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The Lost Art of Ideological Warfare

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In late May 1988, President Reagan traveled to Moscow for his fourth summit with General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. It was the first visit by an American President to the Soviet Union in 14 years. Reagan's team wanted to use the summit to continue diplomatic progress on items like the release of political prisoners, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.¹

It was hard, however, to escape the perception that the event marked a culmination of the Reagan administration's engagement with the Soviet Union. In fact, the Moscow summit was a culmination not of Reagan's personal diplomacy with Gorbachev, but rather of his ideological struggle to defeat Soviet Communism. With the benefit of hindsight, Reagan's address at Moscow State University, coming on the penultimate day of the summit, reads like a victory speech marking the end of the Cold War.

Reagan was not just celebrating the defeat of Soviet Communism, he was ushering it in. Properly understood, Moscow State was Reagan's coup-de-grace in a long campaign of ideological warfare he began soon after entering office. While this campaign was less heralded than Reagan's military buildup, it was no less important. It focused his administration's strategy for competition with the Soviet Union on the Soviet center of gravity: Marxist-Leninism.

Today the United States again finds itself competing with a great power in the East whose ideology challenges that of the West. As Vice President Pence recently argued, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represents a generational challenge to American leadership and our values.² While competition with the CCP is inevitable, an American victory is not. In order to prevail in its 21st century struggle against the Chinese Communist Party, the United States will have to relearn the lost art of ideological warfare. Reagan's speech at Moscow State provides an instructive path for us to follow. Only by challenging the basic legitimacy of the CCP can the

¹ George P. Schultz to Ronald Reagan, *Memorandum for the President: The Moscow Summit*, Memorandum, *The Reagan Files*, <http://www.thereaganfiles.com/19880500-shultz-to-reagan.pdf>

² Mike Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China" (speech, The Hudson Institute, October 4, 2018), The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>

United States win this competition, and thereby ensure the defense of the free, open, and prosperous world that Reagan foresaw in Moscow.

The Ideological Cold War

In 1977, Reagan described a simple goal to end the Cold War: “We win and they lose.”³ Reagan’s terse goal was radical at that time—it challenged the prevailing strategic consensus that the Soviet Union stood as a permanent fixture on the geopolitical landscape. Upon entering office four years later, he set about creating a framework for victory. Reagan’s Cold War theory of victory is best encapsulated in National Security Decision Directive (NSDD)-75.⁴ As lead NSC staff author Richard Pipes described it, NSDD-75 represented “a clear break from the past...[The] goal was no longer to coexist with the Soviet Union but to change the Soviet system.”⁵

To do this, NSDD-75 set out a three-pronged approach to engage the Soviet Union. The first two lines of effort involved competing militarily with, and exerting economic pressure on, the Soviets. The third and most ambitious line of effort involved ideological warfare. In the words of NSDD-75, “U.S. policy must have an ideological thrust which clearly affirms the superiority of U.S. and Western values of individual dignity and freedom, a free press, free trade unions, free enterprise, and political democracy over the repressive features of Soviet Communism.”⁶

Using ideological or political warfare—including at the level of presidential rhetoric—to advance grand strategic goals was not a new idea. Early in the Cold War, George Kennan defined political warfare as “the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives.”⁷ Many of Reagan’s predecessors had incorporated these tools into their attempts to contain the Soviet Union. For example, after the death of Stalin on March 6, 1953, Eisenhower delivered his famous “Chance for Peace” speech aimed to test whether specific steps could be taken to improve U.S.-Soviet relations, reduce the cost of armament, and reduce the likelihood of global war. The speech argued that Stalin’s death offered the Soviets a “precious opportunity” to open a new chapter in their foreign relations, choosing butter over guns.⁸ Eisenhower’s rhetoric was both sincere and strategic. Eisenhower wanted to reduce tensions with the Soviets. Yet he also put the onus for positive action on the enemy, while

³ Lee Edwards, Ph.D., “Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism,” The Heritage Foundation, January 2010, <https://www.heritage.org/report/ronald-reagan-and-the-fall-communism>

⁴ William P. Clark to the Vice President, et al., *NSDD 75 on “U.S. Relations with the USSR,”* January 17, 1983, Federation of American Scientists, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-75.pdf>

