodization – or, put another way, when the Cold War ended. Second, specialists on U.S. foreign relations disagree about how effective U.S. policy was in ending the Cold War. Third, and related to the second point, observers evaluate the relative contributions of key political actors quite differently. Finally, scholars are increasingly attentive to the legacies of the Cold War’s end.

### Periodization

As with the origins of the Cold War, dating when the Cold War ended, and even when its end began, has produced considerable scholarly debate. Though the historian Robert Service (2015) has argued that there is “no definable date” for the end of the Cold War, a number of key moments between 1989 and 1991 have gained proponents.

Among the earliest points around which arguments have coalesced are those that align with the end of U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s time in office. Former U.S. official Jack Matlock (2004) argues, “Psychologically and ideologically, the Cold War was over before Ronald Reagan moved out of the White House.” Reagan himself agreed with this chronology, telling reporters as he flew home to California following George H. W. Bush’s inauguration that “The Cold War is over” (Fitzgerald 2000). For those most focused on the threat of nuclear weapons, the December 1987

Washington Summit, which was noteworthy for the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, is an appropriate endpoint. The treaty called for the elimination of all U.S. and Soviet ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles within 3 years. For those who defined the Cold War as the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's address to the United Nations General Assembly on December 8, 1988, in which he pledged to withdraw Soviet troops from Eastern Europe and reduce Soviet conventional forces by 500 000 soldiers and 10 000 tanks, signaled a very new world. Gorbachev's speech was likely more significant to European actors than U.S. observers.

I have argued that the Cold War ended on the final day of Reagan's presidency – January 19, 1989 (Snyder 2011). In the assessment of Reagan's secretary of state George P. Shultz (1993), at this point, "It was all over but the shouting." At the same time, a number of scholars have paid close attention to important moments in the months that followed. The fall of the Berlin Wall on the night of November 9, 1989, for example, offered some of the most spectacular visuals of the end of the Cold War, as well as emotional payoff for those most effected by the division of Germany and Europe. According to former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, "suddenly anything was possible, even the dream none of us thought we would see in our lifetimes: a Europe whole and free" (Bush and Scowcroft 1998). For historian Mary Sarotte (2009), the fall of the wall marked "the collapse of the old order," which ushered in a period of change that lasted through the end of 1990. In the aftermath of November 1989, from this view, Europe was remade.

The next month, in early December, U.S. President George H. W. Bush and his Soviet counterpart General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev met amid the stormy seas off the coast of Malta. Observers have pointed to Gorbachev's declaration there that the Soviet Union would never start a war against the United States as marking the end of the Cold War. Due to the compression of key events in late 1989, some scholars also point to the year as a whole, rather than a single event, as signaling its end (Sebestyen 2009).

Given that many defined the Cold War by the division of Europe, Germany, and Berlin, it also makes sense that historians such as Kristina Spohr (2015) point to German reunification on October 3, 1990. This perspective also echoes the assessment of contemporary actors. For Scowcroft, it was the Soviet acceptance of a unified Germany in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that marked the end of the Cold War (Bush and Scowcroft 1998). Bush also emphasized that because at its heart the Cold War had begun as a contest over Europe, "It can only end when Europe is whole" (Zelikow and Rice 2006).

Following a similar logic, close observer Raymond L. Garthoff (1994) also points to the end of the Cold War coming in 1990, the year in which the United States and the Soviet Union ended their military conflict and Germany and Europe were reunified. Former Secretary of State James A. Baker points to the joint statement that he and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze made in Moscow on August 3, 1990 condemning the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In his view, that the two superpowers could set aside their geopolitical rivalry signaled a new approach to international relations and a willingness to pursue cooperation rather than confrontation when faced with crises in the world (Baker 1995).

Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991 signaled to skeptics who were hesitant to assess the Cold War as having ended that the United States' superpower rival had ceased to exist (Gaddis 2005). Complicating existing scholarly narratives a bit, in Odd Arne Westad's (2017) view, the Cold War ended at different times in different places. In particular, Westad cites the cases of Mozambique and Vietnam, which he argues had each turned away from a socialist, command economy before any similar innovations were undertaken in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. Westad thus locates the end of the Cold War "around 1990." In line with this, Chen Jian (2011) argues that China had "virtually withdrawn" from the Cold War by the end of the "long 1970s." Their interpretations emphasize the value of including perspectives from scholarship written with less attention to the United States, the Soviet Union, and Europe.

