

George Shultz, Nuclear Statecraft and the Vision for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons¹

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Summary

As Secretary of State, George Shultz worked hard to help protect Ronald Reagan's and Mikhail Gorbachev's shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. This article looks into Shultz's contribution to Reagan's groundbreaking arms control diplomacy and its pivotal role for the peaceful end of the Cold War highlighting the contemporary significance of Reagan's and Shultz's vision at a time when the global challenge is to build from scratch a new arms control architecture for the 21st century, something that will need strength, patient statecraft and the long-term management of adversarial relations with Russia and China. The article sheds new light on the complexities of Ronald Reagan's approach: On the one hand, Reagan wanted America's victory in the battle with the Soviet Union. At the same time, he wanted to abolish nuclear weapons, and reducing nuclear weapons required patient statecraft and the relaunch of U.S.-Soviet cooperation. Ronald Reagan and George Shultz managed to weave these aims together combining strength and diplomacy in new ways in an effort to advance freedom and promote democracy.

About the Author

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Disclaimer: This report has been prepared as part of a research internship at the Department of Political Science of the Roma Tre University, funded by the European Union (EU) Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium as part of a larger EU educational initiative aimed at building capacity in the next generation of scholars and practitioners in non-proliferation policy and programming. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Political Science of the Roma Tre University, the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium or other members of the network.

¹ The contents of this paper benefited from research conducted as part of a Digital Fellowship at University Roma Tre and Prof. Leopoldo Nuti's Chair for the History of International Relations at Roma Tre's Political Science Department funded by the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium. I'd like to express my gratitude to the Consortium. Its funding enabled me to pursue policy-oriented research working with Leopoldo Nuti, Marilena Gala and Giordana Pulcini.

I. Introduction

After a stellar career in academia, business and government, former Secretary of State George P. Shultz passed away at 100 on February 6, 2021. Shultz was a seminal figure in U.S. diplomacy and will be remembered for his groundbreaking role in the peaceful end of the Cold War. On February 9, in an obituary in the *New York Times*, his biographer Philip Taubman looked into the interplay between Ronald Reagan's nuclear abolitionism and George Shultz's creative nuclear statecraft quoting Mikhail Gorbachev saying that "without Reagan the Cold War would not have ended. But without Shultz, Reagan would not have ended the Cold War."² As Secretary of State, Shultz worked hard to protect Ronald Reagan's and Mikhail Gorbachev's shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Shultz's mission was to reverse the reliance on nuclear weapons for deterrence and to prevent their proliferation into potentially dangerous hands. In this endeavor, during the last 15 years, Shultz joined forces with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry and former Senator Sam Nunn.³

In 1986, the vision for a world free of nuclear weapons was at the heart of Ronald Reagan's and Mikhail Gorbachev's summit meeting at Reykjavik, Iceland.⁴ Albeit Reagan and Gorbachev were not able to find consensus on the abolition of nuclear weapons, their meeting facilitated a unique upward spiral of mutual trust, turning on its head the arms race and triggering the conclusion of the land-mark 1987 INF Treaty abolishing an entire class of missiles.⁵ Given the current confrontation in U.S.-Russia relations and the deep crisis of arms control, I thought it useful to look into the methods of Shultz's path-breaking nuclear diplomacy.

How can the United States and Russia stop the downward spiral in their bilateral relationship? How can trust and some basic rules be re-established? For thirty years, we were living with the security structure that was established in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This order is gone. The demise of

² Philip Taubman, "He Helped End the Cold War With Kindness," *New York Times*, 9 February 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/08/opinion/george-shultz-dead.html>, accessed 18 April 2021.

³ See Henry Kissinger, William Perry, Sam Nunn, Building on George Shultz's Vision of a World Without Nukes in: *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 March 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/building-on-george-shultzs-vision-of-a-world-without-nukes-11616537900>, accessed 18 April 2021.

⁴ For the context, see Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton (Eds), *The Last Superpower Summits. Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush. Conversations that Ended the Cold War* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016).

⁵ See George P. Shultz, Steven P. Andreasen, Sidney D. Drell, James E. Goodby (Eds), *Reykjavik Revisited. Steps Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007); Martin Anderson and Annelise Anderson, *Reagan's Secret War. The Untold Story of His Fight to Save the World from Nuclear Disaster* (New York, Penguin Random House, 2009); Philipp Gassert, Tim Geiger, Hermann Wentker (Eds), *The INF Treaty of 1987. A Reappraisal* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), <https://www.vr-elibrary.de/doi/pdf/10.13109/9783666352171>, accessed 18 April 2021.

the INF Treaty and the fall of the Open Skies Treaty were the last nails in the coffin.⁶ As Steven Miller wrote, “the nuclear order of 1991 no longer exists. The optimistic and hopeful nuclear ambitions and opportunities envisioned in 1991 never became a reality.”⁷ The current downward spiral can only be stopped if the U.S. and Russia manage to create positive experiences with each other. The track-record of U.S.-Russia relations suggests that it will almost be impossible to deal with bold questions of nuclear arms control at the outset of prospective negotiations. What is needed are working relations on which both sides can rely. Confidence-building and mutual respect are key elements in such a process.

George Shultz knew all of this when he became secretary of state in 1982. Back at the time, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were in deep crisis and at a dangerous low. The Reagan administration was dominated by anti-Soviet hardliners – and Reagan himself dubbed the Soviet Union as “the evil empire.”⁸ Unknown to the public, George Shultz managed to open up new channels of communication with the Soviet leaders. Shultz won over Reagan and worked on the improvement of U.S-Soviet relations step-by-step in the shadow of multiple crisis in bilateral relations long before Mikhail Gorbachev’s arrival.⁹ Starting in 1985, Shultz helped Reagan to capitalize on Mikhail Gorbachev’s arrival sensing genuine change in the Soviet leadership and emphasizing that “Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were from a distinctly different mold. It was more than a difference in personality. Because this new generation of leaders from the provinces had dealt with real problems in the Soviet system, they might accept the fact that change was imperative,”¹⁰ Shultz thought.

Shultz’s patient statecraft facilitated four summit meetings between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev.¹¹ Both saw nuclear weapons as immoral and reconceptualized the notion of “security” trying to move from mutually assured destruction to mutually assured survival.¹² This was a most

⁶ See Ulrich Kühn and Anna Péczeli, Russia, NATO, and the INF Treaty, in: *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 11:1 (Spring 2017), 66–99; Andrey Baklitskiy and Sergey Radchenko, The Death of Open Skies Means a More Dangerous World, in: *The National Interest*, 4 February 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/death-open-skies-means-more-dangerous-world-177607>, accessed 18 April 2021.

⁷ See Steven E. Miller and Alexey Arbatov, *Nuclear Perils in a New Era. Bringing Perspective to the Nuclear Choices Facing Russia and the United States* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2021), see <https://www.amacad.org/publication/nuclear-perils-new-era>, accessed 26 April 2021.

⁸ See Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, 8 March 1983, <https://www.reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm>, accessed 16 December 2017.

⁹ See Stephan Kiener, *The Diplomacy of Détente. Cooperative Security Policies from Helmut Schmidt to George Shultz* (London: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁰ George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph. Diplomacy, Power and the Victory of the American Ideal* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 586.

¹¹ See Robert Service, *The End of the Cold War, 1985–1991* (New York: Public Affairs Book, 2015).

¹² See James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan. A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Viking Press, 2009), Beth Fischer, *The Myth of Triumphalism. Rethinking President Reagan’s Cold War Legacy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019).

challenging endeavor. The hardliners on both sides constantly attacked Reagan's and Gorbachev's nuclear zero vision. CIA Director William Casey followed his own foreign policy in secret and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was a powerful opponent of progress in arms control.¹³

How did Reagan and Shultz manage to engage Gorbachev and the new Soviet leadership? One of the key methods for success was their focus on process and personal diplomacy as a way to generate mutual trust. "Trust was the coin of the realm," as Shultz used to say. When trust was in the room [...] good things happened. When trust was not in the room, good things did not happen. Everything else in details," Shultz thought.¹⁴ Reagan and Shultz were not geopolitics-oriented figures such as their Republican predecessors Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. Reagan and Shultz thought more in terms of people and their interests than in abstract terms like nation and states and how they seek to maximize power in the international system. They abandoned Nixon's and Kissinger's concept of "linkage" under which a setback in U.S. Soviet relations in one part of the world would lead inevitably to repercussions in another.¹⁵ There was no tit-for-tat, only process and patient diplomacy. This was one of the key factors for the success of the INF Treaty despite the continuation of the global Cold War and intra-Administration conflict with hardliners in Reagan's government.¹⁶ At the same time, the path of Shultz's nuclear diplomacy was not a linear development. It was full of pitfalls and often resembled a bureaucratic guerilla warfare. George Shultz fought a battle royal and threatened to resign three times.¹⁷

Another key determinant for the success of Reagan's and Shultz's nuclear statecraft was the breadth of their diplomacy geared around four main issue areas to which they stuck throughout the years: a mutual reduction in nuclear weapons, the improvement of bilateral relations, a lessening of regional conflicts where the superpowers were involved, and a Soviet recognition of the importance of human rights.¹⁸ Beyond nuclear issues, Shultz engaged Mikhail Gorbachev in discussion on the

¹³ See Caspar Weinberger, *In the Arena. A Memoir of the 20th Century* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2003).

