

**THE REBELLION
-OF-
RONALD REAGAN**

A HISTORY OF THE END OF THE COLD WAR

JAMES MANN

VIKING

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For Elizabeth and Ted,
who will always mean more to me
than they can ever know

CHRONOLOGY

1982

November 8-10 : Soviet general secretary Leonid Brezhnev dies and is succeeded by Yuril Andropov

1983

March 8: Reagan, speaking to the National Association of Evangelicals, denounces the Soviet Union as an “evil empire”.

March 23: Regan announces Strategic Defense Initiative.

September 1: Soviet military shoots down South Korean commercial flight KAL 007, killing 269 passengers.

November 2-11: NATO forces conduct Able Archer 83, a military exercise testing chain-of-command procedures for nuclear weapons; CIA reports that Soviet officials feared it was the start of a surprise nuclear attack.

November 20: ABC television airs *The Day After*, dramatizing the impact of nuclear war on a single town in Kansas.

November 23: American Pershing II missiles are deployed in West Germany.

1984

January 16-17: Reagan deliver speech calling for renewed dialogue with the Soviet Union and mentioning opportunities for peace. Regan meets a White House with Suzanne Massie and sends her to Moscow as intermediary seeking a new cultural agreement.

February 9–13: Andropov dies; Konstantin Chernenko named new Soviet leader.

August 17: At secret meeting in Moscow, Soviet leaders complain to Erich Honecker that East Germany is drawing too close to West Germany.

November 6: Reagan wins reelection.

1985

March 10–11: Chernenko dies; Mikhail Gorbachev becomes fourth Soviet leader in less than three years.

November 19–21: Reagan and Gorbachev meet for the first time in Geneva.

1986

January 15: Gorbachev unveils a proposal for a nuclear-free world by 2000.

April 26: Soviet nuclear disaster occurs at Chernobyl.

July 18: Richard Nixon visits Gorbachev in Moscow, describes him as a leader with a “steel fist.”

August 13: Residents of West Berlin let the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Berlin Wall pass quietly by. Reagan calls for the wall to be torn down.

August 30: Soviets detain American reporter Nicholas Daniloff in response to American arrest of Soviet diplomat on spying charges.

September 28–30: U.S. and Soviet officials announce a deal for Daniloff’s release. Shortly afterward, the White House announces that Reagan and Gorbachev will meet again soon in Reykjavik.

October 11–12: At Reykjavik, Reagan and Gorbachev discuss dramatic cutbacks in missiles and nuclear weapons, but no agreement is reached.

November 3–4: Iran-Contra scandal breaks.

1987

February 26: Tower Commission finds Reagan traded arms to Iran in exchange for release of American hostages in Lebanon. Reagan fires Chief of Staff Donald Regan, names Howard Baker to succeed him.

February 28: Gorbachev announces Soviet Union is willing to try to conclude a treaty limiting intermediate-range missiles in Europe, without insisting that it be part of a larger agreement.

April 26–27: Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger warn in an op-ed of the dangers of Reagan’s diplomacy with Gorbachev. Reagan meets with Nixon at the White House.

May 27–28: In East Berlin, Gorbachev persuades Eastern European leaders to approve new military doctrine in which Warsaw Pact is considered a strictly defensive alliance.

May 28: West German teenager Matthias Rust flies Cessna plane through Soviet air defenses over Moscow; Gorbachev responds by shaking up Soviet military command.

June 12: Reagan, in West Berlin, delivers speech calling on Gorbachev to “tear down this wall.”

September 7: With Soviet acquiescence, Erich Honecker makes first visit to West Germany.

December 8–10: Reagan and Gorbachev hold summit in Washington, conclude INF Treaty.

1988

May 27: Senate ratifies INF Treaty.

May 29-June 1: Reagan visits, Moscow, says his description of Soviet Union as an “evil empire” was from “another time and another era”.

November 8: Bush wins presidency.