### Efficacy

Of concern to many observers – particularly those who judged the United States to have "won" the Cold War – was a central question: To what extent did U.S. foreign policy precipitate the end of 45 years of superpower conflict? Of the transformation of Eastern Europe in 1989, former National Security Council (NSC) official Robert L. Hutchings (1997) writes, "U.S. policy obviously did not *cause* these developments." Nonetheless, he argues, "American policy exerted a strong, sometimes decisive, influence on the peaceful end of Europe's postwar division and the collapse of the Soviet empire." Hutchings continues:

It would be hard to exaggerate U.S. influence among the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe and their new political leaders in 1990 and 1991 ... In 1989, we elevated Eastern Europe to first place on the international agenda and, in effect, held U.S.–Soviet relations hostage to Moscow's acceptance of peaceful democratic change in this region. This was arguably the most important single thing the United States did in helping bring about the end of the Cold War. Of course, the United States did not cause the revolutions of 1989: those sprang from deep historic, economic, and political roots. But we did help create an international environment conducive to their success. (Hutchings 1997)

Hutchings' memoir was among the early contributions to these debates, and it was followed by others, which also shifted between triumphalist and more circumspect analyses.

In evaluating the U.S. role in the end of the Cold War, former Ambassador to the Soviet Union Jack Matlock reflected:

Obviously, some of the things we pushed for to end the Cold War, such as opening up the country, bringing in democratic processes, supporting the election process, were things that made the eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union possible ... So I'm not saying that none of our policies had any relevance. I'm just saying that we didn't bring it about. We didn't have the power to bring it about. It was brought about internally. Some of these internal forces had been encouraged by the United States and the West in general, not so much by a direct action, although by that too, but by our very existence. (Maynard 2008)

Both Hutchings and Matlock, who had personal stakes in assessing the impact of politics they formulated and implemented, assessed U.S. actions as facilitating but not causing the end of the Cold War.

Historian László Borhi (2008) highlights the challenges that Western governments, like that of the United States, faced in their efforts to shape events in Eastern Europe. In his view, these governments confronted a puzzle in their relations with Hungary in 1989: What was the best means of supporting reform while maintaining stability? Bush likewise remembers that he shared Scowcroft's interest in Eastern Europe but wanted to be "careful" to avoid any repression (Bush and Scowcroft 1998). In Borhi's (2008) assessment, "Thus the West supported transformation along a tightrope: going far enough to satisfy the domestic appetite for democracy and to stave off economic collapse, but stopping short of upsetting the status quo and thus peace and stability in Europe."

Hutchings (1997) perhaps not surprisingly sees the United States as pursuing a more assertive approach. He writes that "the United States played an important facilitative role by throwing its weight fully behind the processes of peaceful democratic change in east central Europe, and that the U.S. role in German unification was decisive in ensuring that it came out right – with Germany enjoying full sovereignty from the moment of unification, with its E.C. and NATO affiliations intact, and with all of Europe accepting and even welcoming this outcome." Even more stridently, journalist Peter Schweizer (1994) asserts that the Reagan administration deliberately undertook a "strategic offensive" against the Soviet Union. To the extent to which we see the United States as pursuing regular summit meetings with Soviet leaders beginning in 1985, then U.S. agency facilitated the bilateral American–Soviet summits that "helped significantly to break the ice" between Reagan and Gorbachev (Hunt and Reynolds 2016).

Not all observers have attributed as much intention of effect to U.S. policymakers in these years. In the view of historian Mary Sarotte (2009), the United States was not the dominant player, but rather Germany and other European actors. Similarly, when the Polish Politburo suspended martial law in late 1982, Gregory F. Domber (2014b) reports that "There was no talk of foreign pressure or American sanctions. Instead, suspending martial law allowed the government to focus on pressing economic measures." Based on extensive use of Polish records, Domber argues that the United States may have inflated its influence in securing the release of Polish political prisoners. He asserts that the most significant contribution the United States made was to funnel money to the opposition. Based on an analysis of U.S. records, Jeffrey A. Engel (2009) marvels at "how little control policymakers held over the events of 1989 and yet at the time how their decisions, made in the face of such unexpected change, structured the world we inhabit today." Similarly, National Security Archive Director Tom Blanton (2010) demonstrates the limited influence the United States had on events in Eastern Europe.

