INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD REMAINS A DANGEROUS PLACE

Most political analysts agree that the Cold War ended in 1989, when revolutions in Poland and Hungary quickly spread to other East European countries, toppling existing Communist regimes and shattering the Iron Curtain that had divided Eastern and Western Europe for almost forty-five years. Much of the credit for these developments has been given to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who promoted economic and political liberalization in the Soviet Union through his policies of perestroika and glasnost', restricted the use of Soviet military power to maintain Soviet hegemonic control over Eastern Europe and sought new and fruitful openings to the West. In 1992, of course, these same liberal policies led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself, following an unsuccessful coup against Gorbachev.

In a fine history on the end of the Cold War, Washington Post reporter Don Oberdorfer has also attributed considerable credit to President Ronald Reagan. Believing when he took office in 1981 that the Soviet Union was an "evil empire" (the term he used in a 1983 speech), Reagan was nevertheless anxious to ease tensions between Washington and Moscow. Determined to strengthen America's military posture, he was unalterably committed to his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI or "Star Wars"), despite Gorbachev's equally resolute opposition to it. Throughout most of Reagan's administration, in fact, SDI remained the major impediment to a Soviet-American disarmament agreement. In the end, however, the Soviets realized they could not afford the costs of competing with the United States in the development of sophisticated and enormously expensive military technology. Accordingly, in 1988 they joined the United States in ratifying a treaty reducing intermediate nuclear forces (INF) from Europe.

For Oberdorfer, then, Reagan has not always been given the credit in the press and within academic and political circles that is due him. This view is shared by the Cold War historian, John Gaddis. "For President Reagan," Gaddis writes, "appears to have understood—or to have quickly learned—the dangers of basing foreign policy solely on ideology: he..."
combined militancy with a surprising degree of operational pragmatism
and a shrewd sense of timing."

Like many other issues relating to the end of the Cold War, historians
and other commentators will likely argue for years over the respective
roles of Gorbachev and Reagan in bringing it to an end. After all, only
five years have passed since the Berlin Wall—perhaps the most significant
symbol of the Cold War—was torn down, and many of the ramifications
from the end of the Cold War are still being played out. Nevertheless,

enough is known about the causes and consequences of this major turn-
ing point in international affairs that it seems appropriate to devote an en-
tire number of The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review to these issues.

The essays which follow are written by political scientists and histori-
ans, by experts in Soviet and experts in American foreign policy. Some
are research articles, others are essays of commentary. Together they
suggest a paradox. As might be expected, they illustrate the harmful im-
pact of the Cold War on world politics. Yet they also suggest that the
omnipresent danger of a nuclear confrontation between the United
States and the Soviet Union, which ultimately dictated the course the
Cold War followed, afforded a degree of world order and stability that
is now lacking. Accordingly, they indicate the need to balance the opti-
mism generated by the end of the Cold War with caution about the fu-
ture.

In his essay, historian Thomas Paterson examines Soviet and espe-
cially American policy toward Latin America to illustrate four major rea-
sons why he believes the Cold War ended: 1) the enormous expense of
the Cold War for the United States and the Soviet Union; 2) challenges
from within the spheres of influence of the two superpowers; 3) the in-
creasingly important role in world politics of emerging third world na-
tions; and 4) the growing strength of the anti-nuclear or disarmament
movement. Of particular importance to the Soviet Union was the cost of
its economic and military assistance to Cuba, which by the 1980s, Pater-
son points out, was costing Moscow $5 billion a year and contributing
to the country's economic and political disintegration. Although Paterson
does not address the consequences of the end of the Cold War, he sug-
gests that the Cold War provided a degree of world stability that is no
longer present.

1. Don Oberdorfer, The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and
United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations