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14. ABSTRACT The American foreign policy establishment can learn much from Ronald Reagan's approach to Strategic Competition (SC) during the Cold War's waning days. From 1980 to 1988, Reagan employed a well-balanced and disciplined foreign policy that sought to remedy the perceived shortcomings of both Richard Nixon's realist-leaning policies of retrenchment and Jimmy Carter's liberalist tactics of multilateralism and disarmament. Reagan was markedly different from his predecessors in that he was neither a card-carrying balance of power realist nor an international liberalist - but instead represented a pragmatic amalgamation of both methodologies. Guided by conservative internationalist principles, Reagan tailored his foreign policy agenda to strengthen American diplomacy, nurture bilateral relationships with key strategic allies and enact cost-imposing strategies on fragile adversary structures. Ex post facto, few argue that Reagan's approach to competing with the Soviet Union was not a significant factor in bringing the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion.					
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The Coming Decade of Strategic Competition

The American foreign policy establishment can learn much from Ronald Reagan's approach to Strategic Competition (SC) during the Cold War's waning days. From 1980 to 1988, Reagan employed a well-balanced and disciplined foreign policy that sought to remedy the perceived shortcomings of both Richard Nixon's realist-leaning policies of retrenchment and Jimmy Carter's liberalist tactics of multilateralism and disarmament.¹ Reagan was markedly different from his predecessors in that he was neither a card-carrying balance of power realist nor an international liberalist – but instead represented a pragmatic amalgamation of both methodologies. Guided by conservative internationalist principles, Reagan tailored his foreign policy agenda to strengthen American diplomacy, nurture bilateral relationships with key strategic allies and enact cost-imposing strategies on fragile adversary structures. *Ex post facto*, few argue that Reagan's approach to competing with the Soviet Union was not a significant factor in bringing the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion.

As the U.S. enters 2023, the Biden administration is confronting a similar security situation and set of policy choices that Reagan faced 40 years earlier. In Europe, Russia seized upon the perceived weakness of the West by annexing Crimea in 2014 and then conducted a full-scale invasion of eastern Ukraine in February 2022. In the East, China illegally claimed a dozen islands in the South China Sea throughout the 2000s while amassing a force designed to invade Taiwan and counter American military might in the Western Pacific. However, instead of continuing to employ the same traditional liberal tactics which have yielded few positive outcomes in the last 20 years, the Biden administration should consider insights from the Reagan foreign policy experience to craft a more pragmatic strategy to counter the People's Republic of

¹ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy under Jefferson, Polk, Truman, and Reagan*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 171.

China (PRC) and the Russian Federation. First, to improve the bargaining position of U.S. diplomatic efforts with the PRC and Russia, the Biden Administration must prioritize fielding a credible military force capable of achieving both conventional and nuclear *Integrated Deterrence*.² Second, the Biden Administration must focus finite resources on *Campaigning* with key allies confined to strategic geographic areas.³ Third, the Biden Administration must enact cost-imposing strategies on PRC and Russian internal structures to achieve *Enduring Advantage*.⁴ Ultimately, there is no time to waste and status quo liberal approaches are not working – and revisionist powers in Europe and Asia increasingly threaten American interests.

Reagan’s Conservative Internationalist Approach

Since World War II, American foreign policy has vacillated between liberalist and realist foreign policy approaches that reflected the ideology of the administration occupying the White House. Democratic presidents largely subscribed to a classical international liberalist perspective in which America has a moral obligation to shape the world and its international structures to be more democratic, open, and free. These approaches, however noble in their intent, tended to drive the U.S. to overextension in pursuit of overly idealistic goals. On the other hand, Republican presidents have generally gravitated toward an inwardly focused realist perspective that emphasized military power, alliances, and the preservation of national sovereignty. The result is a methodology that is characteristically hesitant to involve itself in the affairs of foreign states while also seeking to change adversary behavior through the threat of credible force. However, as the post-Cold War environment has demonstrated, neither pure liberalism nor ruthless realism has proven more effective than the other. In fact, a compelling argument can be

² US Department of Defense. “2022 National Defense Strategy Fact Sheet”, 2.

³ US Department of Defense. “2022 National Defense Strategy Fact Sheet”, 2.

⁴ US Department of Defense. “2022 National Defense Strategy Fact Sheet”, 2.

made that both methods invite animosity in reaction to either American power being too involved or, in the other extreme, absent as a stabilizing force in the global security environment.⁵ As the celebrated political scientist and Princeton researcher Dr. Henry Nau describes, “each [American] overreach encounters pushback from other countries and eventually higher military costs, and each retreat is followed by renewed anarchy in the world and fresh attacks on the U.S. and its allies.”⁶ This prescient characterization would become even more accurate and relevant in describing the effects of American waffling toward competition with Russia and China since the turn of the century.

Ronald Reagan intuitively understood the self-induced constraints of dogmatically adhering to the bipolar approaches of twentieth-century American foreign policy tradition. By rejecting the false dichotomy of choosing between liberal or realist tactics, Reagan forged his foreign policy method that harmonized both core elements of liberalism and realism in the struggle against the Soviet Union. In so doing, Reagan carved out a niche foreign policy tradition that Dr. Henry Nau aptly coined “Conservative Internationalism” in his 2013 work. According to Dr. Nau’s work, conservative internationalism “combines the commitment of liberal internationalism to spread democracy and make the world a better place with the instruments of realism to back up diplomacy with military force” in three primary ways.⁷ First, in keeping with this tradition, Reagan believed in American exceptionalism and the unalienable rights of all humanity. Nevertheless, he delicately balanced freedom and force by prioritizing the spread of liberal values on the borders of existing free countries in Europe and Asia and did not attempt to germinate democracy in every nation everywhere.⁸ Second, Reagan took great care to closely

⁵ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, xii.

⁶ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, xii.

⁷ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, xii.

⁸ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, xii.

link military actions to diplomatic offers to achieve incremental improvements over time and largely rejected nation-building as an American task.⁹ Lastly, Reagan envisioned a decentralized global security environment featuring a limited international structure that bound democratic civil societies together while respecting internal values and national sovereignty.¹⁰ In essence, National Security Decision Directive-32 (NDSS-32), published on May 20th, 1982, reflected Reagan's desire to formulate a strategy that supported traditional internationalist structures while also buttressing American power with economic strength "to contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence throughout the world."¹¹ Although it was written over four decades ago, NDSS-32 offers an excellent blueprint for a modern pragmatic competition strategy for the PRC and Russia.

In contrast to the strategy articulated in NDSS-32, The Biden Administration's 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS), published roughly two years after inauguration, offers a traditional internationalist framework for SC along with a smorgasbord of transnational challenges such as climate change and COVID-19.¹² On a positive note, the strategy accurately characterizes the nature of SC while differentiating the challenges posed by the PRC and Russia and the need to act in concert with allies in the unipolar global order. However, because of its broadly written language, it largely lacks a clear statement of national interest priorities, accepted tradeoffs, or the strong and unambiguous terms that frame the serious nature of the "decisive decade."¹³ The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) -- the Department of Defense's (DoD)

⁹ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, xii.

¹⁰ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, xiii.

¹¹ US National Security Council. "National Security Decision Directive Number 32," Reagan Administration (May 20th, 1982), 1-2.

¹² US National Security Council. "2022 National Security Strategy," Biden Administration (October 12, 2022), pgs. 1-47.