The extent to which observers ascribe efficacy to U.S. policy has important political consequences. Melvyn P. Leffler (2009) explains that not only did the end of the Cold War confirm for many Americans the virtuosity of their course, but it also led them to spread their influence elsewhere. For the George W. Bush administration, the lesson of the end of the Cold War was that distasteful regimes could be toppled and liberal democracy could take their place. This interpretation followed his father George H.

W. Bush's view that with the end of the Cold War, "the people of Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union" had "put aside communism and opt[ed] for freedom" (Bush and Scowcroft 1998). According to Engel (2009), American policymakers often drew the wrong lessons from 1989: "American foreign policy in the decades to follow can largely be explained as an extensive effort to replicate this successful strategy throughout the world. Disaster was frequently the result."

### Agency

Who might be responsible for the end of the Cold War is a question that can burnish or tarnish reputations and historical legacies. It also potentially informs current and future foreign policies. For many specialists on the end of the Cold War, personality played a significant role in shaping the history. Scholars such as historian James Graham Wilson (2014) have highlighted the contributions of a range of individuals, including key figures such as Gorbachev, Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz, and George H. W. Bush, whom Wilson argues ended the Cold War through their "adaptation, improvisation, and engagement." My own work has similarly touted the importance of individuals to the end of the Cold War, albeit lower-level actors such as Representative Millicent Fenwick (R-NJ) and Soviet dissident Yuri Orlov more than most under consideration here (Snyder 2011).

When assigning credit for the end of the Cold War, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1993) points to Reagan, writing, "The credit for these historic achievements must go principally to the United States and in particular to President Reagan, whose policies of military and economic competition with the Soviet Union forced the Soviet leaders, in particular Mr. Gorbachev, to abandon their ambitions of hegemony and to embark on the process of reform which in the end brought the entire communist system crashing down." Considerable early writing on the end of the Cold War followed this interpretation. Most notably, historian John Lewis Gaddis (1989) argues that "hanging tough paid off," and Peter Schweizer (1994) ascribes "victory" in the Cold War to Reagan.

Observers have characterized Reagan's contributions in different ways. For political scientist Beth Fischer (1997), his significance is seen in the timing of the shift in U.S. policy toward pursuing a new approach to the Soviet Union, notably in 1984, a full year before Gorbachev became Soviet General Secretary. The journalist James Mann (2009) identifies Reagan's contribution as being to realize that Gorbachev had initiated a new approach to international relations. In Mann's formulation, "Reagan helped create the climate in which the Cold War could end." Observers such as Paul Lettow (2006) have attributed Reagan's policy to a "personal mission ... to abolish all nuclear weapons."

More recently, Reagan's contributions have been treated with greater nuance. For example, historian Gregory F. Domber (2014b) depicts Reagan as a decisive president who drove U.S. policy. Yet, Domber strongly disagrees with interpretations that oversell Regan's impact on the end of the Cold War: "Chronologically and causally, the concept of Reagan's moral leadership falls short in the Polish case." Political scientist Archie Brown (2007) is also interested in refuting those, such as Gaddis, whom he believes overemphasize Reagan's essential role in the end of the Cold War. Instead,

Brown writes, "Any American president with an ounce of common sense, should, with Gorbachev as a partner, have been able to preside over the end of the Cold War." Similarly, historian Vladislav Zubok (2007) asserts that Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), often cited by his proponents as pushing the Soviet Union to its demise, was only "a bit player in the finale of the confrontation."

One theme of more recent scholarship on the Reagan administration has been a rising attention to the influence of Secretary of State George Shultz in shaping the end of the Cold War (Snyder 2011; Service 2015; Kieninger 2018). In particular, scholars emphasize Shultz's introduction of cooperative security and human rights into Soviet-American relations. This literature builds upon *Washington Post* reporter Don Oberdorfer's early work, *From the Cold War to a New Era* (1998), which, based on extensive interviews with the former secretary of state, makes the case that he played a key role in shifting U.S. policy toward engagement with the Soviet Union in the early 1980s.