⁵ The Washington Times, “Crucial Cold War Secret,” January 13, 2008, *The Washington Times*, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/jan/13/crucial-cold-war-secret/>

⁶ William P. Clark to the Vice President, et al., *NSDD 75 on “U.S. Relations with the USSR,”* January 17, 1983, Federation of American Scientists, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-75.pdf>

⁷ George F. Kennan, “George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare,” April 30, 1948, Wilson Center Digital Archive: International History Declassified, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320.pdf?v=944c40c2ed95dc52d2d6966ce7666f90>

⁸ Quoted in Bowie and Immerman, 119.

deliberately provoking uncertainty within the Kremlin. The speech, in other words, was an act of ideological warfare.⁹

In the Reagan Administration, this form of ideological warfare became more prominent and more frequent. The theme of affirming the superiority of Western values that runs throughout NSDD-75 was articulated forcefully eight months earlier by Reagan in the United Kingdom. Standing before the House of Commons, Reagan laid the intellectual foundation of his ideological war on Marxist-Leninism. Criticizing the “shyness of some of us in the West” in standing for “ideals that have done so much to ease the plight of man and the hardships of our imperfect world,” Reagan called on the West to be “[f]ree people, worthy of freedom and determined not only to remain so but to help others gain their freedom as well.”¹⁰

A central theme of the Westminster speech, one that would help carry his ideological struggle to a successful conclusion, was Reagan’s deep and abiding sympathy and support for the Russian people. Arguing that the Soviet Union “runs against the tide of history by denying human freedom and human dignity to its citizens,” he observed how Soviet planning had left the regime “unable to feed its own people,” and while NATO forces faced east to prevent a possible invasion, “Soviet forces also face east to prevent their people from leaving.”¹¹

Westminster marked the purest distillation of Reagan’s ideological offensive against the Soviet Union. As he put it, “the regimes planted by totalitarianism have had more than 30 years to establish their legitimacy. But none—not one regime—has yet been able to risk free elections. Regimes planted by bayonets do not take root.”¹² He returned to this theme time and again throughout his administration to disrupt and undermine Soviet legitimacy. Expressing his support for Solidarity, Reagan took to heart the historic Polish motto, “[f]or our freedom and yours,” declaring that “we the people of the Free World stand as one with our Polish brothers and sisters. Their cause is ours.”¹³ Reagan’s backing of Solidarity extended beyond rhetoric to include an ambitious CIA covert action program that funneled substantial resources to the Polish activists.

Even when Reagan criticized the Soviet Union as a whole, he did so in a way that resonated with the regime’s primary victims. His famous depiction of the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” was cheered most loudly by Soviet dissidents, who covertly spread his message throughout Soviet prisons. As former political prisoner Natan Sharansky, who saw the impact of Reagan’s words

⁹ Waging political warfare, particularly with propaganda, was subsequently operationalized by the Psychology Strategy Board under the leadership of C. D. Jackson. For how this speech fit into Jackson’s plans for a broader psychological warfare offensive, see, “Proposed Plan for a Psychological Warfare Offensive,” EPL, White House Office, NSC Staff Papers, Disaster File, Box 51, “Eastern Europe (2)” and James S. Lay, Jr, “Memorandum for the Psychological Strategy Board,” March 12, 1953, EPL, White House Office, NSC Staff Papers, Disaster File, Box 51, “Eastern Europe (2).”

¹⁰ Ronald Reagan, “Address to Members of the British Parliament,” (speech, London, United Kingdom, June 8, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/60882a>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation About Christmas and the Situation in Poland,” (speech, Washington, DC, December 23, 1981), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/122381e>

firsthand while in the Soviet Chistopol prison, wrote: “Finally the leader of the free world had spoken the truth.”¹⁴

Bit by bit, Reagan built a case against the legitimacy of Soviet Communism. By allying himself with the oppressed peoples of the Eastern Bloc, Reagan sought to create exploitable distance between the Soviet leadership and its captive populations. The key was holding the Soviets to their own standards. During the height of Solidarity, he noted that the “Polish Government has trampled underfoot solemn commitments to the UN Charter and the Helsinki accords. It has even broken the Gdansk agreement of August 1980, by which the Polish Government recognized the basic right of its people to form free trade unions and to strike.”¹⁵ In Poland, the Soviet Union proper, and beyond, Reagan’s point was always the same: all people, especially those struggling under the grip of power untamed, were worthy of dignity, freedom, and economic opportunity.

