

He Did It His Way

THIS IS A VERY WORTHWHILE BOOK, whose title incites hopes for a vast plot concocted and executed in all its intricacy by a much more complicated figure than Ronald Reagan is generally reckoned to be. It is a meticulous, even laborious compilation by Reagan White House insiders Martin and Annelise Anderson, from National Security Council and subcommittee minutes and Reagan's personal diaries, of the president's methodical pursuit of a victorious but unrancorous end to the Cold War and a steady reduction and even removal of the threat of nuclear weapons. It makes no pretense to dramatic or elegant writing and is even awkward at times, near the beginning. But it is based almost entirely on primary documentary sources, and makes its points almost irrefutably.

As Reagan described to one of his biographers, at the end of World War II, "All I wanted to do...was to rest up a while, make love to my wife, and come up refreshed to a better job in an ideal world...I was disappointed in all these ambitions." This was one of his rare references to his first wife, Jane Wyman, and these were his last days as a "hemophiliac bleeding heart Democrat."

The authors' central premise is that when he became president, Reagan had an integrated plan, based on convictions he had been publicly expressing since before there was any real thought of his

candidacy for public office, for winning the Cold War without overly aggravating international tensions. He steadily implemented the plan, and brought it to almost complete success.

Reagan's remarkable presentational and oratorical talents, the greatest of any U.S. president in the time of recorded comment except Franklin D. Roosevelt,

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enabled him to put his ideas across so persuasively it was easy to lose sight of how carefully he had developed his concepts and marshaled his tactics for pursuing them. When asked early on in his presidency his plan for the Cold War, he said, "We win and they lose."

It was a plan based in part on his dealings with attempted Communist infiltration of Hollywood during his six terms as head of the Screen Actors Guild, and on his time as vice president for public and personnel relations of General Electric, where he and the legendary head of labor relations, Lemuel Boulware, outsmarted the red-tainted electrical workers' unions. Reagan was an impassioned opponent of moral relativism. He was untouched by the leftist fear that the U.S. was a swashbucklingly self-indulgent and embarrassing country, or even a menace, and that it had been partly responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War and that it was not necessarily morally superior to the Communists. He thought Communism evil, socialism a losing ticket, and the U.S. a certain winner in the Cold War if America could be allowed to be America.

The authors cite from speeches and articles Reagan wrote all through those years as he advanced steadily toward the nation's highest office. The country came gradually to him, not the other way round, as in tragic or unusual circumstances the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations ended unhappily. He could have been forgiven for thinking that for once, the office really did seek the man.

Reagan is convincingly represented as a swift reader and learner and a very intelligent man who masqueraded as a bit of a charming lightweight. He had never bought the line that the USSR was any great success story. Reagan began as president by proposing substantial tax reductions, which were adopted partly because of the huge wave of support generated by his courage and aplomb after his attempted assassination in March 1981. As the economy responded, he moved decisively to strengthen all aspects of the U.S. military. And he

**Reagan's Secret War:
The Untold Story of His
Fight to Save the World
from Nuclear Disaster**

By Martin Anderson and
Annelise Anderson

(CROWN, 464 PAGES, \$32.50)

Reviewed by Conrad Black

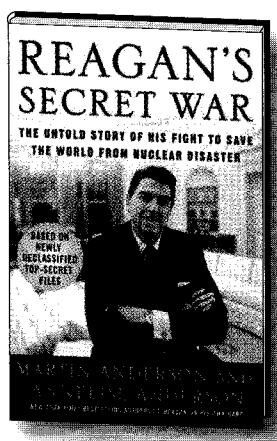
moved to squeeze Soviet access to Western technology, tightening credit and discouraging export permits for sophisticated, and especially defense-sensitive, manufactures.

One of the early initiatives Reagan approved, after French president François Mitterrand shared with him valuable French intelligence about Soviet industrial espionage, was to devise a computerized method of regulating pressures in gas wells and pipelines, assuring that the wells and pipelines would explode with great force, and then making sure that Soviet agents came upon the supposedly state-of-the-art pressure system. A few months later, a gas field and pipeline in Siberia blew up in the greatest non-nuclear explosion ever recorded. Reagan and CIA director William Casey were greatly amused.