For Brown (2007) and others, Gorbachev played a more significant role in ending the Cold War than Reagan or any other actors. Brown sees the end of the war as an outgrowth of Gorbachev's program of liberalization and democratization in the Soviet Union. Political scientist Robert D. English (1997) agrees, identifying the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident as a critical catalyst for Gorbachev's push toward new thinking. In his view, the crisis turned Gorbachev toward more aggressive efforts on behalf of his economic, political, and international reforms. In addition, it spurred his internal reforms, such as freeing political prisoners and ending jamming of foreign radio broadcasts. English also emphasizes the centrality of Gorbachev to the reform course of the Soviet Union, arguing that such policies would not have been pursued if a different leader had occupied the general secretaryship in his place. In English's view, Gorbachev concealed the radicalism of his reform agenda, painting himself as a more moderate reformer modeled on former Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov. Gorbachev was then delayed in his reforms until he could replace conservative Soviet leaders. Historian Melvyn P. Leffler (2007) similarly gives significant credit to Gorbachev for recognizing that "The Soviet Union no longer had the capacity of will to compete ideologically or militarily for the soul of mankind." Therefore, the Soviet leader took a number of steps to deescalate international and regional tension, as well as to liberalize politics at home.

Even U.S. officials such as former NSC staff members Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice (2006) acknowledge that "the Cold War could not have ended without a fundamental change in Soviet policy." They attribute the impetus for that shift to Gorbachev, who, in their view, "did want" to end the Cold War. For Matlock (1995), Gorbachev pursued improved relations with the West to facilitate reform efforts domestically. According to Walter D. Connor (2003), he tried to transform the relationship between the Soviet state and its society, but in doing so he eventually undermined societal support for the Soviet regime.

Vladislav Zubok (2007), while not denying Gorbachev's significance, argues that he did not pursue certain policies consistently, that many of his decisions worsened the economic crisis facing the Soviet Union, and that his leadership did not provide a steady hand at the helm of the Soviet state. Despite these shortcomings, Zubok cites Gorbachev's "determination" to end the Cold War. Historian Mark Kramer (2004) points to the impact of his reforms in the Soviet Union beyond the country's borders,

shaping the future of Eastern Europe as well. Kramer writes that "Gorbachev's boldness in implementing reforms in the Soviet Union made it increasingly difficult for the hard-line Communist regimes in Eastern Europe to hold out against the 'winds of change.'" Director of Russia/Eurasia Programs at the National Security Archive Svetlana Savranskaya (2008) also emphasizes the internationalism of Soviet reform. She shows that Gorbachev began to shift Soviet policy toward its satellites almost as soon as he became general secretary. Furthermore, in Savranskaya's view, by 1989 Moscow was devoting very little attention to Eastern Europe, as the repeated challenges it faced to its authority in the republics consumed Gorbachev's attention.

More recently, scholars of U.S. foreign relations have moved beyond a Reagan-versus-Gorbachev dichotomy to evaluate the contributions made during George H.W. Bush's presidency. The most notable proponent of a reevaluation of Bush's contributions has been historian Jeffrey A. Engel. In asserting his significance, Engel (2013) argues that "Bush faced more complex international crises than any American president in history save perhaps Franklin Roosevelt." In contrast to the president's critics, Engel claims Bush had a vision – and achieved it. He subtly and discreetly guided events, in this view, and Engel's account is a rebuttal to scholars who see the Cold War as having ended before Ronald Reagan left office. In assessing Bush's contributions, Engel (2017) returns repeatedly to the notion of "Hippocratic diplomacy," which he uses to emphasize that the president was driven by the principle to which doctors traditionally swore an oath – to "do no harm." Bush "guided" the United States and the world to a peaceful end to the Cold War. "Avoiding doing the wrong thing" made Bush "a success," Engel writes.

Bush himself has suggested that Reagan has been given too much credit, asserting that his administration "had something to do with it" (Meacham 2015). And observers such as Christopher Maynard (2008) agree. Maynard is a strong defender of Bush's foreign-policy record in office and disagrees with those who see him as a mere beneficiary of Reagan's choices. He argues that Bush's background in foreign affairs led him to engage with his advisers in vigorous debate on the issues. He draws upon former Secretary of State James Baker's argument that the reason for the "pause" in Soviet-American relations, which was initiated by administration officials in order to review the state of those relations in 1989, was to put "a Bush imprint on the nation's foreign policy" and ensure the previous administration had not made "an overly aggressive effort to conclude a deal ... just before time ran out with the Soviets." According to Baker, Bush wanted to assure himself that "Gorbachev was for real."