¹⁴ See George Shultz, "The 10 most important thing I've learned about trust over my 100 years," in: *The Washington Post*, 11 December 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/12/11/10-most-important-things-ive-learned-about-trust-over-my-100-years/?arc404=true> 10 things on trust, accessed 18 April 2021.

¹⁵ Jussi Hanhimäki called linkage "a recipe for deadlock." See Jussi M. Hanhimäki, Dr. Kissinger or Mr. Henry? Kissingerology. Thirty Years and Counting, in: *Diplomatic History* 27:5 (2003), 637–676, here 649. See Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect. Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ See Stephan Kieninger, George Shultz and the Road to the INF Treaty. Process and Personal Diplomacy, 11 December 2020, <https://www.hoover.org/research/george-shultz-and-road-inf-treaty-process-and-personal-diplomacy>, accessed 18 April 2021.

¹⁷ See George P. Shultz, *Learning from Experience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2016).

¹⁸ See Kiron Skinner (Ed.), *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007); James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation. Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2014).

relevance of economics and freedom in the information age reflecting Reagan's and Shultz's understanding of the interconnections between the United States' economic success and its strength in foreign policy. "Just look around," George Shultz told Mikhail Gorbachev during their November 1985 meeting, "the successful societies are the open societies."¹⁹

Last but not least, Shultz had the capacity to weave together two crucial themes of Ronald Reagan's diplomacy: His quest for a world free of nuclear weapons and his mission for America's victory in the Cold War. Combining these two aims necessitated patient statecraft and the relaunch of U.S.-Soviet cooperation – "engaging the evil empire,"²⁰ as historian Simon Miles put it. George Shultz helped Ronald Reagan to combine strength and diplomacy in new ways in an effort to advance freedom and promote democracy. Both elements went together: "If you go to a negotiation and you do not have any strength, you are going to get your head handed to you," George Shultz said. "On the other hand, the willingness to negotiate builds strength because you are using it for a constructive purpose. If it is strength with no objective to be gained, it loses its meaning. [...] These are not alternative ways of going about things," Shultz thought.²¹

II. Reagan and Shultz without Gorbachev. Engaging the Soviet Union without a Partner

Over the six and half years of his tenure as Secretary of State, George Shultz played an invaluable role as Ronald Reagan's key arms control person. Shultz was among the few people who understood Reagan's sincere desire to rid the world of nuclear weapons.²² In July 1982, at the outset of Shultz's tenure, arms control progress was not in sight: Ronald Reagan lacked a partner in the Soviet Union.²³ The leaders in Moscow "kept dying on him," Reagan joked. Reagan and Shultz saw that the path toward sustainable arms control had to begin with an U.S. arms buildup. There was no contradiction between the Reagan Administration's nuclear build up and the vision for a world without nuclear weapons: Hard-nosed diplomacy was a precondition for deep nuclear cuts. George Shultz saw NATO's 1983 deployment of Pershing II and Cruise Missiles as a turning point in the Cold War "because it showed the Soviets that NATO was cohesive, and we could do difficult things to counter what they were doing," Shultz said in an interview with the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. "At the same time, Ronald Reagan had many statements on the record saying that the United States sought

¹⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 586–587.

²⁰ Simon Miles, *Engaging the Evil Empire. Washington, Moscow, and the Beginning of the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2020); Beth Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal. Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

²¹ Interview between James E. Goodby and George P. Shultz, in: *The Foreign Service Journal*, December 2016, see <http://www.afsa.org/groundbreaking-diplomacy-interview-george-shultz>, accessed 22 December 2017.

²² See Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and his Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House: 2005).

²³ For the context, see Leopoldo Nuti (Ed), *The Crisis of Détente in Europe. From Helsinki to Gorbachev 1975–1985* (London: Routledge, 2008); Oliver Bange and Poul Villaume, *The Long Détente. Changing Concepts of Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1950s–1980s* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017).

a world free of nuclear weapons. Reagan and I didn't think the way to get there was just for us to eliminate nuclear weapons. We needed a process that would cause both sides to make arms reductions jointly, so our tough stance on deployments was perfectly consistent with our desire to eliminate nuclear weapons,"²⁴ Shultz said.

1983 was not only the year of the missile, the year of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and the year of deep crisis in U.S.-Soviet relations. 1983 was also a new stimulus for Ronald Reagan's nuclear diplomacy. In public, Reagan dubbed the Soviet Union as the "evil empire." In private, Reagan commissioned Shultz to seek new channels of communication with the Soviet leaders. The change in direction was a Presidential initiative. The aim was preventive diplomacy and to avoid crisis before they arose. Shultz saw an urgent need for revitalized U.S.-Soviet leadership dialogue against the backdrop of the frozen situation between Washington and Moscow and Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev's death in October 1982. Shultz began to practice weekly meetings with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in Washington.²⁵ Shultz called his approach gardening: "The idea was to get out little irritants so that they would not grow into unnecessarily major problems. My idea was: If you see a little weed, get it out before it turns into a real problem,"²⁶ Shultz recalled. Shultz realized that Ronald Reagan had been blocked by his own past rhetoric and by his advisers in the White House and in the Pentagon. Reagan was much more willing to move forward in relations with the Soviet Union than his advisers had been anticipating so far. "I was wishing I could do the negotiating with the Soviets,"²⁷ Reagan noted in a diary entry of January 13, 1983.

One week later, Shultz approached Reagan suggesting a new and more proactive approach aimed at the improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations. Shultz argued that "even if no improvement ultimately takes place, the dialogue itself would strengthen our ability to manage the relationship and keep the diplomatic initiative in our hands." Shultz made the case for patient diplomacy: He acknowledged that bold initiatives were perhaps doomed to fail at this point. Rather, Shultz was eager to initiate a sustainable diplomacy and "a patient, steady, yet creative management of a long-term adversarial relationship with the Soviet Union."²⁸ Moreover, Shultz set out for the first time what was to become

²⁴ Remembering George Shultz: An interview with a key figure in ending the Cold War, by John Mecklin, in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 7 February 2021, <https://thebulletin.org/2021/02/remembering-george-shultz-an-interview-with-a-key-figure-in-ending-the-cold-war/>.

²⁵ See for instance, Memo Shultz for Reagan "My Luncheon with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, November 23," 24 November 1982, in: *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1981–1988, Vol. III, Soviet Union January 1981–January 1983*, Ed. James Graham Wilson (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2016) 810–811, see <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03>.

²⁶ Author Interview with George P. Shultz, 7 December 2016, Hoover Institution.

²⁷ Ronald Reagan, Diary Entry, 13 January 1983, in: Douglas Brinkley (Ed.), *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 188.

²⁸ Memo Shultz for Reagan "U.S.-Soviet Relations in 1983," 19 January 1983, in: *FRUS, 1981–1988, Vol. IV, Soviet Union January 1983–March 1985*, Ed. Elizabeth Charles (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2021), 1, 2. See <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v04>.

the Reagan Administration's four-part agenda: human rights, arms control, regional issues, and bilateral relations. Shultz wanted to maintain the overall framework the Reagan Administration had established. He believed that it was imperative to insist that US-Soviet dialogue addressed the full range of US concerns about Soviet policy: the military buildup, international expansionism, and human right violations.