Reagan also embarked on a low-key effort to create a glut of resources that the USSR exported and which provided most of its hard currency receipts. In 1984, he sold Saudi Arabia a fleet of sophisticated advance warning radar detection aircraft (AWACS), despite the objections of Israel and its more demonstrative lobbyists in the U.S. In the 18 months after this sale was approved, the price of oil, as a consequence of Saudi over-pumping, declined from \$30, where it had been for several years, to \$13 in March 1986. This assisted the U.S. current account and depleted Soviet cash inflows, as an oil exporter.

As the U.S. economy, fueled by Reagan's tax cuts, surged forward out of the Carter "malaise" and the U.S. military expanded, Reagan made contact with Soviet president and Communist Party chairman Leonid Brezhnev, suggesting resumption of arms control talks, which had been deferred after the invasion of Afghanistan. Exchanges continued sporadically but ineffectually with Brezhnev up to his death in November 1982, then with Yuri Andropov until he died in February 1984, then Konstantin Chernenko, who died in March 1985, and finally with a younger generation leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan urged the virtues of nuclear arms reduction on all of them.

DESPITE THE REGULAR DENUNCIATIONS of him as a warmonger apt to press the proverbial nuclear button at any moment, Reagan, from these first exchanges, and in private and tell-



tale utterances for many years before that, sought the abolition of nuclear weapons—at least in the sense that Presidents Truman and Eisenhower had proposed, of international control of them—and a universal policy to advantage the defense in the nuclear equation. He thought the chosen policy of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, equivalent strength and Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), an insane and immoral idea.

In October 1981, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger suggested the zero

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nuclear option for Europe, which had been talked about for a year in Germany. Reagan was intrigued, despite the trenchant opposition of Secretary of State Alexander Haig, who was emerging as a tirelessly obstreperous colleague.

On November 18, 1981, Reagan spoke to the Society of Newspaper Editors and proposed non-deployment of U.S. intermediate cruise missiles and mobile Pershing missiles to Western Europe, in exchange for the withdrawal of the 750 Soviet intermediate-range Soviet missiles already in Eastern Europe. This was the zero option. The Russians responded dismissively.

On December 15, 1981, Reagan opened his effort to coordinate his Eastern European policy with the Vatican's. The Holy See's secretary of state, Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, came to the White House and Reagan referred to Eastern Europe's "terrible hunger for God," and the fragility of Russia's hold on the satellite countries, as the swift rise of the Solidarity movement in the Pope's Polish homeland was already demonstrating.

The Andersons use the declassified notes of the meeting to record that Casaroli brought the message that Pope John Paul II regarded the United States as "the sanctuary for the future of the world...the world relies on your good judgment and wisdom." Reagan revealed, for the first time to any foreign government, as far as is known from public records, his

intention to frighten the Russians "with our ability to outbuild them (militarily), which the Soviets know we can do if we choose." Then, "We could invite the Soviets to join us in lowering the level of weapons on both sides."

The cardinal, on behalf of the pope, offered a secret back channel to the Soviet government if Reagan wanted it, indicating a substantive policy of fomenting discontent behind the Iron Curtain, where there were 120 million Roman Catholics, including 40 million in the Soviet Union and almost

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the entire population of Poland. John Paul II, in a little-recognized move, rewrote the American Catholic bishops' 1983 letter on war and peace, making it generally conform to the new administration's policy. There were 65 million Roman Catholics in the United States, and while not all of them hung on every word of their bishops on national security matters (or anything else), this was distinctly helpful to Reagan. It was also the closest cooperation between the Vatican and the White House in American political matters since Pius XI sent then secretary of state Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli (soon to be Pope Pius XII) to the U.S. for the entire 1936 election campaign, to ensure that Father Charles E. Coughlin and other political clergy did not harass President Roosevelt with intemperate campaign allegations.

The Polish government had declared martial law on December 12, 1981, and the pope openly encouraged passive resistance. Reagan turned the screws of sanctions tighter and poured his oratorical talents into the denigration of the beleaguered Red empire. In a special National Security Council meeting of December 21, 1981, he referred to Roosevelt's Quarantine Speech of 1937 and considered an absolute quarantine of the Soviet Union and "review of our alliances" to reevaluate those who might not wish to cooperate. Haig urged caution and claimed the USSR might "go to war over this." Reagan replied, "Everyone stock up on vodka."