Maynard also demonstrates that Bush strongly believed in personal diplomacy, which can be seen in his invitations of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to Camp David and of French President Francois Mitterrand to Kennebunkport. He cites a number of Bush aides describing the president as a transitional leader, which was a positive characterization for them. Former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft said that "President Bush recognized historic change was taking place. He didn't create the change. But what he did is manage it in a way that these really cataclysmic changes in the world structure took place without a shot being fired" (Maynard 2008). Former Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater made similar comments. In Maynard's view, "Bush led a transition, a transition from the Cold War to a post-Cold War world." Others participating in revisionist assessments of George H. W. Bush include

the writer Jon Meacham (2015), who sees the end of the Cold War as a “victory” for Bush and the United States.

Veterans of the Bush administration are, not surprisingly, invested in highlighting his – and therefore, their – contributions. Former Bush administration official Robert M. Gates emphasizes Bush’s personal diplomacy via telephone as evidence of his meaningful role. In addition, he argues, “Bush’s attentiveness to Gorbachev the man and the politician certainly contributed to the peaceful liberation of Eastern Europe” (Gates 1996; Hutchings 1997). Gates also emphasizes the personal relationship developed between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Jackson Hole during their September 1989 meeting.

Many others have given considerable credit to the Bush administration. Thatcher (1993) sees an important role for Bush and NATO: “President Bush managed the dangerous and volatile transformation with great diplomatic skill,” she wrote. Historian David Schmitz (2011) similarly argues against a body of literature that portrays the first Bush administration as lacking a strategic vision for the end of the Cold War. He contends that with Bush’s May 1989 address in Mainz, “A new vision of Europe was driving American policy.” In Kristina Spohr’s (2015) view, Bush was proactive in trying to ensure that German reunification and the end of the Cold War happened on U.S. terms. In her assessment, Bush was not emotional in his response but intended to support efforts at reunification resolutely.

Like Reagan, Bush also has critics. Historian Andrew Preston (2010) evaluates his worldview as “ill suited to the times.” I have characterized the administration as one marked by hesitation and skepticism, which hindered officials’ efforts to develop a new approach toward Eastern Europe. These attitudes, among others, limited the Bush administration from leading the United States in new directions when the Cold War ended (Snyder 2013). In Domber’s accounts (2011, 2014a, 2014b), Bush stifled rather than sparked Polish liberalization. Disagreeing with the writings of many former Bush administration officials, Domber argues that the president repeatedly sought to retard the pace of change in Poland at least until the end of 1989. Continuing such revisions of his foreign-policy record, Tom Blanton (2010) outlines the administration’s “passivity” in this period and highlights how of the two leaders, it was Gorbachev, not Bush, who had “the vision thing.” Blanton’s interpretation fits with those who have criticized the Bush administration for its “pause” and for stalling the momentum achieved by the end of the Reagan administration (Chollet and Goldgeier 2003; Matlock 2004).

The varied interpretations of Bush’s influence may arise from the president’s approach to leadership. One key theme in Engel’s (2017) account is Bush’s conservatism – not in a political sense, but, as Engel puts it, “in the traditional sense of the word, one who believed that future success required holding fast to the best features of the past.” Much of Bush’s policies were directed at ensuring stability and preserving the role of the United States in Europe. Engel (2013) also writes that Bush intended “to keep the world moving in the right direction” rather than to transform the role of the United States internationally. This assessment of his conservatism is at odds with Zelikow’s (2011) claims that Bush pursued a “radical” foreign policy intended to “fashion a new international system.”