¹³ US National Security Council. "2022 National Security Strategy Fact Sheet," Biden Administration (October 12, 2022), pg. 1.

strategy to achieve the objectives laid out in the NSS – goes somewhat further to discuss efforts to counter Russia in Europe and China in the Pacific, but still falls short on specificity. As one Brookings Institute analyst quipped, “those hungering for prioritization and a detailed alignment of ends, ways, and means will find [the NDS] unfulfilling.”¹⁴ Therefore, in an effort to provide tangible takeaways that can be applied to today’s SC, the subsequent sections will analyze three critical national security decisions that Reagan undertook to compete with, deter, and ultimately defeat the Soviet Union and how these lessons can be applied to inform a more pragmatic strategy for the Biden Administration. First, in a textbook example of successful deterrence, section one examines Reagan’s decision to escalate tensions with Moscow by deploying intermediate-range nuclear missiles to Europe to force a negotiated arms-reduction settlement. Second, section two explores the circumstances associated with the drafting of the “Six Assurances” with the PRC over the sale of weapons to Taiwan in 1982 to deduce how Reagan might have approached campaigning in today’s security environment. Lastly, section three analyzes Reagan’s cost-imposing strategies designed to pressure Soviet structures to secure enduring U.S. advantage.

Strong Defense Enables Strong Diplomacy

In the final days of the Carter Administration in the late 1970s, the Soviet Union began to move ballistic missiles into Warsaw Pact territory. At the time, it was the most provocative deployment of weapons since the Cuban Missile Crisis and brought the superpowers back to the brink of a nuclear exchange in Europe. By 1981, roughly 225 SS-20 / 9M729 Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM) were positioned along NATO’s eastern flank, each armed with

¹⁴ Melanie W. Sisson, “There is A lot to Like in the 2022 National Defense Strategy,” *Order from Chaos (blog)*. The Brookings Institute, (Nov 18, 2022), pg. 1.

up to three nuclear warheads capable of reaching Western cities in under ten minutes.¹⁵ Fearing the missiles would be used against Western Europe, European leaders sought nuclear umbrella assurances from the U.S. and argued for an in-kind deployment of similar NATO weapons to counterbalance the threat.¹⁶ To set conditions for negotiations with the Soviets to remove all SS-20 IRBMs (and their nuclear warheads) from Eastern Europe, Reagan opted to escalate by deploying comparable Pershing II IRBMs and Tomahawk Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) into Western Europe.¹⁷ The psychological effect on the Soviets was significant, leading Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Premier, to liken the weapons to “a pistol held to our heads.”¹⁸ Reagan’s negotiating framework was a classic “peace through strength” tactic that sought the following outcomes. First, the administration’s method put the Soviets on the moral defensive for not agreeing to remove all missiles from Europe before the U.S. deployment. Second, the decision paired diplomatic efforts with the threat of U.S. missile deployments. Finally, borrowing from realist thought, the approach sheltered U.S. sovereignty from an outside arbiter via bilateral negotiations to remove nuclear weapons from Europe. Due in large part to Reagan’s persistence and disciplined diplomacy, the U.S. and Soviet Union signed the bilateral Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty on 8 December 1987, which successfully eliminated theater nuclear weapons from the European continent.¹⁹ The completed INF treaty combined “[U.S.] strengths to maximum effect... with instruments of national power... to provide an effective nuclear deterrent.”²⁰ In essence, Reagan pioneered what would become the modern Integrated Deterrence framework 40 years before it came into fashion in the DoD.

¹⁵ William Inboden, “To Deter Russia, Look to Reagan” *The National Review*, October 2022, 3.

¹⁶ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, 182.

¹⁷ William Inboden, “To Deter Russia, Look to Reagan” *The National Review*, October 2022, 3.

¹⁸ William Inboden, “To Deter Russia, Look to Reagan” *The National Review*, October 2022, 3.

¹⁹ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, 189.

²⁰ US Department of Defense. “2022 National Defense Strategy Fact Sheet.” Biden Administration, (October 27, 2022), pg. 1.