December 7: At United Nations Gorbachev announces troop reductions; holds meeting at New York Governor’s Island with Reagan and Bush.

1989

January 19: Erich Honecker says the Berlin Wall will still exist in “ 100 years.”

January 22: Two days after Bush’s inauguration, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft says, “The Cold War is not over.”

May 31: On trip to Europe, Bush repeats Reagan’s exhortation to tear down the Berlin Wall; calls for Europe “whole and free.”

June 4: In Poland, opposition Solidarity candidates triumph in parliamentary elections.

June 13: Reagan, in Europe, urges Bush administration to be willing to take some “risks” in negotiating with Gorbachev.

September 11: Hungary lifts controls on travel by East Germans to Austria? East Germans stream across borders to Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

October 11: Honecker steps down as East German leader, is succeeded by Egon Krenz.

November 9: Krenz’s regime says it will ease travel restrictions; amid confusion about what the new rules mean, East Germans stream through Berlin Wall and are not stopped.

INTRODUCTION

Several competing mythologies have developed about the role of Ronald Reagan in the end of the Cold War. On one side is the view that through confrontation and pugnacity Reagan “won” America’s four-decade-long conflict with the Soviet Union. Proponents of an opposing view hold that the fortieth president was merely lucky or utterly irrelevant. My aim in this book is to reach beyond these simple formulas, to challenge old stereotypes about Reagan, and, through a combination of new interviews and newly available documents, to look back at what actually happened.

I first became interested in the Reagan years while working on another project. I was examining the careers of the members of George W. Bush’s foreign-policy team for a book that was later published as *Rise of the Vulcans*. During this research, I happened across a then-unknown episode: the Reagan administration had conducted elaborate, highly classified exercises designed to keep the U.S. government operating in various “undisclosed locations” outside Washington in case of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. The details of the secret program (in which Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld had been key participants) made me want to look further at the Reagan years. Where did this episode fit in? Was the president of the United States really willing to contemplate a large-scale nuclear conflict? More generally, what was Reagan himself thinking and doing? Reagan’s rhetoric toward the Soviet Union was clear enough, but what was the relationship between his rhetoric and his actual policies? That was the starting point for this book. As I had in previous books, I wanted to examine the hidden aspects of American foreign policy and to explain them in a historical narrative.

During the course of the research, I found some surprises. The archives show that in dealing with the Soviet Union, Reagan on occasion operated in much the same way as he did in the Iran-Contra affair, secretly making use of low-level private intermediaries to carry personal messages back and forth. Even some of the plans for summit meetings with Mikhail Gorbachev went not through the secretary of state but through a lowly American author, a woman who had gotten to know both Reagan in Washington and a KGB official in Moscow. The archives also show that Reagan at one point had a frosty standoff inside the White House with former president Richard Nixon, who had been secretly brought back to his old haunts for the first time since he had left after his Watergate resignation. Nixon was more skeptical than Reagan that Mikhail Gorbachev represented a significant change in Moscow. Reagan sought Nixon’s support for his efforts to cut back on nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles; Nixon refused to give it.

In Reagan’s second term in the White House, his views and his policies were generally at variance with his image as a truculent Cold Warrior. Indeed, during the final three years of his presidency, Reagan was usually among the doves in the often-contentious American debates about the Soviet Union. Reagan was also horrified by the possibility of nuclear war, even during his first term in the White House. The rehearsals for nuclear war of the early 1980s that I had earlier discovered were not at all representative of Reagan’s overall approach to nuclear weapons. In fact, these doomsday exercises of the early 1980s may have scared Reagan into trying to change American policy; in his second term, he repeatedly prodded U.S. military and defense officials to accept cutbacks in nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

Increasingly, Reagan rebelled against the forces and ideas that had made the Cold War seem endless and intractable. From 1986 to 1988, the period at the heart of this book, Reagan was increasingly at odds over Soviet policy with three separate but overlapping constituencies, each of which had played a powerful role in influencing American policy during the Cold War. The first of these was the political right, that is, the same American conservatives who had supported Reagan from the beginning of his political career through his early years in the White House. Magazines such as *National Review* and columnists such as George Will despised Reagan's unfolding diplomacy with Gorbachev.

The second constituency opposing Reagan was made up of the so-called realists, the group of officials who had teamed up to run American foreign policy during the Nixon and Ford administrations, including Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft. During the 1970s, this group had battled with conservatives (including Reagan himself) as they pursued détente with the Soviet Union. Yet in the mid-1980s, they, together with the conservatives, opposed the efforts by Reagan and his secretary of state, George P. Shultz, to reduce the arsenals of missiles and nuclear weapons that had been at the heart of America's military strategy throughout the Cold War.

Third, leading American intelligence and defense officials also disputed Reagan's view of Gorbachev. They argued that the Soviet leadership was not changing as much as Reagan and Shultz believed, and that Gorbachev represented merely a new face for the same old Soviet foreign policies.

At the end of Reagan's presidency, these constituencies were all working to slow down Reagan's diplomacy with the Soviet Union. When Reagan left office, the new George H. W. Bush administration took office convinced that Reagan had gone too far with Gorbachev. Bush froze diplomacy with Gorbachev for most of his first year in office, until just before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Two decades later, in the aftermath of the U.S. intervention in Iraq of 2003, it is tempting to view American foreign policy as an unending struggle between, on the one hand, hawkish neoconservatives and, on the other hand, more cautious realists. And so it is all the more tempting to superimpose back onto the events of the 1980s the philosophical struggles of the post-Iraq milieu.

Yet in fact, this would be inaccurate. When one looks at what actually transpired during the final years of the Cold War, one finds that history did not play out in the way that we might imagine today. As Reagan proceeded to deal with Gorbachev and to consider cutbacks in nuclear weaponry, *both* the political right *and* the foreign-policy realists were against him. William Buckley's *National Review* published, with approval, a critique of Reagan's Soviet policy by Nixon and Kissinger. During his second term in the White House, Reagan repeatedly forsook the advice of his old conservative friends while also rejecting the ideas of the national-security establishment. This book is an attempt to tell the story of that era, the period leading up to the end of the Cold War.

Anyone writing about Ronald Reagan encounters a special problem: Reagan rarely chose to explain his policy shifts or his not-infrequent changes in strategy or tactics. He had shrewd political instincts but rarely if ever articulated his underlying motivations. His interviews at the time, his private meetings, his autobiography, and his diaries have little to offer on questions of political judgment, trade-offs, or his reasons for reversing course.

Reagan was content to leave everyone with the impression that he was a man of simple principles,

leader utterly without cunning. He was often taken to be merely the instrument of others: at first of the political right and in later years, of a “moderate” group of officials, including Shultz. The impressions sometimes seemed to make sense until the people thought to be controlling Reagan would unexpectedly lose a major policy battle (or occasionally, their own jobs).

Reagan’s way of avoiding extended explanations was to offer a few deflecting phrases that would shut off discussion. When conservative leaders complained about his courtship of Gorbachev, Reagan would dismiss their arguments by saying, “I just think they’re wrong,” without specifying how or why. Like any politician, Reagan had an ego, but in his particular case, the ego wasn’t at all in the words or justifications he uttered. It was, rather, in his public performances. He proudly took note of the size of the crowds at his speeches or how much they cheered or how many letters or calls he received after he appeared on television. When his actions sometimes didn’t seem to fit with the principles he had laid out, Reagan simply restated those principles and left it to others to wrestle with the contradiction. Because he was so opaque, Reagan could not be understood through his words alone or through his actions alone.

I have chosen to probe Reagan’s role in the Cold War’s end through the use of four narrative parts. In its own way, each illuminates the way Reagan operated, the role he played, the influences on his thinking, and the underlying dynamics at work during the last years of his administration.

Part I examines the story of Reagan and Nixon, the two leading anti-Communist politicians of the Cold War. The relationship between the two men and the progress of their political careers offer some understanding of Reagan’s distinctive evolution. Their differing views of the Cold War help to explain how Reagan, after campaigning against détente with the Soviet Union in the 1970s, became such a strong proponent of easing tensions with Gorbachev’s Soviet Union a decade later.

Part II looks at Reagan’s curious relationship with an informal adviser, Suzanne Massie, whom he welcomed to the White House again and again to talk about life in the Soviet Union, even though she was not an established scholar or expert. The Massie story offers some insight into Reagan’s ideas and thinking about the Soviet Union during the mid-1980s, as he was beginning to change his approach to the regime he had called an evil empire.

Part III tells the story of Reagan’s famous speech at the Berlin Wall in June 1987. The speech was vintage Reagan. In uttering the words, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,” Reagan spurned the advice of virtually his entire foreign-policy team, up to and including Shultz. They feared the reproach would alienate Gorbachev or jeopardize his position in Moscow. Reagan judged, correctly as it turned out, that Gorbachev could handle it. Reagan’s speech was much less of a departure from American policy than is commonly imagined, yet it set forth a powerful idea in simple terms and dramatic fashion. The speech reaffirmed the anticommunism on which Reagan had based his career, but it also began to reckon with the idea that under Gorbachev, the Soviet system might be changing. A tough-worded speech, it also maintained support in the United States for Reagan’s subsequent efforts to work with Gorbachev.

Finally, Part IV describes the easing of Cold War tensions during Reagan’s final two years in office. Reagan welcomed Gorbachev to Washington and then visited Moscow, where he proclaimed that the era of the “evil empire” had passed. In between these two summits, Reagan won Senate approval for a major arms-control treaty with the Soviet Union, overcoming the opposition of conservatives from

within his own party. Through these endeavors Reagan helped to foster a growing realization inside the United States that America did not need to exist in a state of permanent enmity with the Soviet Union—and that, in fact, the Cold War was coming to an end.

There have been several biographies of Reagan, but these by their very nature cannot concentrate specifically on the final years of the Cold War. Separately, there have also been several books about the Reagan-era negotiations with the Soviet Union (including Shultz's own extraordinarily detailed memoir). But these books tend to focus, understandably, on the diplomacy, not the political judgments and presidential choices involved in bringing the Cold War to a close.

My own goal was different. I wanted to find what was uniquely Reagan during this period—the personal role and views of the president himself, apart from the work of his subordinates or the diplomacy of his administration. Reagan didn't operate entirely through subordinates such as Shultz; he had his own unusual advisers and intermediaries. Members of his foreign-policy team often thought of Reagan's rhetoric as a nuisance or a hindrance; in fact, it was an integral part of his overall approach to the Soviet Union.

The role of any president is inherently more political than that of any of the officials working for him. Presidents must choose when to push initiatives and when to back off, which route to take when cabinet secretaries disagree. They must decide what the American people will support and how to win congressional approval or acquiescence. Reagan, in particular, confronted considerable resistance to his efforts to scale back America's reliance on nuclear weaponry and to his unfolding relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev.

In the middle to late 1980s, the Cold War was winding down. Gorbachev's ascent triggered a series of political and bureaucratic battles in Washington. Ronald Reagan was at the center of those conflicts. This is the story of Reagan's role.

PART I

TWO ANTI-COMMUNISTS

CLANDESTINE VISIT

In the final days of April 1987, American newspapers carried a routine photograph of Soviet soldiers drilling in Moscow's Red Square, preparing for the annual May Day parade, a wave of arms and legs lined up in parallel against the backdrop of St. Basil's Cathedral. It was what the newspapers call fill art, not meant to convey news or change but rather a sense of the world as usual.

Americans, inured to the tensions of the Cold War, were preoccupied with more mundane pursuits. That spring the Los Angeles Lakers, led by Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, dethroned Larry Bird's Boston Celtics as champions of the National Basketball Association, after the Celtics had themselves defeated the Chicago Bulls and their young star Michael Jordan. America's dominant computer company, IBM, proclaimed that it would be working with Microsoft, the upstart Seattle software firm to develop a new system that could do several tasks at once in different "windows." In music, the AIDS charity song "That's What Friends Are For," a collaboration by Stevie Wonder, Elton John, Dionne Warwick, and Gladys Knight, had just won the Grammy Award for best song of the year, while Paul Simon's *Graceland* was declared the best album. The gossip columns informed Americans that film director Woody Allen and Mia Farrow were expecting a child. *Time* magazine wrote of the increasing problem of sticker shock in college costs: Stanford University had raised its tuition to \$11,880.

Late in the afternoon of April 27, 1987, a cloudy, cool spring day, a secret visitor was smuggled into the White House. Reporters and photographers would have climbed over one another to talk to him and take his picture if they had known he was there, but the attention of the press corps had been diverted. President Ronald Reagan had met with reporters two hours earlier, offering homilies on everything from AIDS to the Iran-Contra scandal, and the correspondents were busy filing their stories. A helicopter swooped low and onto the White House landing pad. Out stepped a familiar figure: Richard M. Nixon, the thirty-seventh president of the United States, who had been living in seclusion ever since being forced to resign thirteen years earlier.

At the Diplomatic Entrance to the White House, Chief of Staff Howard Baker and National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci were waiting, hands outstretched.¹ The illustrious greeters hurriedly escorted Nixon inside and up a private elevator to the second floor, the residence quarters of the White House now occupied by Ronald and Nancy Reagan. Nixon had once lived there himself, of course, but had not returned to his old haunts since August 9, 1974, the day he later called "the nightmare end of a long dream."² He had been at the White House twice since, but only for formal ceremonies downstairs: in 1979, Nixon was on Jimmy Carter's guest list for a state dinner for Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, and in 1981 he had joined Carter and Gerald Ford in a thirty-five minute stopover on the White House grounds before the three ex-presidents flew to Egypt to represent the United States at the funeral of Anwar Sadat. This time, the occasion was more intimate: Nixon had been invited inside and upstairs for a private chat with Reagan.³

Nixon's eyes scanned the living quarters, recording the changes with his characteristic blend of calculation and resentment. The Reagans, never known for parsimony, had given the place a sense of opulence. "I would not have recognized it because of the luxurious furnishings and decorating," wrote Nixon in a memo for his own files a few hours later. "As I looked up and down the hall, I would estimate that at least \$2 million, rather than the \$1 million that has been reported in the press, had been expended for this purpose." By contrast—Nixon reflected to himself—his wife, Pat, had spent less money on redecoration, and had concentrated on the downstairs public spaces of the White House such as the dining rooms and ballroom.⁴

Reagan, dressed in a brown suit, was waiting for him behind a desk in an upstairs study filled with pictures and mementos. Nixon remembered this particular room all too well. It had once been a bedroom, the one where Nixon had slept as president. As he sat down next to Reagan, and Baker and Carlucci settled into chairs across from them, Nixon tried to lighten the mood by launching into the story of when he had first set foot in that room. In 1966, when Nixon, out of office, was in town for the Washington press corps' annual Gridiron Dinner, President Lyndon Johnson invited him to drop by the White House afterward. To Nixon's astonishment, he was ushered upstairs to this very room, a bedroom even then. Johnson chose to chat with him from atop the bed, while Lady Bird Johnson nestled under the covers. Three years later, when the Nixons moved into the White House, he had discovered there were wires under that bed—wires, that is, to make tape recordings.

Reagan laughed at the story and its irony. The White House taping system, of course, was what had eventually led to Nixon's resignation.

Returning from his reverie to the situation at hand, Nixon took his awkward attempt at humor one final step further. He said that Carlucci could take written notes of the meeting if he wanted, and then joked: "I assume that the place isn't taped." Trying to ease the awkwardness, Reagan asked Nixon if he'd like a drink. Nixon, who'd enjoyed his share of cocktails in the White House, might have liked one, but decided that Reagan's offer seemed a bit late and perfunctory. He declined.

This was not to be a social occasion. Reagan and his top aides had invited Nixon to this clandestine White House meeting to talk about the Soviet Union. They wanted Nixon's endorsement for far-reaching new steps Reagan was preparing to take with the Soviet Communist Party secretary, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, steps that were aimed at easing the nuclear standoff of the Cold War. Nixon wasn't going to give Reagan what he wanted.

This was not merely a meeting of two men, or even of two presidents. Reagan and Nixon were more than that: they had been the two most successful anti-Communist politicians of the entire Cold War. Between them, their careers had spanned virtually the entire period. In the late 1940s, Nixon, as a young congressman, had led the campaign against Alger Hiss, the former State Department official who was eventually convicted of perjury after being accused of serving as an agent of the Soviet Union. In the early 1980s, Reagan, as president, had branded the Soviet Union an "evil empire."

When it came to the foreign policy of the Cold War, Harry Truman held pride of place among America's leaders; his administration had come up with both the strategy and the structure for containing the Soviet Union. For charting the paranoiac outer limits of American anticommunism, Senator Joseph McCarthy was the symbol of the age. But for sheer electoral politics, for comprehending the mood and voting habits of the nation, no other American leaders of the Cold War could compare with these two men, Nixon and Reagan. Each man had mounted a full-scale nationwide

campaign for the White House three times. Each had won the presidency twice. Nixon had also been elected twice as Dwight D. Eisenhower's vice president. Of the ten presidential elections in the United States in the Cold War era from the end of World War II through 1984, there had only been two (1948 and 1964) in which neither Nixon nor Reagan had figured prominently as either a presidential candidate or as a vice presidential nominee.

The two men were, essentially, of the same generation; both had been born in the half decade before the outbreak of World War I. Reagan was two years older than Nixon. Politically, however, Nixon was the senior figure, having begun to run for office much earlier in life. In the 1940s and 1950s, while Reagan pursued an acting career, Nixon had served as congressman, senator, and vice president. For most of the time Reagan was governor of California, his first job in public life, Nixon overshadowed him as president of the United States.

Yet Reagan, once he started in politics, proved to have an unsurpassed touch with American voters, one that Nixon had sought but always failed to achieve. Nixon could never escape the accurate perception that he was a career politician; Reagan, having not campaigned for public office until age fifty-five, managed to convey the impression, an inaccurate one, that he was a reluctant candidate, one who stood outside of politics and whose career was elsewhere. Nixon's identity was built upon the fact that he suffered adversity along with the victories; he had lost the 1960 presidential election, failed when he ran for governor of California in 1962, and finally, lost the White House and support of the nation in the middle of his second term. By contrast, Reagan won virtually every election in which he ran. Even the lone exception, the time Reagan didn't win, demonstrated his popularity: in 1976 Reagan challenged an incumbent president, Gerald Ford, for the Republican nomination, winning several primaries before he was defeated.

“IT’S TIME TO STROKE RONNIE”

Reagan and Nixon had dealt with each other in a cordial if guarded fashion for more than a quarter century, since Nixon’s presidential campaign in 1960. At that time, Reagan was still a Democrat, a devoted admirer of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. In 1950, Reagan had even campaigned for the Democrats against Nixon when Nixon had run for the Senate against Helen Gahagan Douglas (whose husband, the actor Melvyn Douglas, was Reagan’s friend).

Reagan had grown ever more disenchanted with the Democrats through the 1950s. After first hoping Dwight Eisenhower might run for president as a Democrat, he voted for Eisenhower on the Republican ticket. Later in the decade, Reagan began speaking out against the evils of big government, high taxes, and communism while touring the country as a spokesman for General Electric. Nixon, who had noticed what Reagan was saying, asked for his support in the 1960 campaign against John F. Kennedy. Reagan gave his assent and told Nixon he planned to switch his party registration to Republican. But Nixon asked him not to do so: it would be better, Nixon said, if Reagan endorsed him and campaigned for him as a Democrat. This was, in retrospect, an episode tinged with irony. Despite Reagan’s help, Nixon never succeeded in attracting many Democrats; but two decades later, Reagan himself would build a new Republican majority with his startling ability to win over formerly loyal Democrat voters.¹

Reagan finally registered as a Republican in 1962, supporting Nixon’s losing race for governor of California. Then, encouraged by wealthy conservative friends, Reagan began to move into Republican politics himself—and for a time in the 1960s he emerged as a potential rival to Nixon. The week before the 1964 election, Reagan delivered a nationwide television speech on behalf of Barry Goldwater, repeating his favorite antigovernment themes. Goldwater lost badly, but Reagan’s speech transformed him from the role of actor to rising political star, the natural heir to Goldwater’s conservative constituency.

After Reagan won California’s gubernatorial election in 1966, some of his conservative supporters and Reagan’s own staff began putting his name forward as a possible presidential candidate. The leading candidate for the 1968 Republican nomination was Nixon, who was seeking to occupy the center of the party, between Goldwater-Reagan conservatives on the right and the party’s liberal wing, which supported Nelson Rockefeller, on the left.

In July 1967, Nixon and Reagan crossed paths in northern California, where both were guests at the Bohemian Grove, the annual, exclusive all-male retreat of business executives and political leaders. Delivering the main address for the gathering, Nixon revived some of his traditional anti-Soviet themes. “They [Soviet leaders] seek victory, with peace being at this time a means towards that end,” Nixon asserted.

Outside the formal sessions, Nixon and Reagan sat down privately to talk presidential politics. On

bench under the lofty redwoods, Nixon probed Reagan's intentions concerning the coming presidential campaign. Nixon said he was planning to enter the presidential primaries. He would try to unite the party by campaigning only against Lyndon Johnson and the Democrats, not against other Republicans. This message was perfectly tailored to appeal to Reagan's loyalties. One of the enduring clichés of Republican politics, the Eleventh Commandment, which holds that "thou shalt not speak ill of another fellow Republican," originated during California's 1966 gubernatorial campaign, when Reagan was an untested new candidate. His political strategists were trying to prevent attacks by his Republican primary opponent, San Francisco mayor George Christopher. "We created [the Eleventh Commandment] for his protection," recalled Stuart Spencer, Reagan's political consultant in the 1966 campaign.²

During their Bohemian Grove meeting, Reagan told Nixon that he really didn't want to run for president but would allow his name to be put forward as a favorite-son candidate from California. He said he wanted to do so in order to preserve party unity within the state's delegation and to smooth over the divisions between Rockefeller and Goldwater forces that had plagued the party in 1964.³ Though Reagan, like Nixon, managed to advance his own political interests while cloaking them in the guise of what was best for the Republican Party.

As he often did, Reagan was feigning modesty. As the 1968 presidential campaign unfolded, he began touring the country to give speeches, and while he didn't enter the primaries, neither did he forswear the nomination. Yet a full-scale Reagan campaign never materialized that year. Nixon had managed to lock up the endorsements of other prominent conservatives, including Goldwater and Strom Thurmond, the leader of the newly emerging southern Republicans. Reagan's own aides seemed to be far more enthusiastic about the 1968 campaign than Reagan himself, who had just settled into his new life as governor. "We pushed . . . , but Reagan was not interested, really, in being president [in 1968]," Lyn Nofziger, who served as Reagan's communications director when he was governor of California, later ruefully concluded. "He gave us damn little help, I must say. . . . What we did, we did pretty much on our own."⁴ As the Republican National Convention in Miami opened, Nofziger and former California senator William Knowland persuaded Reagan to drop his status as merely a favorite-son candidate of California Republicans and declare himself a full-fledged nationwide candidate. They hoped Reagan on the right and Rockefeller on the left could come up with enough delegates to deny Nixon the nomination.