An important subset of writings focused on the Bush administration have highlighted the contributions of Bush’s “alter ego,” former National Security Adviser

Brent Scowcroft (Chollet and Goldgeier 2008). The reasons for doing so are many, including that the two coauthored a quasi-memoir about foreign relations during the Bush years in 2008. In his biography of Scowcroft, David Schmitz (2011) demonstrates how his criticism of President Woodrow Wilson’s quest to transform the world by promoting democracy and distaste for peace settlements dictated by victors shaped his and Bush’s decision to eschew triumphalism in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Furthermore, Schmitz concurs with Scowcroft’s assertion that the United States played “midwife” to the transformation of Poland. Political scientist Bartholomew H. Sparrow (2010) has been among the most prominent scholars marshaling evidence of Scowcroft’s significance. Sparrow clearly rates him positively, highlighting his temperament, close relationship with Bush, and effectiveness as a manager. He goes as far as to assess Scowcroft as the country’s “leading foreign policy strategist of the last forty years,” and he argues that Scowcroft’s personal characteristics made him “almost perfectly suited to the times” (Sparrow 2015).

Scholars have also expanded their analysis beyond focusing solely on the superpowers in examining questions of policy and efficacy. International relations scholar Michael Cox (2008) argues that the European role in the end of the Cold War has been overlooked. The volume in which he published this argument began efforts to correct that omission, highlighting European processes that contributed to the end of the Cold War and its legacies for Europe, including increased integration (Bozo et al. 2008). Subsequently, there has been considerable work highlighting the agency of European leaders, particularly Kohl and Mitterrand. With the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was a burst of literature – including works by Victor Sebestyen (2009) and Constantine Pleshakov (2009) – seeking to move attention away from Moscow and Washington and refocus it on Central Europe. Mary Sarotte (2009) in particular emphasizes the centrality of Kohl as a “savvy politician” who played a central role in ending the Cold War. In her analysis, Kohl drove the pace and content of discussions about German unification. Similarly, Frédéric Bozo’s (2009) important book on Mitterrand shows that France did not work to impede German reunification, as has been previously argued.

Beyond paying greater attention to Bush-era officials and European leaders, scholars have also reevaluated the significance of non-state actors to the end of the Cold War (Evangelista 2010). Those focused on Eastern Europe have emphasized the degree to which people in the region “liberated themselves” (Sebestyen 2009). Among the leaders in this development are constructivist political scientists such as Robert D. English (2000, 2005) and Daniel C. Thomas (2001, 2005), who assert that the influence of ideas and norms such as national identity and human rights has been overlooked in the existing scholarship. Work by political scientist Matthew Evangelista (1999, 2010) has also been particularly influential. He has shown the significance of a transnational network of arms-control advocates to the end of the Cold War, and their influence on Gorbachev in particular.

The Catholic Church – in the United States and internationally – has also warranted considerable attention. The Church played a unique role in Poland, serving first as a counterweight to the Communist party and later as a mediator between it and the opposition (Glenn 2001; Paczkowski 2003). Furthermore, U.S. bishops bolstered the antinuclear activism of the nuclear-freeze movement (McBrady 2015). Historian John Lewis Gaddis (2005) has pointed specifically to Pope John Paul II as

beginning “the process by which communism in Poland – and ultimately everywhere else in Europe – would come to an end.” Yet, Piotr H. Kosicki (2014) has emphasized that the Catholic Church’s opposition to Marxism predated the beginning of the Cold War, and that Pope John Paul II was motivated not by anticommunism per se but by a commitment to defend human rights in the Soviet Bloc.

Beyond religious and antinuclear organizations, human-rights groups are also increasingly acknowledged as having shaped how the Cold War ended (Foot 2010). In particular, groups such as Human Rights Watch and others formed in the wake of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act have warranted attention (Snyder 2011). Gregory Domber (2014a) has demonstrated the contributions of American nongovernmental organizations such as the Polish American Congress Charitable Foundation, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), and Catholic Relief Services in distributing humanitarian aid to Poles in the wake of the imposition of martial law and economic sanctions. Their efforts generated “soft power” for the United States in Poland. More recently, historians of U.S. foreign relations have examined the ways in which mass consumerism and the contributions of U.S. businesspeople also enhanced American soft power (Nye 2004; Rosenberg 2010). In the formulation of one observer, the collapse of the Soviet Union can be attributed to some to degree to a nonmilitary invasion by the West (Connor 2003).