In his (supposedly Christmas) address to the nation that night, Reagan revealed that he had sent a sharply written message to Brezhnev, threatening further unspecified measures if Poland did not return to normalcy, and accusing the USSR (quite accurately) of flagrant violations of the Helsinki Final Act guaranteeing human rights in Europe. He told the NSC on December 23, 1981, that "There is hardly a news service in the U.S. that does not have a coterie of apologists for the USSR," and squelched temporizers and dismissed the UN as "impotent."

Reagan was out of patience with the argumentative and idiosyncratic Haig, who had a tendency to attach himself sadistically to marginal points and debate with Reagan. His resignation was accepted on June 25, 1982. Reagan considered Henry Kissinger, the most obvious replacement, slippery, disloyal to Nixon, ruffleable in crises, and overly respectful of the Great Power status quo. He respected Kissinger's professional competence but thought him an old-world Cold War cynic with little appreciation of the comparative strength of Western ideology in the conflict with Communism. Instead, he turned to the solid, well-tested Californian George Shultz, a former Marine colonel, business school dean, corporate executive, federal budget director, and secretary of labor and the treasury. Reagan changed rather ordinary national security advisers almost annually in his first five years. But his core national security group, Bush, Baker, Shultz, Weinberger, Casey, and Robert Gates (the only one still active in government), was very strong, especially when Howard Baker, Frank Carlucci, and Colin Powell were added in 1986. The observant could already see the possible impact of the three new star players on the world anti-Communist side: Reagan, John Paul II, and Margaret Thatcher. The Cold War was entering its last phase.

REAGAN BEGAN RESEARCH on a comprehensive missile defense system with a small working group on September 14, 1981, to which was soon added his envoy to the Holy See, William Wilson. It was entirely Reagan's idea to tie missile defense to nuclear missile reduction and ultimately elimination. He instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on December 22, 1982, to explore the possibility of comprehensive missile defense.

After feverish preparation, Reagan gave his famous Orlando speech of March 8, 1983, and said that the Soviet Union was "the focus of evil in the

world." On March 23, he revealed in a national address from his office that the U.S. proposed to develop a comprehensive missile defense system. The authors show that his secret intention was to propose a joint reduction in nuclear weapons as defense capabilities proceeded, and when the U.S. was ready to deploy ground cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe, again to propose the zero option—complete withdrawal of intermediate missiles in Europe by both sides.

The SDI speech was popular in the U.S., though the liberal media and faint hearts in the scientific community flapped hysterically, as had been foreseen. The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* unctuously claimed that control vehicles would have to be launched into space that would weigh 45,000 tons, as much as the great passenger liners of a century ago such as the *Titanic* and the *Aquitania*, a fatuous assertion. But Reagan's popularity, good nature, and forensic skill held the bulk of U.S. public opinion in place.

The allies also fussed predictably. Thatcher, West Germany's Helmut Kohl, and other conservatives were solid; Mitterrand was inscrutable in his magnificent Gallic cynicism; and the social democrats, like Canada's Trudeau, many of the West German opposition SPD, and the Scandinavians and Dutch, hovered and widdled. But Andropov, as Reagan had hoped, was horrified, and spoke of an effort to render the USSR's backbreaking military effort "obsolete." Two years before, the Kremlin had thought that military superiority might be in sight. Now the horizon was darkened by a new defensive arms race, a comatose Russian economy, ferment in the satellite countries, and a geriatric leadership crisis (where Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev had reigned for nearly 60 years, Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko died in 28 months).

Reagan's initial idea, explained to a select group of journalists the day after the SDI speech, was to give the technology, once developed, to the Russians (who had been trying, without conspicuous success, to develop such a system for 10 years). No one could believe this (Reagan's 1984 election opponent, Walter Mondale, called it a "non-starter"). It did encourage speculation that Reagan was just trying to win the arms race and put Russia to the wall.

This was a magnificent poker bet; SDI was all-defensive, non-nuclear, and the Western left's effort to ridicule it as sci-fi Star Wars was always belied by the Kremlin's evident fear of it. British foreign

secretary Geoffrey Howe's description of it as a "Maginot Line" was a nonsensical charge, as SDI was to add to offensive strength, not to substitute for offensive weakness, as Maginot did, and would bankrupt the country against which, not by which, it was to be deployed.