Reagan went along with this last-minute strategy, but it did no good. At the convention in Miami, Nixon won easily on the first ballot. Later, William Safire, who was working for Nixon, would observe that the potential challenge from Reagan had been "the only one that Nixon had ever been concerned about." Reagan later maintained he was relieved when Nixon was nominated. "I knew I wasn't ready to be president," Reagan said.⁵

After Nixon was elected president in 1968, he and Reagan no longer saw themselves as rivals. From the White House, Nixon was cordial to Reagan—understandably so, since Reagan was the Republican governor of the largest state in the nation. In response, Reagan treated Nixon with considerable deference.

Privately, however, Nixon spoke of Reagan with disdain. Brent Scowcroft, who was working on the

National Security Council (NSC) as an aide to Henry Kissinger, recalled years later that the president thought of Reagan as a lightweight politician, someone who should not be taken too seriously. “Nixon used to call me periodically, and he’d say, ‘It’s time to stroke Ronnie. Find somewhere for him to go on a presidential mission,’ ” Scowcroft said. “So we’d send Reagan out here and there and elsewhere.”⁶ Reagan made four trips overseas as a presidential emissary for Nixon, meeting with eighteen heads of state. Nixon always provided him with the trappings: an Air Force plane, Secret Service protection, and other aides to pay all of Reagan’s expenses. Reagan later joked that he’d only traveled to seven European countries for Nixon with a total of \$5.11 in his pocket.

Although officials such as Scowcroft made light of these trips, they served a political purpose. Nixon used them in order to profit from Reagan’s anti-Communist credentials. The most important mission was to Taiwan less than three months after Nixon had stunned the world by announcing that Henry Kissinger, his national security adviser, had paid a secret visit to Beijing. Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government was celebrating its sixtieth birthday on October 10, 1971, and Nixon sent Reagan to Taipei as his special envoy to the festivities. The trip provided some small degree of reassurance to Chiang and his aides that the United States would not abandon them. More important, Reagan’s mission helped Nixon protect his political flanks at home by demonstrating that America’s most prominent conservative politician was working alongside Nixon and would not oppose his new opening to China.

From Sacramento, Reagan strongly defended Nixon throughout the Watergate scandal until the very end of his presidency. On August 6, 1974, as Nixon’s support in Washington was rapidly collapsing, Reagan said he had finally changed his mind and concluded that Nixon had not told the public the truth about Watergate. Even then, Reagan said he still felt that Nixon should not step down and that instead, the “constitutional process” of impeachment should go forward.⁷ Nixon resigned three days later after even Barry Goldwater told him that he had lost virtually all support in the Senate and that Goldwater himself might have to vote for impeachment.

Two months later, when Nixon—by then a depressed, shunned, and marginalized ex-president—was hospitalized in California with potentially life-threatening blood clots in his leg, an apparently distraught Reagan called to cheer him up. “Gov. Reagan called and told Tricia, ‘I just hope your father knows how many people love him and are pulling for him,’ ” Julie Nixon Eisenhower told her father in a handwritten note. “What we want to tell you about the call is that Gov. Reagan could hardly speak because he was so emotional—really crying.”⁸

Gradually, the relationship between Nixon and Reagan began to shift. In the mid-to-late 1970s, Reagan was the rising Republican star, while Nixon remained a political untouchable. The former president began to court the aspiring presidential candidate, sending him regular letters, memos, speeches, and newspaper clips, usually offering bits of advice. Reagan always responded graciously, but cautiously.

On August 20, 1976, after Reagan’s challenge to President Ford failed at the Republican convention, Nixon sent him a handwritten note of consolation. “Having won a few and lost a few, I can say that winning is a lot more fun!” Nixon said. “But you can take pride that in losing you conducted yourself magnificently. . . . Keep fighting and speaking for those ideals in which you so deeply believe.” Reagan’s thank-you note supplied the tidbits of insider politics and anti-Rockefeller

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