Reagan's response to aggressive Soviet behavior in Europe offers an instructive anecdote for dealing with aggressive adversary behavior. In reaction to the growing threat to U.S. interests and infrastructure both at home and abroad from a multitude of threats, the administration should employ a similar approach to deter aggressive Chinese and Russian behavior in key strategic areas. While it is uncomfortable ideologically for liberal-minded Administrations to overtly hold a foe at risk with force, it may be one of the few options left, as evidenced by Russia's wanton invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Where primarily diplomatic, economic, and information-based deterrence packages have failed to dissuade Russia and China from coercive and overtly hostile behavior, the threat of decisive conventional or nuclear force may be all that remains to defend the international status quo. To be successful, the Biden administration should also take a page from the realist playbook and acknowledge that the U.S. lacks the capacity to deter everyone, everywhere, all the time. In so doing, U.S. policymakers must be judicious in defining *what* U.S. critical national interests are, *where* the U.S. will focus its limited resources, and *how* the U.S. should employ its resources for the best effect. First, although not analogous to explicitly identified national interests, the NDS priorities are a good starting point for where to focus American efforts for the foreseeable future:

- 1) defending the homeland from multi-domain attack,
- 2) deterring strategic attacks against the U.S. and allies,
- 3) deterring aggression and being prepared to prevail in conflict over China in the Pacific and Russia in Europe, and
- 4) building a resilient Joint force and defense ecosystem.²¹

²¹ US Department of Defense. "2022 National Defense Strategy Fact Sheet.", pg. 1.

Second, the Biden administration has clarified that deterring attacks against the homeland and against U.S. interests and allies in the Pacific and Europe is the top priority. By omission, the administration has implied that ancillary efforts in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia are less important to SC. Third, the administration must “build the future Joint Force by undertaking reforms to accelerate force development, getting the technology [the U.S.] needs more quickly, and making investments in the extraordinary people of the Department, who remain our most valuable resource.”²² The Biden administration should view this as a two-part endeavor. In the short term, the U.S. must urgently work to reestablish an effective conventional and nuclear deterrence of the PRC and Russia. In support of conventional deterrence, the U.S. should hastily deploy long-range offensive weapons that were formally prohibited under the now-dissolved Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF Treaty) – just as Reagan did in 1982.²³ In the nuclear arena, the administration should work with the DoD to develop and field a Nuclear-armed, hyper-sonic missile to reestablish the superiority of U.S. weapons on bombers, submarines, and ballistic missiles.²⁴ Next, the Biden administration must address the strategy-resource mismatch and fund the DoD at a level that reflects the urgency of the need. While the FY24 defense budget includes the most extensive Research and Development (R&D) allocation in recent memory -- or roughly \$145B -- the 3% budget increase has already been consumed by rising inflation.²⁵ Furthermore, instead of attempting to match the Chinese in terms of the numbers of ships and aircraft as many have argued, the Biden Administration should instead seek an offset by focusing effort on areas of relative advantage: capitalizing on breakthroughs in quantum computing,

²² US Department of Defense. “2022 National Defense Strategy Fact Sheet.”, pg. 2.

²³ James J. Carafano, Michael Pillsbury, Jeff M. Smith, Andrew J. Harding, “Winning the New Cold War: A Plan for Countering China,” *The Heritage Foundation*, Report no. 270 (Mar 28, 2023): pg. 10.

²⁴ Carafano, Pillsbury, Smith, Harding, “Winning the New Cold War: A Plan for Countering China”, pg. 10.

²⁵ US Department of Defense. “Department of Defense Releases the President’s Fiscal Year 2024 Defense Budget.” Biden Administration, (March 13, 2023), pg. 1.

artificial intelligence, reusable space lift and autonomous vehicles. This strategy approach will enable the DoD to field truly disruptive capabilities to overcome numerical disadvantages and stimulate economic growth by developing technology with utility for the private sector.