In contrast to these at times heated debates about the roles of certain individuals or groups in ending the Cold War, a body of literature argues that the poor state of the Soviet economy was paramount (Brooks and Wohlforth 2003). James Graham Wilson (2014), however, has written that “leaders always faced choices, and structural conditions did not dictate outcomes.” He points in particular to the absence of economic conditions in Gorbachev’s decisions to invade Afghanistan and to abstain from using force in Eastern Europe in 1989, both factors in the end of the Cold War. Others have pointed to broader forces, or “tectonics,” beyond the state of the Soviet economy that may have facilitated the end of the Cold War, including the “decline of brutality” and the “collapse of authoritarianism” (Gaddis 1992).

### Legacies

As we move further and further away from the end of the Cold War, scholars are increasingly assessing how it shaped the post-Cold War world. Whereas early interventions touted a U.S. victory and declared the “end of history,” more recent evaluations are more measured and note the continuing challenges the United States faces in the world (Fukuyama 1989). In contrast to triumphal accounts, Westad (2017) points out that the end of the Cold War did not bring peace and prosperity to all regions. Instead, he argues, it led to “misery” in the Middle East.

One of the most contested debates regarding the legacy of the end of the Cold War has been the extensive back and forth on the question of the enlargement of NATO. This body of research is driven, in part, by an urge to understand the current poor state of U.S.–Russian relations. Kristina Spohr (2012) argues that the ongoing debate about the supposed Western “betrayal” is a justification for current Russian foreign policy rather than a debate based on the historical record. In her assessment, any promises made were “not legally binding” and amounted only to “speculative”

discussion. No Western leader made promises to Soviet officials that limited NATO expansion eastward. Similarly, Sarotte (2010) explains how flaws in Soviet policy formulation and implementation contributed to the confusion over the commitments made to Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. For Sarotte, as for the leaders 20 years ago, the crux of the problem is that nothing was written down at the end of the critical Baker–Gorbachev meeting of February 9, 1990. She suggests that Gorbachev intended to rely on Baker’s oral commitment that the “zone of NATO” would not expand. She aptly demonstrates, however, that Baker had not intended his proffer to be a firm commitment, but rather saw it as one step in a series of talks over the matter. The two leaders thus held different perceptions of whether an agreement had been reached. Sarotte argues that Gorbachev, unadvisedly, made a concession on German unification based on his understanding that Baker and Kohl had agreed NATO would not extend further east.

On the other hand, political scientist Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin (2016) sees “merit” in Russian claims of a “broken promise” regarding NATO enlargement. In Shiffrin’s view, though the United States did not offer any formal commitments, it did extend “informal assurances” that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe beyond Germany. Highlighting the ongoing tension over this question, Mark Kramer (2017) has criticized Shiffrin’s work as a “flawed account.” In his intervention, political scientist James Goldgeier (2016) argues that miscommunication among U.S. and Russian officials in the early 1990s – particularly between U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Russian President Boris Yeltsin – is far more significant to understanding the consequences of NATO expansion than any promises that were or were not made during the Gorbachev years. Focusing on European integration in economic and political terms instead of military ones, meanwhile, N. Piers Ludlow (2017) looks at how the end of the Cold facilitated the construction of a new Europe under the umbrella of the European Community and then the European Union.

The end of the Cold War also had a significant impact on Latin America, and Central America more specifically, as the ideological framework that had shaped U.S. relations with it transformed. Rather than being driven solely by anticommunism, immigration and globalization became much more significant forces in shaping U.S. policy toward the region (Crandall 2008). Furthermore, the George H. W. Bush administration was willing to countenance a peace plan to address the wars that had consumed Central America throughout the Reagan administration with devastating effects. Whereas the Bush administration had been more skeptical of Gorbachev than had Reagan’s, in Central America Bush and his aides displayed more flexibility and cast off the ideological blinders that had led to U.S. overt and covert support for the Contras in Nicaragua. Bush instead backed a political process that he hoped, in addition to bringing peace to Central America, would improve U.S. relations with Latin America, as well as those among the different branches of the U.S. government (Moreno 1994; Popkin 2000; Arnson 2012). Other scholarship on the impact of the end of the Cold War on Latin America has analyzed the transition to democracy in Chile and elsewhere (Kenney 2010; Stern 2010), as well as efforts to achieve truth, reconciliation, and justice in post-transitional countries, including El Salvador (Collins 2010; Popkin 2000).