On February 15, 1983, Shultz went one step further and brought Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin over to the White House for a private meeting with Ronald Reagan. The idea developed during a Saturday White House dinner between the Reagans and the Shultzs. Shultz expected a brief conversation, but Reagan had thought a great deal about the meeting and engaged Dobrynin on all a multitude of issues arguing U.S. positions across the board. Reagan spoke with genuine feeling and affection on the subject of human rights and talked with intensity about a special request: Reagan wanted the Soviet authorities to give emigration permission for a group of Pentacostals who had taken refuge in the US Embassy in Moscow almost five years earlier.²⁹ Shultz noted that "the President developed his own point of view that this was a subject that he was perfectly willing and ready to work at quietly and that results would be greeted with appreciation but not with any sense of victory."³⁰ Afterward, Shultz and Dobrynin went back to the State Department and continued their conversation for another hour.

Amidst crisis, Reagan's encounter with Dobrynin was a turning point in U.S.-Soviet relations. Ronald Reagan was ready to move forward. Shultz and Dobrynin found common ground by putting together an inventory of bilateral U.S.-Soviet agreements. Some of them had expired or had been cancelled after President Carter had terminated all contacts with the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. Shultz suggested a renewal of the existing U.S.-Soviet cultural agreement and the opening of reciprocal consulates in Kiev and New York.³¹ In addition, Reagan authorized Shultz to intensify negotiations over a long-term grain agreement: Reagan's public attacks

²⁹ On 27 June 1978, seven members of two families – the Vashchenkos and the Chmykhalovs – burst into the embassy in Moscow and lived there in a cramped basement apartment. See Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow to the Department of State (No. 15024) "Sakharov sees Pentecost family in Embassy", in: Department of State Declassification Project, Telegrams, 1973-1978, FOIA, accessed 29 November 2015. In July 1983, thanks to Reagan's quiet diplomacy, they could leave the Soviet Union for Israel. See Sarah B. Snyder, No Crowing. Reagan, Trust and Human Rights, in: Martin Klimke, Reinhild Kreis and Christian F. Ostermann (Eds), *Trust, but Verify. The Politics of Uncertainty and the Transformation of the International Order* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 43–62; Stephan Kieninger, Human Rights, Peace and Security are Inseparable. Max Kampelman and the Helsinki Process, in: Sarah B. Snyder and Nicolas Badalassi (Eds), *The CSCE and the End of the Cold War. Diplomacy, Societies and Human Rights* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018), 97–116.

³⁰ Memcon Reagan, Shultz and Dobrynin, 15 February 1983, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. IV*, 30–32. See Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 163-165. See Interview between James E. Goodby and George P. Shultz, *The Foreign Service Journal*, December 2016, see <http://www.afsa.org/groundbreaking-diplomacy-interview-george-shultz>, accessed 22 December 2017.

³¹ Memo Shultz for Reagan "USG-Soviet Relations—Where Do We Want To Be and How Do We Get There?", in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. IV*, 43–50.

on the Soviet Union and his evil empire speech went hand in hand with the emergence of his quiet diplomacy.

At the same time, deterrence remained a key feature of Shultz's nuclear diplomacy.³² Time and again, Shultz emphasized that NATO had stuck to its familiar two-track diplomacy: The Alliance needed both a firm defence and the willingness to see a constructive relationship with the Soviet Union emerge. NATO's dual-track decision of December 1979 reflected the parallelism between strength and diplomacy. NATO offered the Warsaw Pact a mutual limitation of medium-range ballistic missiles and intermediate-range ballistic missiles combined with the threat that in the event of disagreement NATO would deploy additional weapons in Western Europe.³³ Deployment and negotiations were intertwined.³⁴ NATO would not get one without the other. Ronald Reagan championed the so-called zero option, that is the complete removal of Intermediate Nuclear Forces on both sides. He saw it as the ideal outcome as it would remove all the Euromissiles rather than simply controlling their growth in balanced ways. The U.S. proposal foresaw that the Soviets would take out all their deployed SS-20 missiles and NATO would not deploy any Intermediate Range Forces.³⁵

NATO was determined to show resolve: If the Soviets did not remove their missiles, NATO's deployment would go forward. On March 30, 1983, Ronald Reagan proposed an interim INF agreement to establish equal global levels of U.S. and Soviet warheads on INF missile launchers at the lowest possible number-- between 50 and 450 warheads, with zero still the ultimate goal.³⁶ However, the Soviet Union rejected the proposal. The Soviets were determined to prevent real progress in the INF negotiations hoping that NATO would not be willing to implement its INF deployments. In April 1983, Ronald Reagan told NATO Secretary General that "he was often frustrated at public perceptions that he was not committed to arms reductions. He emphasized the importance of Alliance support for the two-track decision since the Soviets were unlikely to negotiate

³² For the relevance of extended deterrence, see Leopoldo Nuti and Christian Ostermann (Eds), *Extended Deterrence in Europe and East Asia during the Cold War. A Reappraisal*, in: *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39:4 (2016).

³³ Marilena Gala, "The Essential Weaknesses of the December 1979 "Agreement." The White House and the Implementing of the Dual-Track Decision, in: *Cold War History* 19:1 (2019), 21–38.

³⁴ See Kristina Spohr, *The Global Chancellor. Helmut Schmidt and the Reshaping of the International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Andreas Lutsch, *Westbindung oder Gleichgewicht? Die nukleare Sicherheitspolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zwischen Atomwaffensperrvertrag und NATO-Doppelbeschluss 1961–1979* (Munich: De Gruyter 2019).

³⁵ See Marilena Gala, *The Euromissile Crisis and the Centrality of the "Zero Option"* in: Leopoldo Nuti, Frederic Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey and Bernd Rother (Eds), *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 158–175.

³⁶ See "Fact Sheet issued by the White House, March 30, 1983: New Proposal for an Interim Arms Agreement," in: U.S. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy. Current Documents 1983, Document 144* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 398–399.

seriously until the Alliance was ready to make deployments.”³⁷ NATO’s unity and firmness eventually led to the deployment of Pershing II and Cruise Missiles starting in November 1983. George Shultz saw it as a turning point in the Cold War: The Pershing moment signaled strength – the Soviet Union was not able to break NATO’s solidarity.

In response, the Soviet Union stormed out of the INF negotiations in Geneva in November 1983. In December 1983, Ronald Reagan wrote a letter for Soviet Secretary General Yuri Andropov requesting him to return his delegation: “I continue to believe that despite the profound differences between our nations”, Reagan wrote Andropov on 23 December 1983, “there are opportunities – indeed a necessity – for us to work together to prevent conflicts, to expand our dialogue, and to place our relationship on a more stable and constructive footing. Though we will be vigorous in protecting our interests and those of our friends and allies, we do not seek to challenge the security of the Soviet Union and its people”.³⁸ Ronald Reagan was ready to seize initiatives. In January 1984, he went public emphasizing his vision for a world free of nuclear weapons. On 16 January 1984, Reagan gave a televised speech on US-Soviet relations drawing up a comprehensive program of US-Soviet cooperation: “Strength and dialogue go hand in hand. We are determined to deal with our differences peacefully, through negotiations”, he said. “I support a zero option for all nuclear arms. As I have said before, my dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the earth.”³⁹ It was the first time Reagan softened his tone in public.

Yet, the Soviet Union’s leadership vacuum continued. In February 1984, Brezhnev’s successor Yuri Andropov died from cancer. The selection of the debilitated Konstantin Chernenko as the new Soviet leader was not the envisaged sign of a new departure. Against this backdrop, Ronald Reagan and George Shultz were determined to generate as much factors of balance and stability as possible: Whoever was to be appointed as Chernenko’s successor should be able to rely on reassuring rather than a threatening international background. Gardening was the most promising approach to keep the Soviet leadership engaged. Like Margaret Thatcher, George Shultz believed that “we are more likely to make progress on the detailed arms control negotiations if we can first establish a broader basis of understanding between East and West. It will be a slow and gradual process, during which we must never lower our guard. However, I believe that the effort has to be made.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Memcon Reagan and Luns, 26 April 1983, in: RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC, Subject Files, Reagan Memcons, Box 51.

³⁸ Letter Reagan for Andropov, 23 December 1983, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. IV*, 511.

³⁹ Ronald Reagan “Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations”, 16 January 1984, <https://www.reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1984/11684a.htm>, accessed 3 November 2017.

⁴⁰ Letter Thatcher to Reagan, 8 February 1984, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/141908>, accessed 3 November 2017.