However, even if executed flawlessly, deterrence alone may not be enough to change adversary behavior and may require the Biden Administration to synchronize its activities across all elements of national power, with the rest of the U.S. government, and in concert with allies and partners.

Resource Responsible Campaigning in Key Regions

In the spring of 1982, the PRC became increasingly vocal about their displeasure over continued U.S. weapons shipments to Taiwan. Only three years earlier, the liberalist Carter Administration had made the momentous decision to formally recognize the People's Republic of China as the sole sovereign government of China. However, this also placed the U.S. in a difficult position concerning its continued support of the Republic of China (ROC). In response, the Reagan administration was keen to maintain an open dialogue with the PRC and assuage Chinese concerns over the weapons shipments while balancing engagement with the commitment to continue supplying Taiwan with military arms. In signing what would become the "Six Assurances" in August of 1982, Reagan walked an incredibly fine line to uphold the "One China Policy" while ensuring Taiwan's security with U.S. material support.²⁶ In private communications, Reagan went to great lengths to emphasize the U.S. expectation for a "peaceful resolution" of the cross-straits dispute and to reaffirm that weapons shipments would continue in

²⁶ US Congressional Research Service. "President Reagan's Six Assurances to Taiwan", IF11665, no. 1 (8 October 2020). 1.

“quantitative and qualitative terms... relative to that of the PRC [threat] will be maintained.”²⁷

Reagan borrowed from realist perspectives by seeking to serve as an offshore balancer while supporting a liberal desire to harden a crucial democracy in a strategic part of the world.

Reagan recognized the finite nature of power and opted to preserve U.S. capacity for supporting critical partners in strategic areas. The Biden Administration must also make tough choices on which partner countries receive support and with what instruments of U.S. national power. Successful campaigning efforts require developing and maintaining of regional alliances, conducting exercises, executing freedom of navigation operations, and providing material support to allies and partners.²⁸ While this concept is not novel, the 2022 NDS focuses these activities in geographically significant areas to “strengthen deterrence and enable [the U.S.] to gain advantages against the full range of competitors’ coercive actions.”²⁹ To support this goal, the Biden Administration should stop expending resources in non-strategic regions and instead focus U.S. capabilities on supporting key allies and partners most affected by PRC and Russian coercive activities. First, the U.S. must exponentially increase support to Ukraine and Taiwan to counter Russia and the PRC by providing *defensive and offensive* long-range weapons. In support of this effort, the administration should partner with the U.S. Congress to double the share of foreign assistance spending in the Pacific and Europe to roughly 40% of total foreign assistance.³⁰ Second, the U.S. must urgently increase its organic production of weapons and munitions to support partners and allies on the front lines of competition in the Pacific and Europe. Not only should the administration meet the needs of those actively fighting to protect

²⁷ Harvey J. Feldman, “Taiwan Arms Sales and the Reagan Assurances,” *The American Asian Review* 19, No. 3, (Fall 2001), pgs. 2.

²⁸ Melanie W. Sisson, “There is A lot to Like in the 2022 National Defense Strategy,” pg. 3.

²⁹ US Department of Defense. “2022 National Defense Strategy Fact Sheet.”, pg. 2.

³⁰ Carafano, Pillsbury, Smith, Harding, “Winning the New Cold War: A Plan for Countering China”, pg. 10.

their national sovereignty, but it must also begin to replenish U.S. stockpiles in anticipation of potential future hostilities involving U.S. forces. Third, the U.S. should accelerate security cooperation between strategically aligned regional democracies. The US should expedite efforts between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. (colloquially called “AUKUS”) to improve the bloc’s ability to share intelligence, operate jointly, and synchronize campaign plans and efforts. Furthermore, the U.S. should establish a “quad-select” initiative that brings together India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S. with select nations by invitation to improve coordination and planning between key democracies in the Pacific.³¹ When combined with economic incentives and diplomacy, these efforts significantly increase the effectiveness of U.S. campaigning with like-minded sister republics.