In some instances, Latin American countries were increasingly characterized by insurgency and counterinsurgency in the years following the end of the Cold War

(Arnson 2012). These cases, along with the violent fracturing of Yugoslavia and genocide in Rwanda, show that the end of the Cold War did not necessarily usher in a more peaceful era of world history. On the other hand, Chris Saunders (2011) argues that the end of Cold War led the United States to increase its pressure on South Africa to end its racially discriminatory system of apartheid, helping abolish one of the last remaining human-rights travesties of the twentieth century.

### Conclusion

One particularly productive area of new research has been on the impact of emotions on the end of the Cold War. Historians and others have made clear the significance of emotions – particularly trust, distrust, and anger – in shaping international relations in these years. For example, Domber (2014b) highlights how in the immediate aftermath of the Polish imposition of martial law, Reagan was “livid.” He emphasizes American anger again and again, citing sources reporting that “Reagan erupted” and that “real rage dominated after the declaration of martial law.” Similarly, Robert Service (2015) demonstrates the role of suspicion in Soviet–American relations.

Other historians examine more productive emotions. For Leffler (2007), Reagan’s most significant contribution was the “trust he inspired.” In one of the best examples of this type of work, J. Simon Rofe (2016) emphasizes the significance of trust in Bush’s diplomacy – he relied upon it with his key advisors, sought to build upon it with Gorbachev, and utilized it in negotiations with U.S. allies. Similarly, Meacham (2015) points to the significance of trust between Bush and Gorbachev. Brent Scowcroft supports this analysis, arguing that the Malta meeting was an important turning point in the Bush–Gorbachev relationship: “I think the relationship between the two leaders changed. That was the most dramatic ... that they got comfortable with each other ... They would occasionally call each other on the phone and so forth. So the personal relationship changed, and that was very beneficial” (Maynard 2008). Bush’s memoirs echo this analysis, though without explicitly using the language of trust; in *A World Transformed* (Bush and Scowcroft 1998), he maps the evolution of his relationship with Gorbachev: the two went from using titles such as “Mr. Vice President” and “Mr. Chairman” to addressing each other by their first names, “George” and “Mikhail.”

Having heeded Michael Cox’s (2008) admonition to pay more attention to European actors, specialists on the end of the Cold War are now giving increasing attention to its end in areas outside of the North Atlantic. For example, Chris Saunders and Sue Onslow (2010) have pushed us to think more about the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall on southern Africa – in that, as fear of communism receded, the government in South Africa turned to addressing growing internal tensions. In their words, “The end of the Cold War and the end of apartheid were inextricably linked.” In a similar vein, Odd Arne Westad (2017) argues that actors in the Global South, rather than Eastern Europe, drove the global transformations of the late 1980s. Important work is also being done in this respect by Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergey Radchenko (2011; Radchenko 2014). These histories, however, have rarely considered the United States, focusing instead on how the end of the Cold War affected disparate locations. Going forward, scholars of U.S. foreign relations should direct

more attention to how U.S. foreign policy toward southern Africa and Afghanistan, among other places, changed as the Cold War ended.

One way in which scholars are studying the late Cold War and the end of the Cold War in other areas of the world is through a growing literature on democracy promotion, which Robert Pee and William Michael Schmidli (2019) argue became “a defining feature” of U.S. foreign policy in the late 1980s. This work examines U.S. foreign policy toward diverse locales such as Uruguay, El Salvador, and the Philippines, and it offers opportunities to begin to fill in the geographic holes in the literature on U.S. foreign policy and the end of the Cold War.

As the Cold War recedes, scholars may increasingly be turning toward Westad’s (2017) recent framing – that the Cold War “did not decide everything.” As Westad does, scholars would benefit from exploring the multiple ways in which the end of the Cold War intersected with the broader global trends of the twentieth century, including decolonization, globalization, and human rights.

The expansion of writing on the end of the Cold War geographically and chronologically ensures that scholars will continue to debate its significance for some time. Similarly, though strides have recently been made in declassifying the documentary record of these years, significant material remains inaccessible. New discoveries will be made as the cast of characters seen as influential in the end of the Cold War broadens. As Leffler, Engel, and others have argued, this scholarship, and how we interpret the end of the Cold War, has important political and diplomatic consequences. Therefore, our engagement with this historical turning point will continue.

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