Meanwhile, Ronald Reagan was still yearning for a one-on-one meeting with a Soviet leader. On 28 September 1984, he finally saw Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko for two hours in the Oval Office. Reagan talked about all topics including human rights. Gromyko praised the benefits of Communism in near religious proportions. Both picked selective evidence to argue that the other side was seeking superiority. Reagan found Gromyko's remarks outlandish. Yet, he believed that the common responsibility for peace counted more than the political differences. Right at the beginning of their conversation, Reagan pointed out that "our political systems are very different and [...] we will be competitive in the world. But we live in one world and must handle our competition in peace". Reagan's aim to abolish nuclear weapons was uppermost on his agenda: "As the two superpowers", he emphasized "we must take the lead in reducing and ultimately eliminating nuclear weapons."⁴¹

Many in Reagan's Administration did not share his vision. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger doubted that mutually-beneficial arms control with the Soviet Union was possible at all. He argued that "the Soviet Union has little interest in giving the President a victory. They would only give him an agreement for which he could not take credit. [...] If we become too eager", he warned, "the Soviet Union will sense weakness". Ronald Reagan was determined to go ahead. He believed it was pivotal to convey willingness reiterating that "we can't go on negotiating with ourselves. We can't be supplicants crawling, we can't look like failures."⁴² Reagan designated George Shultz to carry out his policy, and he wanted Shultz to be his public spokesman on arms control. However, the arms control skeptics within the Reagan Administration wanted to put an end to negotiations before they even started. Caspar Weinberger standard arguments was: "Now is very inappropriate for any proposal." George Shultz wanted to start strategic arms reduction talks right away: "We have been around four years. What have we been doing?"⁴³ Shultz believed that the United States was going to negotiate from a position of strength.

Shortly after the 1984 Presidential election, word came of Moscow's interest in resuming nuclear arms talks. On 17 November 1984, Reagan received a letter from Soviet Secretary General Chernenko calling for a new round of arms negotiations on strategic arms, space weapons and INF. Negotiations should even go further: "We are prepared to see the most radical solution which would allow movement toward a complete ban and, eventually, liquidation of nuclear arms,"⁴⁴ Chernenko wrote. Neither Reagan nor his advisers believed in this part of Chernenko's message. The Soviets had

⁴¹ Memcon Reagan and Gromyko, 28 September 1984, in: *FRUS, 1981–1988, Vol. IV*, 1022, 1023.

⁴² Minutes of National Security Planning Group "Nuclear Arms Control Discussions," 27 March 1984, in: *FRUS, 1981–1988, Vol. IV*, 739, 742.

⁴³ Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting "Next Steps in the Vienna Process," 28 September 1984, in: *FRUS, 1981–1988, Vol. IV*, 980, 982.

⁴⁴ Letter Chernenko for Reagan, 17 November 1984, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. IV*, 1118.

left the bargaining table fourteen months ago – now they were proposing to get rid of all nuclear weapons? Was it possible to find a way to navigate to nuclear zero? This question greatly complicated U.S.-Soviet relations in Ronald Reagan’s second term. The main argument was Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Reagan saw SDI as a lever toward a world free of nuclear weapons. He envisaged two ways to rid the world of nuclear weapons: “One was by eliminating nuclear weapons; the other was to build a defense that would make them impotent and obsolete. Linking the two methods offered a way forward,”⁴⁵ as James Goodby wrote. Time and again, Reagan emphasized that SDI had to be shared at the deployment stage. “As we continue to develop SDI, we need to find a way for SDI to be a protector for all—perhaps the concept of a “common trigger” where some international group, perhaps the UN, could deploy SDI against anyone who threatened use of nuclear weapons,⁴⁶ Reagan thought.

In January 1985, George Shultz told Andrei Gromyko that strategic missile defense, “if they proved feasible, could contribute to the goal of eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons.” The Soviets wanted Reagan to abandon SDI holding progress on the INF and START negotiations hostage. Gromyko countered that SDI “would be used to blackmail the USSR.”⁴⁷ The Nuclear and Space Talks (NST) in Geneva addressed all the tracks under one roof. But in January 1985, it was not predictable at all that Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev would manage to break the impasse arresting the arms race.

III. Reagan, Shultz and Gorbachev. Visions for Nuclear Zero and Conflicts over SDI

The start of the new NST talks coincided with the Mikhail Gorbachev’s ascent as the new Soviet Secretary General after Konstantin Chernenko’s death in March 1985. Vice President Bush and George Shultz met with Gorbachev in Moscow for Chernenko’s funeral services and quickly recognized that Gorbachev was different.⁴⁸ Gorbachev was of a younger generation, radiated energy, showed spontaneity, did not cling to his talking points and was capable to conduct real discussions. George Shultz sensed that “Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were from a distinctly different mold. It was more than a difference in personality. Because this new generation of leaders from the provinces had dealt with real problems in the Soviet system, they might accept the fact that change was imperative,” Shultz thought.⁴⁹ Thus, Shultz was determined to seize up the opportunity to

⁴⁵ See James E. Goodby, *At the Borderline of Armageddon. How American Presidents Managed the Atom Bomb* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 150.

⁴⁶ Minutes of a National Security Planning Group Meeting, 3 February 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. V, 817.

⁴⁷ Memcon Shultz and Gromyko, 7 January 1985, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. IV, 1303, 1305.

⁴⁸ Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 14 March 1985, “Subject: Memcon, Gorbachev Meeting of March 13,” in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. V, Ed. Elizabeth Charles (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2020), 8–17. See <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v05>.

⁴⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 586.

engage Shevardnadze on the occasion of their first meeting taking place in Helsinki in July 1985 on the occasion of a meeting between 35 foreign ministers commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Shevardnadze was newly appointed and made his global debut at an international conference. “With some 30 national delegations gathered in Finlandia Hall, Mr. Shultz placed his papers at the American table at the bottom of the amphitheater and slowly climbed the steps to the Soviet delegation near the last row to welcome Mr. Shevardnadze. The buzz of dozens of conversations stopped as he approached Shevardnadze and extended his hand. After years of frigid American dealings with Andrei Gromyko [...] the moment was electrifying. It helped set the foundation for a remarkably constructive working relationship,”⁵⁰ Taubman wrote.

Shultz envisaged his meetings with Shevardnadze as real conversations: He wanted Shevardnadze to abandon the old Soviet technique of reading long-drawn out prepared statements. Instead, Shultz was striving to have a real dialogue and a profound exchange of arguments. Thus, Shultz used their first meeting in July 1985 as way to introduce the technique of simultaneous translation instead of the traditional consecutive translation.⁵¹ It worked so well that Reagan and Gorbachev also came to use it. “This meant an opportunity for a real conversation, for a chance to connect the words with the eyes, the hands, and the body language of the speaker, for the possibility of interruptions and the kind of exchange that is possible when both people speak the same language,”⁵² Shultz noted.

Good personal relations were important for Shultz in order to discuss the U.S.-Soviet disagreement in terms of substance. The Reagan Administration’s SDI was the main point of contention. Gorbachev’s aim was to kill SDI in order to avoid the militarization of space. Ronald Reagan was determined to protect America’s capability for the continued testing of SDI technology, including tests in space, as part of his nuclear zero vision. In November 1985, prior to the U.S.-Soviet Geneva summit, Gorbachev confronted Shultz with the Soviet arms control position during their meeting in Moscow: No reductions in offensive weapons unless the United States abandon SDI: “We will only compromise on condition that there is no militarization of space,” Gorbachev, said. “If you want superiority with your SDI, we will not help you. We will let you bankrupt yourselves. But we will not reduce our offensive missiles. We will engage in a buildup that will break your shield,”⁵³ Gorbachev reiterated.

SDI dominated the Geneva summit sessions between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in November 1985. Gorbachev’s objective was clear: He wanted a ban on space weapons as a

⁵⁰ Philip Taubman, “He Helped End the Cold War With Kindness,” in: *New York Times*, 9 February 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/08/opinion/george-shultz-dead.html>, accessed 18 April 2021.

⁵¹ Memcon Shultz and Shevardnadze, 31 July 1985, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 269–292.

⁵² Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 573.