Recapitalize the U.S. Technology Brand and Impose Costs

During Reagan’s first term, he intuitively sensed that the relative strength of the Soviet Union’s hand at the SC poker game was weakening. Reagan accurately assessed that the Soviets were under pressure due to economic challenges, a widening technology gap, and inefficient communist government structures at home. In March 1983, Reagan addressed the American people to announce his intent to pursue a “comprehensive and intensive effort to define a long-term research and development program” to field advanced weapons capabilities that would greatly enhance the strength of the U.S. military.³² In the following months, the Reagan Administration would establish a space-based ballistic missile defense research program known as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), commonly referred to as “Star Wars,” that would

³¹ Carafano, Pillsbury, Smith, Harding, “Winning the New Cold War: A Plan for Countering China”, pg. 14.

³² US Congressional Research Service. “The Strategic Defense Initiative: Program Description and Major Issues”, no. 86-8 SPR (7 January 1986). 7.

protect the U.S. from a Soviet missile attack.³³ The plan was audacious and threatened to alter the balance of nuclear deterrence in U.S. favor while also upending Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine. Reagan's calculus was simple: at best, the SDI program would deliver a capability to enable the negotiated destruction of all U.S. and Soviet offensive nuclear missiles. At worst, the mere existence of the SDI program might force the Soviets to expend resources they did not have to counter it. The Soviets responded predictably, as the Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh characterized, "the atmosphere in Moscow was very tense for the first few years of the Reagan administration especially because of the SDI program: it frightened us very much."³⁴ However, Reagan pursued far more than SDI during this period to put pressure on the Soviets in what can be accurately characterized as shrewdly realist; Reagan worked closely with Congress to revive the B-1B low-altitude bomber, develop the B-2 stealth bomber, the Peacekeeper ballistic missile and dramatically increased the defense budget to strengthen the U.S. military. Within six months of taking office, Gorbachev concluded that the Soviet Union could not enter an arms race with the U.S., declaring to his advisors: "we will lose."³⁵ By 1986, Reagan's gamble started to bear fruit, and the cost-imposing strategies provided significant leverage at the bargaining table. As Reagan later wrote in the fall of 1986, "they blinked," as the Soviets simply lacked the resources and agility to respond to Reagan's initiatives.³⁶

Just as Reagan deduced in the early 1980s, the authoritarian systems of Russia and the PRC are inherently fragile and potentially vulnerable. While formidable, the PRC faces a

³³ US Congressional Research Service. "The Strategic Defense Initiative: Program Description and Major Issues", no. 86-8 SPR (7 January 1986). 7.

³⁴ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, 181.

³⁵ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, 181.

³⁶ Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism*, 189.

looming demographic crisis over the next decade, the fallout of draconian COVID-19 restrictions, and slowing economic growth. Russia is mired in what is likely to become a years-long conflict in Ukraine with a diminishing industrial capacity and economy mainly tied to petroleum and natural gas. Consequently, the Biden Administration should adopt a three-part cost-imposing strategy similar to Reagan's that focuses competition on areas of relative advantage in sustainable energy production, the globally ubiquitous nature of the dollar, and the superiority of the U.S. private technology sector. First, the U.S. must use funding from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act to research and develop clean energy technologies, such as the recent breakthroughs in Cold Fusion electricity generation, as a source of potentially limitless, environmentally friendly energy.³⁷ As an interim solution until the technology is viable at scale, the administration should buck conventional liberal wisdom to work with U.S. petroleum companies to increase production to meet European demand created by Russian sanctions. Second, the U.S. should vigorously contest efforts by the "Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa" (BRICS) economic bloc to supplant the U.S. dollar as the globally traded reserve currency to preserve the U.S.'s ability to wield it as a tool for imposing punitive sanctions and offering economic assistance to key partners and allies. Third, using the CHIPS and Science Act, the administration should further incentivize the development of space lift, advanced computing, information technology, telecommunications, aviation, and other critical industries to stay ahead of the PRC and Russia and ensure a resilient, dual-use manufacturing base.³⁸ Third, to limit the U.S. dependence on foreign production, the administration should seek opportunities to "reshore, nearshore and friendshore" industrial production activities away from the PRC, Russia, and

³⁷ US National Security Council. "2022 National Security Strategy," Biden Administration (October 12, 2022), pgs. 15.