On August 4, 1983, Andropov expressed interest in the zero option for European intermediate forces. On September 1, the Russians shot down, without warning, a Korean civilian 747 airliner that had

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strayed into Soviet airspace, without warning, and killed 269 people. A U.S. monitoring station in Japan had picked up and recorded the Russian pilot's sky-boy comments as he shadowed and shot down the target.

Reagan's genuine outrage was heavily supplemented and well served by his timeless theatrical, not to say histrionic, talents. It was a Soviet public relations disaster, and showed again Reagan's astonishing good fortune: the near fatal assassination attempt, the accident-free period after he fired the air traffic controllers; for the Gipper, the ball always bounced as it should.

The Soviets had walked out of all arms control talks: conventional forces, strategic (START), and intermediate (INF). The U.S. had always resisted strategic arms reduction or even a no-first-use of such weapons agreement, because of Soviet conventional forces superiority in Europe. Now it was possible to envision an INF zero, gradual strategic reduction, and a symmetrical or even joint SDI deployment. It was an infinitely more appealing basis of world security than MAD, and from Reagan's perspective, it was an exquisite pleasure to have the domestic left squealing in ridicule at a system that clearly frightened the Kremlin.

IT WAS A MASTERLY AND FORTUITOUS alteration of Great Power strategic thinking, including the shell game Reagan conducted about how to

assure that the USSR wouldn't lose its retaliatory ability with his on-again, off-again sharing or jointly deploying the SDI technology. The nuclear age had begun with Truman and Eisenhower advocating "massive retaliation," and Eisenhower added the flourish of "more bang for the buck": a larger nuclear lead and smaller conventional forces. This line of thinking reached its apogee with the Formosa Resolution in 1955 that authorized the president to use any degree of force he judged necessary in support of what he considered to be the national interest, including the strategically irrelevant offshore Chinese islands of Quemoy and Matsu.

Kennedy announced his preparedness to "bear any burden, pay any price," and the result was the Vietnam expedition. Kennedy and Johnson allowed the USSR to catch up with the U.S. in nuclear throw-weight, and Mutual Assured Destruction was sup-

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posed to lead to fruitful arms control discussions. Instead, it led to greater Soviet adventurism while the U.S. sank into the "limited war for a limited objective" quagmire in Indochina, which MacArthur and Eisenhower had warned their successors to avoid.

Nixon went to "nuclear sufficiency," an artistic combination of nuclear superiority through technological advances while maintaining approximate arithmetic equality and continuing to wave the banner of arms control. He extracted the U.S. from Vietnam without losing a non-Communist government in Saigon, opened up relations with China to pry open greater Soviet cooperation, effectively threw the Russians out of the Middle East, and negotiated the greatest arms control agreement in history with Moscow, in SALT I.

The Watergate debacle took all the cards out of the hands of Nixon and Ford, and Carter came into office full of otherworldly notions of unilateral arms reductions and "an irrational fear of Communism." Afghanistan was effectively annexed to the USSR (though it was never really subdued). Castroism spread to Nicaragua, and Angola and Ethiopia became quasi-Soviet satellites.

Reagan radically changed this landscape and within a few years had the Russians agreeing to remove deployed intermediate missiles in Europe in exchange for non-deployment of half as many U.S. missiles, some of which (Pershings) were not, in fact, very accurate (and all were replaced on the Western side by sea-launched cruise missiles anyway). The Soviet Union was prepared to agree to almost anything to avoid development of a sci-fi defensive system that doesn't really perform as it was advertised even 25 years later.

For good measure, and as a sincere reflection of his strongest inborn faith, Reagan threw human rights into the equation, most famously with his speech at the Berlin Wall in 1987, peaking at: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" Reagan emphasized these issues enough to chivy the Soviets along, but not so gratingly that they balked and bolted the process. The authors recount the development of Reagan's views on the subject, including a decisive defeat of Robert Kennedy in a worldwide radio debate on May 15, 1967, after which Kennedy told his aides not to pit him against Reagan again. (Carter should have listened to the tape of that debate before challenging Reagan to debate in October 1980.)

Direct senior contact between U.S. and Soviet leaders started with a productive interview Reagan had with the ancient Bolshevik confidence trickster (and foreign minister), Andrei Gromyko, September 28, 1984. It was clear that Reagan would be overwhelmingly reelected. Gromyko conveyed the Soviet leadership's proposal, which was formalized by Chernenko on November 17, that simultaneous talks on START, INF, and conventional force reductions be opened. In a letter of November 28, Chernenko declared his interest in pursuing the elimination of nuclear weapons altogether.

ALL THIS WAS IN PLACE when Gorbachev succeeded to the Soviet leadership in March 1985, and the last 40 percent of this book is an account of the minuet with him. The Geneva meeting between them in November 1985, where Reagan told him the United

States would never tolerate any other country having military superiority; Reykjavik in October 1986, where the Andersons debunk the theory that Reagan was taken to the brink of disaster by giving up all offensive nuclear weapons; all are recounted carefully from official notes. Gorbachev was almost offering total disarmament to avoid SDI. Reagan was delighted by the Russian obsession with SDI, and his failure to pursue joint development and deployment makes the case, though these authors don't so describe it, that Reagan demoralized and tantalized the Russians with what amounted to a bait and switch about whether he really was seeking outright military superiority.

As he outlined to a February 3, 1986, NSC meeting, Reagan was offering to share the technology at the deployment stage. Of course the Russians couldn't accept that, but the great question is why Gorbachev, a formidable man by all accounts, did not play a better game of poker himself, and realize that Congress might not fund it, and that it was pie in the sky anyway. The crunch came at Reykjavik when Gorbachev said, "Excuse me, Mr. President, but I do not take your idea of sharing SDI seriously." Reagan replied, "If I thought that SDI could not be shared, I would have rejected it myself." The reason it stopped there and they didn't try to work out a joint deployment agreement is, presumably, that the Russians thought there was no chance of this.

By the time of Reykjavik, the Russians had been rattled by the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown in April 1986. And the Iran-Contra sideshow shook the Reagan administration in the fall of 1986 and early 1987. Everything went silent with the Russians after Reykjavik, but Reagan was confident they would be back, and Gorbachev did write to Reagan on February 28, 1987, offering an INF zero-zero agreement. This was quickly agreed, more than five years after Brezhnev had contemptuously rejected it.

Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush, negotiated a START agreement with the Russians. The Cold War was effectively over when Reagan left office in January 1989, and his achievement was immense. The Soviet Union imploded, taking most of international Communism with it.

There are a few slips in the book: the 1984 election was never going to be close, and there wasn't really much chance of a nuclear exchange with Andropov in 1983. *Reagan's Secret War* makes no pretense to being a full history of the Reagan presidency, but it is a very powerful argument for why he was one of America's great presidents. ❧

Blown Away

WHEN I LEARNED THAT Dr. Stephen Meyer had written a new book on the evidence of design displayed in living cells, I expected to be impressed by it. I wasn't prepared to have my mind blown—which is what happened.

In *Signature in the Cell*, Meyer marshals the scientific facts and arguments to show that the staggering quantity of information contained in the "computer code" of our cellular DNA almost certainly cannot have been generated by undirected material processes. Instead, Meyer contends, in our combined human experience the kind of complex, functionally specified information that is present in living cells is known to be produced by only one source: an intelligent, purposeful mind.

The implications of that thesis are enormous, and the scientific arguments Meyer presents for it are compelling.

As Director of the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute, Meyer is a principal architect and advocate of the intelligent design (ID) movement. After gaining altitude for a number of years, intelligent design exploded into the national consciousness in 2004 and 2005 like a starburst shell on the Fourth of July. ID proponents have taken several approaches to demonstrating the existence of design in nature, including arguments based on the dazzling "fine-tuning" of the universe's physical laws, and on the "irreducible complexity" of biological structures and processes (most famously advanced by Prof. Michael Behe in *Darwin's Black Box*).

Of the approaches taken by ID theorists, *Signature in the Cell* is most closely aligned with the pioneering work on design detection published over the last decade by mathematician William Dembski, one of Meyer's colleagues at the Discovery Institute. Dembski and Meyer both rely, at least in part, on information theory and probabilistic analysis to determine whether a phenomenon is best explained as the product of unguided "chance and necessity," or of design by an intelligence.

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**Signature in the Cell:
DNA and the Evidence for
Intelligent Design**

By Stephen C. Meyer
(HARPERONE, 611 PAGES, \$28.99)

Reviewed by Dan Peterson