⁵³ Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 6 November 1985, “Subject: Secretary’s Meeting With Gorbachev, Nov. 5, 1985,” in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 602.

precondition for reductions in strategic arms. Gorbachev had come to Geneva to end SDI. But Reagan did not waver. He pushed his personal vision of SDI arguing that “you cannot erase from men’s mind how to make these weapons, and even if we eliminate them, and the current power eliminate them, some madman may develop them in the future; we’ll need a defense against them if we’re going to eliminate them.”⁵⁴ Reagan envisaged that the United States and the Soviet Union, and then the other nuclear powers, would negotiate reductions in – and ultimately the elimination of – their nuclear arsenals. The United States would then “internationalize” the defense system by sharing it with other countries, including the USSR, and the shared defense would ensure the safety of a nuclear-free world. Gorbachev countered that “ways could be found to prevent madmen. Because of one madman, should we have an arms race in space?”⁵⁵

The first Reagan Gorbachev summit catalyzed further, intense arms control debate.⁵⁶ The momentum on arms control was there to stay. In January 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev presented a radical plan to abolish nuclear weapons by the year 2000. His program envisioned three stages. The first stage foresaw a 50-percent reduction of strategic nuclear weapons over 5 to 8 years and an agreement to eliminate all medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe. Starting in 1990, the second stage entailed the participation of Britain, France and China. They would join the process by freezing their arsenals, and all nuclear powers would eliminate their tactical weapons and ban nuclear testing. Starting in 1995, the third stage envisaged the liquidation of the remaining nuclear weapons.

On January 14, 1986, Gorbachev presented the program in a letter to Ronald Reagan before he made a public announcement the following day.⁵⁷ Reagan was thunder-struck: Gorbachev attempted to seize the propaganda initiative by hijacking his vision of a nuclear-free world. Nevertheless, Reagan welcomed the initiative. “It has a couple of zingers in there which we’ll have to work around,” Reagan wrote in his diary. “But at the very least it is a h-1 of a propaganda move. We’d be hard put to explain how we could turn it down.”⁵⁸ Reagan did not want to turn it down. “I want our children

⁵⁴ See Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and his Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005), 192.

⁵⁵ Memcon Reagan and Gorbachev, Third Plenary Meeting at the Geneva Summit, 20 November 1985, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 705.

⁵⁶ See James Graham Wilson, “The Nuclear and Space Talks, George Shultz, and the End of the Cold War,” in: Bernhard Blumenau, Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Barbara Zanchetta (Eds), *New Perspectives on the End of the Cold War. Unexpected Transformations?* (London: Routledge, 2018), 32–45.

⁵⁷ See Letter Gorbachev to Reagan, 14 January 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 772–776. For the context, see Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton (Eds), *Gorbachev’s Nuclear Initiative of January 1986 and the Road to Reykjavik*, National Security Archive Briefing Book #563, 12 October 2016, see <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault-russia-programs/2016-10-12/gorbachevs-nuclear-initiative-january-1986>.

⁵⁸ Ronald Reagan, 15 January 1986, in: Brinkley (Ed.) *The Reagan Diaries*, 383.

and grandchildren particularly to be free of these terrible weapons, he told one of his generals.”⁵⁹

George Shultz thought the same way. He believed that “we should see this as an opportunity to transform Gorbachev’s concept so that it matches your own vision for a non-nuclear world. [...] Our response should elaborate on our own concept for a process leading to the elimination of nuclear arms, concentrating on the bilateral reductions necessary in the first stage of that process.”⁶⁰

Gorbachev’s nuclear abolition plan caused a major policy debate in Washington DC. The Pentagon saw it as a disaster and a Soviet propaganda ploy aimed at killing SDI.⁶¹ George Shultz stepped forward arguing that Gorbachev’s initiative matched Reagan’s own thinking. On 17 January 1986, Shultz gave a speech to the State Department’s arms control group: “We need to work on what a world without nuclear weapons would mean to us and what additional steps would have to accompany such a dramatic change. The president has wanted all along to get rid of nuclear weapons. The British, French, Dutch, Belgians, and all of you in the Washington arms control community are trying to talk him out of it. The idea can potentially be a plus for us: The Soviet Union is a superpower only because it is a nuclear and ballistic missile superpower.”⁶²

Meanwhile, Reagan and Gorbachev needed time and energy for a comprehensive review of their arms control policies. The process of adaption continued throughout spring and summer 1986. Ronald Reagan was still committed to his vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Shultz’s advice was to seek constructive moves on INF and START while meeting Gorbachev’s concerns on ABM and SDI. Shultz thought that “our proposal would not be an open-ended commitment that would delegitimize nuclear weapons. Rather, it envisions a continued role for an effective deterrent until the conditions exist where we could contemplate the elimination of nuclear weapons.”⁶³ Indeed, Reagan’s reply to Gorbachev emphasized the need for further moves on INF, START and confidence building measure in the Mutual and Balanced Forces Reduction Talks (MBFR) as well as additional verification measures.⁶⁴ Gorbachev was frustrated about Reagan’s response. In April 1986, Gorbachev wrote another letter complaining that “more than four months have passed since the

⁵⁹ Edward Rowny, quoted in: Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang 2007), 388.

⁶⁰ Memo Shultz for Reagan “Responding to Gorbachev’s Arms Control Proposal,” 29 January 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 810.

⁶¹ See Memo Weinberger for Reagan “Choosing a Response to the Gorbachev Proposal,” 31 January 1986, <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3131902/Document-06-Department-of-Defense-Secretary-of.pdf>, accessed 13 August 2019. See Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton (Eds), Gorbachev’s Nuclear Initiative of January 1986 and the Road to Reykjavik, *National Security Archive Briefing Book #563*, 12 October 2016, see <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault-russia-programs/2016-10-12/gorbachevs-nuclear-initiative-january-1986>.

⁶² Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 701.

⁶³ Memo Shultz for Reagan “Responding to Gorbachev’s Arms Control Proposal,” 29 January 1986, in: *FRUS, 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 811.

⁶⁴ Letter Reagan for Gorbachev, 22 February 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1986, Vol. V*, 840–845.

Geneva meeting. We ask ourselves: what is the reason for things not going the way they, it would seem, should have gone? Where is the real turn for the better?”⁶⁵ he asked. In the spring of 1986, Eduard Shevardnadze was not willing to see George Shultz for further arms control discussions. Shevardnadze told US Ambassador Arthur Hartman that “the Soviet Union favored dialogue but that circumstances were not yet right for a meeting between himself and Shultz.”⁶⁶

George Shultz grew alarmed. Time was running away. Reagan envisaged 1986 as the year for negotiations on key arms control elements permitting the conclusion of new arms control agreements by 1987 and their ratification by 1988. When Reagan made this point in a conversation with Anatoly Dobrynin in April 1986, the latter insisted on careful preparation: “We need to know what minimum will be achieved,” Dobrynin said. “We cannot risk failure at the top level.” It was essential to have something that both sides could announce at the next Reagan-Gorbachev meeting. It seemed like an INF agreement was in reach. “We agree that we should go down to zero. We do disagree on how to apply this globally. But we could bridge that at the next summit,” Reagan argued.⁶⁷ Gorbachev thought the same way: He recalibrated his negotiation position. In a September 1986 letter to Reagan, he reiterated that an INF agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union would not count British and French nuclear forces. Moreover, Gorbachev considered on-site inspections and conveyed his readiness to cut the Soviet Union’s land-based missiles. He still planned to travel to the United States in 1987, but why not meet sooner? His suggestion was to see Reagan in Europe.⁶⁸

Reagan agreed to host a summit in 1986: The meeting was scheduled to begin on 11 October 1986, in Reykjavik, with little time to prepare it. Prior to the summit, George Shultz did not expect major breakthroughs over the short-term. Shultz’s aim was mainly to prepare the ground for a future U.S.-Soviet summit in the United States. Shultz argued that “arms control will be key not because that is what the Soviets want, but because we have brought them to the point where they are largely talking from our script. This does not mean we will find Gorbachev easy to handle in Reykjavik, but it means we are justified in aspiring to accomplish something useful there,”⁶⁹ Shultz thought.

Gorbachev came to Reykjavik trying to achieve a compromise on SDI. He wanted to achieve an SDI test moratorium. Reagan rejected this proposal. Gorbachev was frustrated. How could he trust

⁶⁵ Letter Gorbachev for Reagan, 2 April 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 885.

⁶⁶ Telegram UK Embassy Moscow to FCO (Telno 568) “US/Soviet High-Level Consultations,” 12 May 1986, www.margarethatcher.org/document/143891, accessed 18 April 2021.

⁶⁷ Memcon Reagan, Shultz and Dobrynin, 8 April 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 903, 904.

⁶⁸ Letter Gorbachev to Reagan, 15 September 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 1122–1125.

⁶⁹ Memo Shultz for Reagan “Reykjavik,” 2 October 1986, in: *FRUS, 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 1240. For the context, see Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton (Eds), *The Reykjavik File. Previously Secret Documents from U.S. and Soviet Archives on the 1986 Reagan-Gorbachev Summit*, *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203*, 13 October 2006, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB203/index.htm>.