³⁸ US National Security Council. "2022 National Security Strategy," Biden Administration (October 12, 2022), pgs. 15.

satellite states – and instead encourage and incentivize companies to return their production activities to the U.S. and partner nations.³⁹ If successful, the Biden administration will ensure the U.S. economy’s enduring advantage and will enhance technology the U.S. military can draw upon to compete and deter the PRC and Russia.

The Ideologue’s Counter Argument

There is no shortage of academic discourse related to past and present U.S. Foreign Policy efforts. On the one side, leading realist theorists such as John Mearshiemer and Steven Walt lambast the liberal internationalist approach since the end of the Cold War with articles such as “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order.”⁴⁰ On the other, liberal thinkers such as John Ikenberry vigorously defend the moral supremacy of liberal internationalism, arguing it is the only way to sustain the Western-architected world order.⁴¹ Both parochial arguments largely fail to consider the efficacy of a Reagan-inspired balanced, middle-ground approach for competing and deterring the PRC and Russia. Furthermore, among the critiques offered of the Reagan administration, most are focused on a relatively small number of the administration’s foreign policy blunders related to the U.S. Marine barracks bombing in Beirut and the Iran Contra Affair. In sum, this analysis misses the mark and distracts earnest examination from the overwhelming success of the administration’s approach.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 was no accident – it is the greatest evidence of the effectiveness of Reagan’s approach toward strategic competition. First, despite realist objections, there is still a need to maintain strong relationships with crucial Allied nations and international

³⁹ Carafano, Pillsbury, Smith, Harding, “Winning the New Cold War: A Plan for Countering China”, pg. 8.

⁴⁰John J. Mearshiemer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order”, *International Security* 43, No. 4 (Spring 2019), pgs. 7-50.

⁴¹ John Ikenberry, “A Rival of Americas Making? The Debate Over Washington’s China Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 101, No. 2 (Mar-Apr 2022), pgs. 172-175.

structures. Reagan understood this and went to extraordinary lengths to cultivate and maintain relationships with leaders in democratic sister republics and strengthen NATO. Second, spreading democratic values where practical is worthy of U.S. effort, so long as it does not lead to overzealous attempts to install democracy everywhere, all at once. Reagan was far more disciplined than recent administrations in this regard and instead chose to support these movements only in key strategic areas. Lastly, liberal internationalists naively believe that goodwill alone is enough to convince adversaries to cooperate within the confines of strong international structures. Reagan knew better, and instead sought to couple diplomatic efforts with the threat of military action to enhance his bargaining position at the negotiating table. In short, Reagan's conservative internationalist approach is far superior to the bipolar prescriptions of current liberal and realist thinkers and is ideally suited to inform the next steps of the Biden Administration's National Security Strategy.

Conclusion

As the U.S. foreign policy establishment continues to grapple with the strategic challenge posed by the PRC and Russia, it is helpful to study successful approaches from the past. Reagan rejected the standard U.S. foreign policy traditions and instead forged a different path that successfully supported the expansion of freedom, a potent military buildup, and effective diplomacy that protected sovereignty while maintaining strong relationships with allies. Reagan's approach was fundamentally instrumental in bringing the Cold War to a logical conclusion -- without a major clash between the West and the Soviets. Consequently, modern-day architects of American foreign policy can and should employ the lessons of Reagan's experience in crafting a more pragmatic conservative internationalist strategy for the People's Republic of China and Russia to effectively manage Strategic Competition.

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