Reagan in Moscow

For eight years, Reagan repeatedly made this case in speeches and in policies. In May 1988, he finally had the chance to make his ideological case against Marxist-Leninism in the heart of the Soviet Union. The President’s team correctly sensed that the Moscow summit would come across as something of a victory lap. As Secretary of State George Shultz wrote in a memo to Reagan preparing him for the summit, “The temptation in Moscow may be to look backward at all that has been achieved. The challenge will be to use the meeting to prepare the ground for further progress. We want the Moscow summit to be remembered as the place where our dialogue caught its second wind, not as its highwater mark.”¹⁶ Gorbachev seemed to share this perspective, and in his first interaction with Reagan in Moscow, stressed that he was determined to keep the momentum going even as the two sides had already changed the world for the better.¹⁷

While the trip was viewed as a diplomatic success, not much diplomatic business got done. In Reagan’s first one-on-one meeting with Gorbachev on the afternoon of May 29, Gorbachev proposed language for a joint statement emphasizing that no international disputes could or should be resolved militarily, and that they “regard peaceful coexistence as a universal principles of international relations. Equality of all states, non-interference in internal affairs and freedom of socio-political choice must be recognized as the inalienable and mandatory standards of international relations.”¹⁸ Reagan initially responded by saying he liked it, but Shultz and Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci later objected to the phrasing and offered an alternate statement that made no mention of military action, peaceful coexistence, or non-interference. In

¹⁴ Natan Sharansky with Ron Dermer, “The Case for Democracy,” *Public Affairs*, 2004, 138.

¹⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation About Christmas and the Situation in Poland,” (speech, Washington, DC, December 23, 1981), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/122381e>

¹⁶ ¹⁶ George P. Schultz to Ronald Reagan, *Memorandum for the President: The Moscow Summit*, Memorandum, *The Reagan Files*, <http://www.thereaganfiles.com/19880500-shultz-to-reagan.pdf>

¹⁷ Ronald Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *The President’s First One-on-One Meeting With General Secretary Gorbachev*, May 29, 1988, Moscow, Russia, Memorandum of Conversation, *The Reagan Files*, <http://www.thereaganfiles.com/moscow-summit-transcripts.pdf>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

their second plenary meeting on June 1, Gorbachev challenged Reagan to explain his specific objections to the Soviet language and chided him by suggesting he had agreed in principle only to be overruled by his subordinates. Reagan refused to reconsider the language, and the substantive portion of Reagan's visit concluded as both sides walked out to a ceremony to exchange documents ratifying the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.¹⁹

Despite Shultz's best efforts, the most significant dialogue of the summit happened not between Reagan and Gorbachev, but between Reagan and the students and faculty of Moscow State University, Gorbachev's alma mater. In what the *New York Times* called Reagan's "finest rhetorical hour," he "told the Moscow State University students what Americans mean by freedom. That's hard to do without turning pious or stale. Yet he was stirring... When people some day look back on the milestones of the cold war, they are likely to remember the day Ronald Reagan extolled freedom, while Lenin looked on."²⁰ As Peter Schweizer writes of the Moscow summit in *Reagan's War: The Epic Story of His Forty Year Struggle and Final Triumph*: "Little was accomplished in terms of diplomacy. There were no breakthroughs on arms control. But Reagan had come to the Soviet Union with a purpose—namely, to take the gospel of freedom into the heart of the Soviet empire. Now he could look back and say that he had accomplished his mission."²¹

If some in the audience had been expecting to hear hardline anti-communist rhetoric, they had not been paying attention to Reagan's ideological war. Rather than directly criticizing the Soviet regime, he criticized bureaucracy everywhere (including in the U.S.) while emphasizing commonalities between the Russian and American peoples. He talked about things more fun and fundamental than politics, like technology, literature, movies, and religion. In fact, the word "communism" did not appear anywhere in his speech. The word "freedom," on the other hand, appeared 23 times.