Reagan to share SDI with the Soviets when America was not even willing to share harvesting and oil-drilling technology? There was no way to break the impasse. Reagan and Gorbachev were united in their desire to achieve a world without nuclear weapons, but they failed to find a common path to move forward. “With respect to SDI,” Reagan said, “he had made a pledge to the American people that SDI would contribute to disarmament and peace, and not be an offensive weapon. He could not retreat from that pledge.”⁷⁰ Gorbachev noted that the meeting “had not been in vain. But it had not produced the result that had been expected in the Soviet Union, and that Gorbachev personally expected. Probably the same could be said for the United States,”⁷¹ he observed. At the same time, Reykjavik brought progress in terms of INF: Apparently, the Soviets were ready for an INF treaty and prepared for a comprehensive verification regime. In Reykjavik, Reagan and Gorbachev reached preliminary agreement to eliminate all Intermediate Nuclear Forces in Europe: Moreover, Gorbachev agreed to reduce Soviet SS–20s in Asia to 100 total warheads in return for the elimination of all US Pershing II and Ground-Launched-Cruise Missile warheads except for 100 warheads in the United States.⁷²

During their last session in Reykjavik, Reagan and Gorbachev came unexpectedly close to the potential elimination of all nuclear weapons within a ten-year period. “Why the Hell should the world have to live for another ten years under the threat of nuclear weapons if we have decided to eliminate them?,”⁷³ Reagan asked. “It would be fine with him if we eliminated all nuclear weapons,” Reagan argued. “We can do that. We can eliminate them,” Gorbachev responded. “Let’s do it,”⁷⁴ said Shultz. However, SDI stood in the way. “He would not destroy the possibility of proceeding with SDI,” Reagan emphasized. The meeting adjourned with no agreement. But it was important for future summits that both leaders discovered the extent of the concessions the other side was willing to make.

Moreover, it was important for the U.S. military to acknowledge the benefits of Reagan’s vision for a world without nuclear weapons. In January 1987, in a meeting with George Shultz, Admiral Crowe, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff wondered which kind of military capabilities were necessary in a nuclear-weapons free world. What was the worth and the use of the continuation of

⁷⁰ Memcon Reagan and Gorbachev, 12 October 1986, 10:00 a.m. - 1:35 p.m., in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 1316.

⁷¹ Memcon Reagan and Gorbachev, 12 October 1986, 10:00 a.m. - 1:35 p.m., in: *FRUS, 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 1324.

⁷² For a summary record, see Memo for the Record “Reykjavik Chronology,” 18 October 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. VI, Soviet Union, October 1986–January 1989*, Ed. James Graham Wilson (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2016), 1–14. For the context, see George P. Shultz, Steven P. Andreasen, Sidney D. Drell, James E. Goodby (Eds), *Reykjavik Revisited. Steps Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007).

⁷³ Memcon Reagan and Gorbachev, 12 October 1986, 10:00 a.m. - 1:35 p.m., in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. XI, START I, 1981–1988*, Ed. James Graham Wilson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2021), 714.

⁷⁴ Memcon Reagan and Gorbachev, 12 October 1986, 3:25–4:30 p.m. and 5:30–6:50 p.m., in: *FRUS, 1981–1988, Vol. V*, 1340.

expense missiles programs such as MX? While the top military people were thinking about the costs for the expansion of conventional deterrence and going back to bombers only, George Shultz emphasized the “a zero-nuclear world was where the President was driving,” adding that “the concept of SDI as an insurance policy should stay in our minds.”⁷⁵

Reykjavik had bold implications. The prospective conclusion of an INF agreement and deep reductions of strategic nuclear weapons would bring conventional arms control and the imbalances in short-range nuclear forces to the front burner of NATO’s arms control agenda. Both issues necessitated in-depth allied consultations. NATO needed time to adapt and to reel in Gorbachev’s arms control proposal in its own agenda.⁷⁶ Despite its failure, George Shultz saw the Reykjavik summit as a conceptual success. In November 1986, Shultz turned to Reagan writing that “in a series of steps culminating in Reykjavik, the Soviets have accepted our conceptual framework for arms control: substantial, verifiable reductions in offensive forces to low, equal levels. [...] The results of Reykjavik will be difficult to translate into concrete agreements, but [...] the results are irreversible in political terms.”⁷⁷ Shultz saw it as an encouraging sign that the Soviets were not withdrawing from the nuclear bargaining table like in 1983. “This time they are playing smarter,” Shultz noted. “This could mean that the Soviets will reengage very quickly, enabling us to resume serious discussions without much loss of momentum.”⁷⁸

IV. The INF Treaty and Foundations for Strategic Arms Reductions

George Shultz’s forecast was correct. In 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev stepped forward with a comprehensive INF arms control proposal: In February, he suggested the inclusion of missiles of shorter ranges between 500 and 1,000 km including the West German Pershing IA and the Soviet SS-23 and SS-12.⁷⁹ Moreover, Gorbachev announced the decision that he would no longer link an INF Treaty to other arms negotiations on offensive strategic weapons and the SDI/ABM systems.⁸⁰ Thus, he untied the Reykjavik package. In addition, Gorbachev conveyed his willingness to reduce and eliminate shorter-range missiles as part of his vision of a non-nuclear world. Ronald Reagan was

⁷⁵ Memcon “Shultz and Nitze Meeting with Joint Chiefs of Staff,” 17 October 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. XI, 741, 743.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Tim Geiger, *Controversies Over the Double Zero Option. The Kohl–Genscher Government and the INF Treaty of 1987*, in: Gassert, Geiger, Wentker (Eds), *The INF Treaty of 1987*, 123–153.

⁷⁷ Memo Shultz for Reagan “Strategy for the Soviets,” 14 November 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. VI, 59, 60.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ See Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, *The Nuclear Abolition Package of 1986 and the Soviet Road to INF*, in: Gassert, Geiger, Wentker (Eds), *The INF Treaty of 1987*, 71–87.

⁸⁰ See Editorial Note, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. VI, 87–88. See “Politburo February 26, 1987 On Soviet-American Relations and Negotiations on Nuclear and Space Armaments,” <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/russian/Final1987-02-26%20Politburo.pdf>, accessed 21 December 2019, in: Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton (Eds), *The INF Treaty 1987–2019, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book#679*, 2 August 2019, see <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2019-08-02/inf-treaty-1987-2019>.

determined to accelerate the INF negotiating process: In turn, Gorbachev invited Shultz for negotiations in Moscow in order to facilitate the completion of an INF treaty before the end of 1987.⁸¹

Gorbachev emphasized his readiness to include the shorter-range SS-23 missile in an INF agreement: He addressed NATO's concern that shorter-range INF missiles with a range between 500 and 1,000 kilometers could be used to circumvent the effects of an INF agreement. Negotiators and administrative officials referred to this tandem of short-range and long-range INF as the "global double zero" proposal. Shultz and Gorbachev were in agreement about the need of a comprehensive verification regime that was envisaged as a role model for further arms control treaties on strategic weapons. Shultz's meeting with Gorbachev brought the breakthrough that both sides had been seeking. Finally, Gorbachev used the meeting in order to reiterate that "we should discard the old stereotypes, the old approaches, and try to interact." Shultz agreed: "There were very powerful forces at work that had nothing to do with capitalism or socialism, but affected both. They were changing the world, and this deserved discussion."⁸²

The European allies generally welcomed the double-zero idea. But the proposal triggered concerns that the global double-zero could bring NATO in a situation in which it would rely more heavily on its conventional forces as part of its deterrent. NATO's debate over the global double zero was on. At this juncture, NATO sought an analysis of what it needed for its security in the aftermath of the INF Treaty, and it then had to relate its arms control priorities to that. NATO's vivid internal debate on Short-Range Nuclear Forces did not stand in the way of the INF Treaty,⁸³ but George Shultz was right when he pointed out that "there are more than two players in the East-West game. NATO governments face tough political choices on next steps in nuclear and conventional arms control and

⁸¹ See Ronald Granieri, *It's Only Easy in Retrospect, The American Road to INF, 1986–1987*, in: Gassert, Geiger, Wentker (Eds), *The INF Treaty of 1987*, 55–70.

⁸² Memcon Shultz and Gorbachev "The Secretary's Meeting with Gorbachev April 14", 14 April 1987, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. XI*, 190. For the Soviet account, see "Memorandum of Conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz April 14, 1987," <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/russian/Final1987-04-14%20Gorbachev-Shultz.pdf>, accessed 21 December 2019.

⁸³ In 1987, NATO postponed a decision. Eventually, NATO's May 1989 summit brought a compromise. It delayed modernization and maintained the option for deployment. NATO's approach was to eliminate the asymmetries in conventional forces as a way to put off SNF modernization. "The key to solving this nuclear dilemma lay in conventional arms control," James Baker recalled in his memoirs." See James A. Baker III with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Revolution, War & Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 90. See Mary E. Sarotte, *1989. The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). On SRINF see Thomas Halverson, *The Last Great Nuclear Debate. NATO and Short-Range Nuclear Weapons in the 1980s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995).

modernization. Where they come out will bear great influence on our dialogue with the Soviets, and could define the direction of the Alliance for the remainder of the century.”⁸⁴

In the summer of 1987, the rapid conclusion of an INF agreement and another U.S.-Soviet summit were in the making. In September 1987, the Reagan administration tabled new proposals for verification: They envisaged a short transitional period for the elimination of the missiles – one year for short-range INFs and three years for long-range INFs; and a ban on modernization, production and flight testing of all the systems involved. Verification during the transitional period would be ensured by provisions for initial detailed exchanges of data and baseline inspections to verify this data; on-site inspection of the destruction and dismantlement of the missiles and a quota of on-site inspections of declared sites. In addition, there would be a provision for short notice inspections of certain categories of “suspect” sites – that is ICBM-related facilities.⁸⁵ George Shultz and Eduard Shevardnadze discussed these issues during their talks in Washington in September 1987. Shultz pointed out that “if we succeeded in reaching an INF agreement, it would have the strongest verification in the history of arms control by a long shot.”⁸⁶

Finally, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev signed the INF Treaty on 8 December 1987 on the occasion of their Washington summit meeting. It was a historical occasion. Reagan took the microphone when he entered the stage: “It was over 6 years ago, November 18, 1981, that I first proposed what would come to be called the zero option. It was a simple proposal one might say, disarmingly simple. Unlike treaties in the past, it didn’t simply codify the status quo or a new arms buildup; it didn’t simply talk of controlling an arms race. For the first time in history, the language of ‘arms control’ was replaced by ‘arms reductions’ – in this case, the complete elimination of an entire class of U.S. and Soviet nuclear missiles.” Reagan continued quoting the old Russian maxim “Doveryai, no proveryai – trust, but verify.” Gorbachev interjected with a smile: “You repeat that at every meeting.”⁸⁷ The summit meeting reflected the friendly relationship between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. The INF Treaty was a landmark agreement: It banned all of the two nations’ land-based ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and missile launchers with ranges of 500–5,500 km. By

⁸⁴ Memo Shultz for Reagan “The Next Six Months with the Soviets,” 26 June 1987, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. XI*, 258–259.

⁸⁵ See Memo Parker for Powell “INF Verification: Latest US Proposal,” 8 September 1987, in: TNA, PREM 19/2056, 198–200

⁸⁶ Memcon Shultz and Shevardnadze “First Shultz-Shevardnadze Plenary,” 15 September 1987, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. XI*, 327.

⁸⁷ Ronald Reagan “Remarks on Signing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty,” 8 December 1987, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-signing-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-treaty>, accessed 18 April 2021.

May 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union had eliminated 2,692 missiles, followed by 10 years of on-site verification inspections.⁸⁸

The Washington Summit was a cutting-edge event: The INF Treaty marked the end of the Euromissile problem. In addition, it was a catalyst for the START negotiations, the talks on short-range nuclear weapons and the East-West negotiations on conventional weapons armaments. The INF Treaty facilitated the peaceful end of the Cold War – it was the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security in a time awash of bold changes and promised to bring a more peaceful and more cooperative world. At NATO's December 1987 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, George Shultz stressed the need for NATO to seize the opportunities of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika: "It was important, without neglecting the lessons of the past, to look to the future," Shultz said: "The world would be very different in 5 to 10 years. Openness to ideas, information and contacts were key. [...] Something different is going on, the change in the relationship with the Soviet Union was profound. This did not mean that the Russians were going to roll over and be nice to us. Allied strength and cohesion would remain vital. But the prospects for a major breakthrough were there."⁸⁹

In a nutshell, soft power and the belief in ideals were a pivotal theme of Shultz's diplomacy. The vision for world free of nuclear weapons was based on an optimistic assessment: Democracy would prevail over totalitarianism. The United States had the chips in the competition of ideas and would prevail on the battlefield of the mind. Shultz believed that "stripped of its superior military capabilities, the Soviet Union is an unimpressive power. Its political and socio-economic systems are relics of the past. A heavy industry nation in an "information age."⁹⁰ The Soviet Union was only a superpower because it was a missile superpower with a supreme capability to develop and deploy huge land-based nuclear weapons system. Thus, the focus of U.S. diplomacy had to be on reductions in the missiles. "Reductions are the name of the game," George Shultz said. "The negotiation of large reductions in strategic missiles is the most important objective for the security of the United States. We have a tremendous amount to gain by bringing the number of strategic missiles down,"⁹¹ Shultz thought.

Reykjavik and the conclusion of the INF Treaty brought into reach reductions in strategic weapons as well. The challenge was that time was running away during the last year of Ronald Reagan's

⁸⁸ For the text of the INF Treaty, see "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles," 8 December 1987, see <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/120887d>, accessed 19 August 2019.

⁸⁹ Telegram UK Del NATO to FCO (Telno. 403) "NATO Ministerial Meeting," 11 December 1987, in: The National Archives Kew (TNA), Prime Minister's Office Papers (PREM) 19/3100, 109.

⁹⁰ Telegram from the Department of State to Secretary of State Shultz in Tokyo, 6 May 1986, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. V, 945.

⁹¹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 716.

presidency. Reagan was still as ambitious as ever: He was determined to go for a strategic arms reductions treaty – and he wanted his advisers to work hard. “You've got to remember that the whole thing was borne of the idea that the world needs to get rid of nuclear weapons. We've got to remember that we can't win a nuclear war and we can't fight one,”⁹² Reagan emphasized in September 1987. In February 1988, he told his key foreign policy people that “I would like to use the remaining months of this Administration to the best advantage.” “From my past experience as a labor negotiator, maybe we need to do this: We need to go for the gold. You need to put down what the ideal agreement would be.”⁹³ George Shultz shared Ronald Reagan’s assessment: “It's my impression we can get there if we give it the right priority and effort. [...] The real question is how important is this to us. I think it is important because the Soviets are a lot better than we are at producing and deploying ballistic missiles that are targeted at the United States, and that's just the cruel truth,”⁹⁴ Shultz added.

However, there was one major problem holding up further progress – and that was the Reagan Administration’s problem with INF ratification in Congress. Critics voiced concern that the INF Treaty would leave Western Europe denuclearized and vulnerable to the Warsaw Pact’s enormous conventional military superiority – as former President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger argued.⁹⁵ George Shultz responded to the criticism in *Time* and in the *New York Times* arguing that “even after an INF agreement, NATO would retain a robust deterrent. More than 4,000 nuclear weapons would still be in Europe.”⁹⁶ Nixon’s and Kissinger’s basic problem was perhaps that they did not sufficiently understand the bold changes and the sincerity of Gorbachev’s reform policy which were underpinned by Gorbachev’s February 1988 announcement to withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan by May 15. It seemed that the real target of domestic INF criticism was to prevent the conclusion of START Treaty in the remainder of Reagan’s terms.

Mikhail Gorbachev was ready for progress. He wanted a START Treaty – and he was prepared for new forms of verification as he told George Shultz in February 1988. “The Soviet side was ready for cooperation, for intensive, even new forms of verification compared to the INF Treaty,”⁹⁷ Gorbachev emphasized. However, START was not finalized for Reagan and Gorbachev to sign at their Moscow Summit in late May and early June 1988. In March 1988, George Shultz and Edvard Shevardnadze had another extended meeting to review the remaining issues such as the U.S. 7-year reduction

⁹² Minutes of a National Security Planning Group Meeting, “Subject: Review of United States Arms Control Positions,” 8 September 1987, in: *FRUS 1981–1987*, Vol. XI, 888.

⁹³ Minutes of a National Security Planning Group Meeting, 9 February 1988, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. VI, 692–693, 694.

⁹⁴ Minutes of a National Security Planning Group Meeting, 9 February 1988, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. VI, 693.

⁹⁵ See Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1081–1086.

⁹⁶ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1082.

⁹⁷ Memcon Shultz and Gorbachev, 22 February 1988, in: *FRUS 1981–1988*, Vol. VI, 764.

timetable for strategic offensive reductions, limits of mobile ICBMs, land-based ICBMs, SLBMs and ALCMs and heavy bombers.⁹⁸ In April 1988, George Shultz conducted another visit in Moscow in an effort to resolve the rest of the contentious START issues, yet this was to no avail. In mid-April 1988, Reagan, Shultz and their advisers reviewed the continuous START issues – and Shultz told Reagan that “it's not going to be possible, in his opinion, to resolve the verification questions satisfactorily before the Summit. There was just too much verification work to be done.”⁹⁹

Progress on strategic arms control needed more time and additional work. Given the intricacies of the issues, 1988 was not a lost opportunity. Reagan's and Gorbachev's shared nuclear abolitionism was a key driver for the end of the cold War and the bold changes in the bilateral U.S.-Soviet relationship. “He had come into office believing in the instability of a world whose security was based primarily on nuclear missiles,” Ronald Reagan emphasized at the 1988 Moscow Summit. When Gorbachev raised doubts about SDI as a purely defensive weapon, Reagan said again that “Gorbachev was overlooking the President's frequently stated belief that a nuclear war could not be won and must never be fought. The President believed nuclear weapons must be eliminated.”¹⁰⁰ Both sides were determined to maintain their strategic partnership. Ronald Reagan saw Mikhail Gorbachev as a genuine partner. At the 1988 Moscow Summit, when Reagan and Gorbachev had a walk on Red Square, Reagan was asked whether he still believed the Soviet Union was an evil empire. Reagan responded he was talking about “another time, another era.”¹⁰¹ Equally important, Mikhail Gorbachev's thinking had also changed profoundly. In April 1988, Gorbachev told George Shultz that “the Soviets did not pretend to have the final truth. They did not impose their way of life on other peoples. They told the U.S. they wanted to cooperate, they wanted dialogue, they wanted to find answers together with the U.S.”¹⁰²

Both sides were interested in the conclusion of a START agreement. Without it, the Reagan Administration anticipated that the Soviet advantage in ballistic missiles warheads would more than double to 3548 by the end of the 1990s despite the U.S. strategic modernization program. A START Treaty and a 50 per cent reduction in strategic weapons would make this Soviet advantage disappear. In August 1988, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented these military implications in a meeting with the President. Reagan's response was enthusiastic: “Our approach reduces the danger of nuclear war. Some of our so-called friends are saying we gave away the store. Your briefing

⁹⁸ See Memcon Shultz and Shevardnadze, 22 March 1988, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. VI*, 821–838.

⁹⁹ Minutes of a National Security Planning Group Meeting “Preparations for the Moscow Ministerial,” 15 April 1988, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. VI*, 914.

¹⁰⁰ Memcon Reagan and Gorbachev “First Plenary Meeting,” 30 May 1988, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. XI*, 1410, 1411.

¹⁰¹ See “Reagan's Words: `Differences Continue to Recede,’” *New York Times*, June 2, 1988, page A–16.

¹⁰² Memcon Shultz and Gorbachev, 22 April 1988, in: *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. VI*, 969.

says its quite the reverse. I see why the Soviets are willing to accept it; we know how their economy is.”¹⁰³

The George H.W. Bush administration was less enthusiastic in terms of bold nuclear reductions and soon confronted with other more pressing issues. The fall of the Berlin wall and the demise of communism in Eastern Europe and the war in Iraq were on the front burner of the Bush Administration’s diplomacy.¹⁰⁴ START was a less urgent issue. Thus, it was delayed until July 1991 when Bush and Gorbachev finally found agreement on 50 per cent cuts in strategic weapons. However, both sides did not manage to tackle the problem of the most destabilizing weapons, land-based ICBMs with multiple warheads. As James Graham Wilson pointed out, “the great missed opportunity from the end of the Cold War is not that the U.S. and the Soviets Union failed to get rid of nuclear weapons entirely but that they failed to ban potential first-strike weapons: land-based MIRVed ICBMs.”¹⁰⁵

Signed by Bush and Russia’s new President Boris Yeltsin in January 1993, START II was supposed to achieve this ultimate goal. Yet, with the benefit of hindsight, it seems that both sides went for START II too fast – U.S. policymakers quickly sensed that the new democratic Russia would not be able to eliminate its tremendous arsenal of MIRVed ICBMs with that much speed. Russia’s concessions were made during its deepest economic crisis and a time of tumultuous changes in 1992. As Leopoldo Nuti pointed out “the Russian Duma had developed second thoughts on the ratification of START II – both because of the US work on missile defence and for the reduction of MIRVed missiles that it envisaged. A clear sign that the times were changing was the slowly grinding halt to the bilateral arms control process between the United States and Russia. In the U.S. there was increasing domestic pressure to continue research on anti-missile defence capabilities, which Russia regarded as a violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and of the fundamental tenets of strategic stability.”¹⁰⁶ In a nutshell, the Reagan-Shultz legacy initiated bold steps leading to significant reductions in deployed long- and intermediate-range nuclear forces, but it failed to break the neck of the nuclear arms race.¹⁰⁷ In the post-Cold War era, American and Russian policymakers failed to turn

¹⁰³ Minutes of a Meeting “Military Implications of a START Treaty,” 11 August 1988, in: FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. XI, 1479.

¹⁰⁴ See Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton and Vladislav Zubok (Eds), *Masterpieces of History. The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010); Jeffrey Engel, *When the World Seemed New. George H. W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); Kristina Spohr, *Post Wall, Post Square. Rebuilding the World after 1989* (London: Harper & Collins, 2019).

¹⁰⁵ See James Graham Wilson, “The Nuclear and Space Talks, George Shultz, and the End of the Cold War,” in: Blumenau, Hanhimäki and Zanchetta (Eds), *New Perspectives on the End of the Cold War*, 32–45, here 42.

¹⁰⁶ See Leopoldo Nuti, NATO’s Role in Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Arms Control. A (Critical) History, Italian Institute for International Affairs, Rome, January 2021, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/natos-role-nuclear-non-proliferation-and-arms-control-critical-history>, accessed 26 April 2021.

¹⁰⁷ See George P. Shultz and James E. Goodby, *The War That Must Never Be Fought. Resolving the Nuclear Dilemma* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2015).

nuclear arms control into an irreversible endeavor. As things turned out, both sides did not manage to establish a nuclear arms control regime of permanent duration. One reason was the emergence of new challenges such as the rise of China, Russia's revanchism and the arrival of additional nuclear-armed actors. Another reason was the George W. Bush administration's withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002 two weeks after the conclusion of the U.S.-Russia Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) in May 2002. At the same time, the regulatory framework was weakening. At the outset of the 21st century, experienced arms control experts have warned that the era of negotiated arms control was perhaps coming to an end. In 2001, former U.S. arms control negotiator James Goodby wrote that "if we think of the end of the cold war as a time of relative peace among the major powers, we should ask ourselves whether arms control could survive the peace." Goodby's prophetic answer: "Perhaps not."¹⁰⁸

It was this insight that triggered George Shultz to revive the vision for a world without nuclear weapons in the famous 2007 Wall Street op-ed that he co-authored with William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn. The danger of a new and costly new arms race was the main concern behind the new Shultz initiative:¹⁰⁹ "Will new nuclear nations and the world be as fortunate in the next 50 years as we were during the Cold War?" Shultz thought that "unless urgent new actions are taken, the United States soon will be compelled to enter a new nuclear era that will be more precarious and psychologically disorienting, and economically even more costly than was Cold War deterrence."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ James E. Goodby, "Major Powers and Arms Control. A U.S. Perspective," in: Ian Anthony and Adam Daniel Rotfeld (Eds), *A Future Arms Control Agenda*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2001, 68, see <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/books/SIPRI01AnRo/SIPRI01AnRo.pdf>, accessed 26 April 2021.

¹⁰⁹ See George P. Shultz, Sidney Drell, James E. Goodby (Eds), *The Gravest Danger. Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003).

¹¹⁰ See George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, *A World Free of Nuclear Weapons*, in: *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 January 2007. See <https://www.hoover.org/research/world-free-nuclear-weapons-0>, accessed 18 April 2021.