Reagan's goal was, of course, subversive. The point was to plant within the audience the understanding that freedom was a fundamental human right, as inalienable for Russians as it was for Americans. He did this in two ways.

First, he described how freedom was "something of a national pastime" for Americans.²² He detailed at length the freedoms enjoyed in the United States, from the lively election—including candidates from the Socialist Party—to replace him, to the thousands of independent television and radio stations, open and often heated debate on college campuses, freedom of assembly, and freedom of worship. Perhaps most compelling was his depiction of the rule of law. In stark contrast to the Soviet Union, where show trials had all too frequently demonstrated the inequity and arbitrary cruelty underlying the Soviet system, in the United States, in "any

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "With Lenin Watching," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1988, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/06/01/opinion/with-lenin-watching.html>

²¹ Peter Schweizer, *Reagan's War: The Epic Story of His Forty Year Struggle and Final Triumph*, (New York: Anchor books, 2003), 276.

²² Ronald Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University" (speech, May 31, 1988, Moscow, Russia), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/053188b>

courtroom...there will preside an independent judge, beholden to no government power. There every defendant has the right to a trial by a jury of his peers, usually 12 men and women -- common citizens; they are the ones, the only ones, who weigh the evidence and decide on guilt or innocence.”²³ In each case, the contrast with the Soviet Union was left implicit yet unmistakable.

Freedom was about more, however, than institutions. As Reagan described, freedom was about the individual worth and dignity of all people: “Freedom is the recognition that no single person, no single authority or government has a monopoly on the truth, but that every individual life is infinitely precious, that every one of us put on this world has been put there for a reason and has something to offer.”²⁴ Even if Soviet citizens had no firsthand experience with the freedoms Reagan described, they could understand his core message that the Soviet regime denied them their fundamental human dignity.

Second, Reagan connected these themes to Russian culture, arguing that Soviet citizens were no less deserving of freedom and dignity than their American counterparts. As he put it, “I hope you know I go on about these things not simply to extol the virtues of my own country but to speak to the true greatness of the heart and soul of your land.”²⁵ As Reagan put it, “one of the most eloquent contemporary passages on human freedom...comes, not from the literature of America, but from this country.” Quoting Boris Pasternak’s formerly banned novel *Doctor Zhivago*, Reagan argued that “what has for centuries raised man above the beast is not the cudgel, but an inward music—the irresistible power of unarmed truth.”²⁶

Reagan’s entire speech was an attempt to expose the “irresistible power of unarmed truth” for all of Moscow State to see: all individuals were equal in the eyes of their creator and imbued with a basic dignity that no government or bureaucrat could ever remove. The “inward music” that Reagan spoke about was freedom; denied temporarily by the weight of the Soviet state, it was beginning to play softly. Reagan’s goal was to make sure the Soviet people were listening. As he put it, “the marvelous sound of a new openness will keep rising through, ringing through, leading to a new world of reconciliation, friendship, and peace.”²⁷

Sensing that great change was afoot, Reagan urged—using a scene from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*—the Soviet people to come with him on a great leap of faith towards freedom. Noting how past adversaries like Great Britain, Germany, and Japan were now amongst America’s closest friends, Reagan extended the hand of friendship, calling increased human interaction between the two societies “a dream that is our responsibility to have come true.”²⁸

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University” (speech, May 31, 1988, Moscow, Russia), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/053188b>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

While all of this reflected Reagan's heartfelt optimism and deep conviction in the dignity of all people, behind the outward displays of friendship was an ideological nuclear strike. Reagan's message and logic was unmistakable: all people have worth, the Soviet system denies that inherent humanity, and if the Russian people were to cast off this system, America would be there alongside them in friendship.

Reagan closed with characteristic optimism: "We do not know what the conclusion will be of this journey, but we're hopeful that the promise of reform will be fulfilled. In this Moscow spring, this May 1988, we may be allowed that hope: that freedom, like the fresh green sapling planted over Tolstoy's grave, will blossom forth at last in the rich fertile soil of your people and culture."²⁹

For a time, Reagan was right. Across Eastern Europe, the inward music of freedom transitioned into the Ode to Joy as the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union was relegated to the ash heap of history. Unfortunately, history did not end with the collapse of the Evil Empire that Reagan had done so much to destroy.

Refining the Technological Instruments of Repression

Reagan's faith in political freedom was matched by his faith in economic freedom. In fact, the two were deeply connected. Much of his optimism for freedom's eventual triumph over totalitarianism stemmed from his understanding that the economic malaise of Communism would eventually undermine the Soviet government. He articulated this point most explicitly in Westminster, observing that "[i]n an ironic sense Karl Marx was right. We are witnessing today a great revolutionary crisis, a crisis where the demands of the economic order are conflicting directly with those of the political order. But the crisis is happening not in the free, non-Marxist West, but in the home of Marxist-Leninism, the Soviet Union."³⁰

Reagan's thesis was simple: allowing human liberty in economic affairs would bring prosperity and higher standards of living, and eventually give rise to political liberalization. At Moscow State, Reagan argued that the informational technology revolution was hastening this process as it "quietly [swept] the globe without bloodshed or conflict. Its effects are peaceful, but they will fundamentally alter our world, shatter old assumptions, and reshape our lives."³¹

The implications of this global economic transformation were not subtle. As Reagan put it, "we're emerging from the economy of the Industrial Revolution" into one "in which there are no bounds on human imagination and the freedom to create is the most precious natural resource."³² Advances in microchips, robotics, genetics would open up endless possibilities, meaning "one individual with a desktop computer and a telephone commands resources unavailable to the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Address to Members of the British Parliament," (speech, London, United Kingdom, June 8, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/60882a>

³¹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University" (speech, May 31, 1988, Moscow, Russia), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/053188b>

³² Ibid.

largest governments just a few years ago.”³³ With freedom of thought, information, and communication, it was possible to break “through the material conditions of existence to a world where man creates his own destiny.”³⁴ As Reagan expanded on the changes this revolution would bring, it was not hard to see his ultimate message: technology was making Marxist-Leninism, a byproduct of the industrial era, obsolete.³⁵

Reagan’s optimism over economic change was not limited to the Soviet Union. As he surveyed the world in 1988, Reagan saw democracy and economic freedom spreading in places like South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Latin America. As he argued at Moscow State: “Perhaps most exciting are the winds of change that are blowing over the People’s Republic of China, where one-quarter of the world’s population is now getting its first taste of economic freedom.”³⁶

This technological and political optimism, so obvious in 1988 and seemingly vindicated into the early 1990s, has not aged well. Last year, Freedom House reported the 13th consecutive annual decline in global freedom, with diminishing rates of open electoral processes and freedom of expression, as well increasing instances of ethnic cleansing and consolidation of power among governmental executives.³⁷ Reagan’s optimism missed the mark most widely in China, where one year after he spoke with the students at Moscow State, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) brutally massacred thousands of its own students in Tiananmen Square.

The People’s Republic of China today is an unmistakable counterpoint to Reagan’s argument about economic liberalization and political reform. In the decades since Tiananmen, although the Chinese economy has transformed, the CCP has only increased its control of everyday life. In a trend Freedom House has described as “digital authoritarianism,” advanced technologies have played a key role in cementing the Party’s increasingly totalitarian control.³⁸

Skyrocketing domestic surveillance investments by the CCP underpin an Orwellian surveillance state highlighted by a pilot “social credit” system that rates Chinese citizens according to their behavior. The system measures everything from credit-worthiness, adherence to traffic and pedestrian regulations, criminal activity, volunteer activity, shopping habits, online interactions, and loyalty to the Party.³⁹ According to the CCP, the credit system “will allow the trustworthy to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Reagan comes close to saying this outright: “In the new economy, human invention increasingly makes physical resources obsolete. We’re breaking through the material conditions of existence to a world where man creates his own destiny.”

³⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University” (speech, May 31, 1988, Moscow, Russia), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/053188b>

³⁷ *Democracy in Retreat: Freedom in the World 2019*, New York: Freedom House, 2019.

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat>

³⁸ *Freedom on the Net 2018: The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism*, New York: Freedom House, 2018.

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism>

³⁹ Josh Chin and Gillian Wong, “China’s New Tool for Social Control: A Credit Rating for Everything,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-new-tool-for-social-control-a-credit-rating-for-everything-1480351590>

roam freely under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step.”⁴⁰ In practice, the Party will provide top-scoring citizens with rewards such as a leg-up for better schools and jobs, easy credit, and access to luxury hotels.⁴¹ Conversely, individuals who demonstrate insufficient loyalty to the CCP can be locked out of employment and prevented from traveling.⁴² The program is currently being tested with an expected nationwide launch in 2020.⁴³

Advances in artificial intelligence and data mining help make this social credit system feasible.⁴⁴ Facial recognition software matches video captured in public and runs it through government databases, allowing officials to quickly track and locate individuals, monitoring for everything from jaywalking to seditious activities. With more than 200 million surveillance cameras in China today and a projected 300 million by 2020, facial recognition technology is so pervasive that it is even being brought to public restrooms in Beijing.⁴⁵ In Xiangyang, photos of jaywalkers and unsafe drivers are publicly broadcast on a large screen, along with government identification.⁴⁶ Many of the facial images are passed to a data-driven police system named Skynet.⁴⁷

Since Chinese law requires companies to “support, assist, and cooperate with state intelligence work,” individuals have no expectation of privacy in their own homes.⁴⁸ The CCP could have access to intimate details such as the websites where individuals shop, the comments they post, and the media they consume.⁴⁹ To make matters worse, scores will likely also depend on those of friends and family members. Individuals who partake in seditious activities like researching human rights abuses may end up lowering the scores of their relatives—creating an atmosphere of distrust and paranoia.⁵⁰

⁴⁰ Matthew Carney, “Leave No Dark Corner,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation News*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-18/china-social-credit-a-model-citizen-in-a-digital-dictatorship/10200278>

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Josh Chin and Gillian Wong, “China’s New Tool for Social Control: A Credit Rating for Everything,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-new-tool-for-social-control-a-credit-rating-for-everything-1480351590>

⁴⁴ Anna Mitchell and Larry Diamond, “China’s Surveillance State Should Scare Everyone,” *The Atlantic*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/china-surveillance/552203/>

⁴⁵ Paul Mozur, “Inside China’s Dystopian Dreams: A.I., Shame and Lots of Cameras,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/08/business/china-surveillance-technology.html>; “‘Toilet reform’ hot in Beijing,” *People’s Daily Online*, July 5, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0705/c90000-9478073.html>

⁴⁶ Paul Mozur, “Inside China’s Dystopian Dreams: A.I., Shame and Lots of Cameras,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/08/business/china-surveillance-technology.html>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Murray Scot Tanner, “Beijing’s New National Intelligence Law: From Defense to Offense,” *Lawfare Blog*, July 20, 2017, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/beijings-new-national-intelligence-law-defense-offense>

⁴⁹ Josh Chin and Gillian Wong, “China’s New Tool for Social Control: A Credit Rating for Everything,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-new-tool-for-social-control-a-credit-rating-for-everything-1480351590>

⁵⁰ Anna Mitchell and Larry Diamond, “China’s Surveillance State Should Scare Everyone,” *The Atlantic*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/china-surveillance/552203/>

The CCP has already begun exporting its growing surveillance state beyond its borders. Venezuela has hired ZTE to build a “fatherland card” that mimics the CCP’s social credit system. Huawei has partnered with Mexico to build “the largest public Wi-Fi network in Latin America,” Malaysian police are equipped with automated facial recognition cameras made by Yitu, and Chinese officials hold regular trainings and seminars on “information management” with foreign government partners.⁵¹ As Freedom House cautions, “Beijing’s desire and capacity to spread totalitarian models of digitally enabled social control pose a major risk to democracy worldwide.”⁵²

During a darker hour of the Cold War than the Moscow spring of 1988, Reagan observed that “[o]ptimism comes less easily today, not because democracy is less vigorous, but because democracy’s enemies have refined their instruments of repression.”⁵³ This is even more true today. As Reagan put it at Westminster, “democracy is not a fragile flower. Still it needs cultivating.”⁵⁴ Cultivating democracy against the CCP’s techno-authoritarianism is America’s generational challenge. While this competition will have military and economic components, ultimately, these lines of effort are secondary to the ideological competition. In Reagan’s words, “the ultimate determinant in the struggle that’s now going on in the world will not be bombs and rockets, but a test of wills and ideas, a trial of spiritual resolve, the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish, the ideals to which we are dedicated.”⁵⁵

Great Power Ideological Competition

The Trump administration’s National Security Strategy (NSS) acknowledges a bipartisan foreign policy failure over the last three decades “rooted in the belief that support for China’s rise and for its integration into the post-war international order would liberalize China.”⁵⁶ The NSS argues that the United States must change course and recognize America is in a “fundamentally political [contest] between those who favor repressive systems and those who favor free societies.”⁵⁷ As the National Defense Strategy notes, “It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic, and security decisions.”⁵⁸

In other words, the United States once again finds itself in a long-term competition with a great power adversary. In order to ensure that its 21st century struggle against totalitarianism is as successful as Reagan’s, the United States will have to influence and win over two distinct groups: third-party nations and Chinese citizens. Success on both of these fronts will depend on

⁵¹ *Freedom on the Net 2018: The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism*, New York: Freedom House, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism>

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Ronald Reagan, “Address to Members of the British Parliament,” (speech, London, United Kingdom, June 8, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/60882a>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Donald Trump, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> 25

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf> 2

ideological warfare to discredit the CCP in the eyes of potential foreign partners and, ultimately, the Chinese people.

No one understands this better than General Secretary Xi Jinping, who has exhaustively studied the Soviet collapse.⁵⁹ Xi's most interesting conclusion is that the Soviets were insufficiently dedicated to ideology.⁶⁰ According to Xi, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union became corrupted by wealth, leading to a loss of faith and political legitimacy. As Xi put it, "The wavering of idealistic faith is the most dangerous form of wavering. A political party's decline often starts with the loss or lack of idealistic faith."⁶¹

As a result, Xi has gone to great lengths to re-assert the importance of ideology and the CCP in the conduct of PRC affairs of state. In May 2018, he hosted a weeklong celebration to mark the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth. Events included a mandatory "study session" for senior officials on *The Communist Manifesto*, a five-part mass-market television documentary titled "Marx Was Right," and a major speech by Xi on Marx's legacy in the Great Hall of the People.⁶²

Xi's goal is not necessarily to ensure the Chinese population is ideologically pure, but rather to defend his government by using Marxism-Leninism as a source of domestic legitimacy. In speaking about the Soviet collapse, Xi has warned, "In the USSR, where the military was depoliticised, separated from the party and nationalised, the party was disarmed."⁶³ It is no coincidence that Xi's ambitious programs such as Made in China 2025 and the Belt and Road Initiative have the practical effect of energizing the Chinese population and heightening their faith in the Chinese Communist Party. As Xi put it, bringing back a Mao-era slogan, "east, west, south, north and center—the party leads everything."⁶⁴

After all, when faith in the Party flags, the entire system risks collapse. Xi's challenge, to continually convince 1.4 billion people that the CCP should remain in power and that foreign governments should partner with his ethnocentric totalitarian government, is no small task. It would be great power competition malpractice for the United States to fail in making Xi's efforts more difficult.

To wage a Reagan-style ideological offensive against the CCP, the United States must first promote its track record and values as a direct contrast to the CCP. America's diplomatic and development achievements are an indispensable public diplomacy asset that the CCP cannot hope to match. As Reagan pointed out in Moscow, even former adversaries, once incorporated into the American-led international community, have prospered economically and politically.

⁵⁹ Damian Grammaticas, "China's New President Xi Jinping: A Man With a Dream," *BBC News*, March 14, 2013 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-21790384>

⁶⁰ Martin McKenzie-Murray, "Inside China's 'United Front,'" *The Saturday Paper*, Edition No. 194, March 3-9, 2018, <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2018/03/03/inside-chinas-united-front/15199956005888>

⁶¹ Graham Allison, *Destined for War*, 119-120.

⁶² Steven Jiang, "At the Height of His Power, China's Xi Jinping Moves to Embrace Marxism," *CNN*, May 18, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/17/asia/xi-jinping-marxism-china-intl/index.html>

⁶³ Damian Grammaticas, "China's New President Xi Jinping: A Man With a Dream," *BBC News*, March 14, 2013 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-21790384>

⁶⁴ Parellio-Plesner and Li, *The Chinese Communist Party's Foreign Interference Operations: How the U.S. and Other Democracies Should Respond*, 7.

America's historic magnanimity is especially potent in light of the CCP's growing reputation for debt traps, economic coercion, and regional bullying. American policy makers should emphasize both US successes and the many examples of CCP coercion abroad at every possible opportunity to drive this difference home.

Highlighting divergent records and values is critical because, as one Chinese academic wrote in 2011, "the core of competition between China and the United States will be to see who has more high-quality friends."⁶⁵ Xi and his cadres are working daily to turn American allies neutral, and to get neutral states to lean toward China. Despite well-publicized financial risks associated with Chinese investment, if this calculation comes down to a strictly economic decision, investment-starved nations are unlikely to turn down Xi's offer. America's challenge is to make a values-driven ideological case that demonstrates the downsides associated with CCP alignment are not worth the cheap capital.

Secondly, the U.S. must make it more difficult for the CCP to leverage emerging technologies to exercise domestic political control. Taking a page from the Reagan Administration's emphasis on the Coordination Committee for Multilateral Export Controls, which sought to block the transfer of sensitive technologies to the Soviet Union, Congress should build on recent legislation to modernize the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States. Next steps include increasing scrutiny on joint ventures where national security or surveillance-related technology could wind up in the hands of the CCP. At the same time, legislators should consider legislation that would block US technologies from export to PRC telecommunications companies like Huawei and ZTE. The private sector should chip in, too. Silicon Valley should broaden its definition of Corporate Social Responsibility to exclude technology partnerships with Chinese firms that are likely to lead to human rights abuses and the CCP surveillance state.

Finally, American policymakers must differentiate between the Chinese people and the CCP. A key element in the CCP's ideological warfare strategy is collapsing the distinction between the Party and the Chinese people.⁶⁶ Just as Reagan sympathized with and supported Soviet citizens against the regime that oppressed them while threatening the external world, the U.S. today must make clear it has no quarrel with the Chinese public. Vice President Pence hit the right note last October when he emphasized CCP oppression, including of religious minorities, and quoted Chinese proverbs at length.⁶⁷ The key is to demonstrate, in ways that resonate with the Chinese people, that the CCP is its oppressor and not its champion. At every opportunity, American policymakers should highlight the concentration camps of Xinjiang and make the case that this arbitrary mass detention and pervasive surveillance state is the logical conclusion of a corrupt regime.

⁶⁵ Yan Xuetong, "How China Can Defeat America," *The New York Times*, November 20, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/21/opinion/how-china-can-defeat-america.html>

⁶⁶ John Garnaut, "How China Interferes in Australia," *Foreign Affairs*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-03-09/how-china-interferes-australia>

⁶⁷ Mike Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China" (speech, The Hudson Institute, October 4, 2018), The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>

Discrediting the CCP in the eyes of the world and the Chinese people will not be an easy process. Ideological warfare is seldom simple. Yet as Reagan demonstrated, it is effective. Reagan's relentless ideological war against Soviet communism played a key role in the eventual destruction of the Soviet Union. Capped by his performance at Moscow State, Reagan convinced the Soviet people that they had nothing to fear from the United States and everything to gain if they cast off their oppressors. It was an optimistic message, one that Soviet leaders could not counter.

As Reagan knew well, "progress is not foreordained. The key is freedom—freedom of thought, freedom of information, freedom of communication." Today, all of these are under threat from the Chinese Communist Party. The United States may be in an earlier stage of its great power competition than Reagan was during the Moscow spring of 1988, but his roadmap to victory is no less relevant today. By rediscovering the lost art of ideological warfare, the United States can live up to Reagan's legacy and ensure that the Chinese Communist Party joins the Soviet Union on the ash heap of history.