U.S Policy and the Collapse of the Soviet Union

Hanne Amundsen

Master Thesis

Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, Faculty of Humanities

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Hanne Amundsen

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IV
Abstract

This thesis examines whether the United States played a significant role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is focused around three factors which presumably may have played a role in the demise of the USSR. The first factor concerns the unintended consequences of the Helsinki accords. The Helsinki accords were signed in 1975 by thirty-five countries, including the Soviet Union and the United States. The final basket of the agreement, which would become known as the Final Act, called for the signatory countries to improve and respect basic human rights principles. When the USSR did not adhere to these principles, it led to a continuous pressure from the U.S. to improve human rights conditions. I examine whether this pressure had any effect on the Soviet leadership’s choice of policies, especially in regard to separatism in the republics. The second factor concerns the announcement of Ronald Reagan to develop the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a space-based shield able to intercept incoming missiles. This thesis examines whether the Soviet leadership began to increase their nuclear capacity as a response to SDI, further undermining their economy leading to its collapse. The third, and final factor focuses on the Soviet defense burden, and whether the arms race with the United States during the Cold War played a role in the Soviet collapse by severely straining the Soviet economy.

The method used to approach these factors have been to consult memoirs, autobiographies and diaries of central Soviet politicians and people working in the military-industrial complex to provide a Soviet point-of-view of the relevant questions I have asked. Additionally, I have made use of available online archive material. By consulting these types of sources, I have been able to get an insight into how the Soviet leadership approached these issues at top-level meetings with the United States. Upon examining these sources, it has become clear that the United States’ role in the collapse of the Soviet Union was at most minimal. I have argued that the Soviet economy collapsed from its own intrinsic causes, and that SDI did not lead to increases in Soviet military spending. I have further argued that the minimal role the U.S. played in the Soviet collapse can be seen through its role of pushing forward liberal reforms in the USSR by constantly reminding the Soviet leadership of the principles they agreed to in Helsinki in 1975.
Acknowledgments

The idea behind this thesis came during a study-abroad semester in St.Petersburg in the spring of 2016. I asked one of my professors, Dmitriy Goncharov, about ideas for a research paper which I later could use as a springboard for my master thesis. He suggested “international factors in the collapse of the Soviet Union”, which subsequently led me to writing this thesis. I would therefore first and foremost like to thank professor Dmitriy Goncharov at Higher School of Economics in St.Petersburg for the exiting idea behind this thesis.

I further wish to thank the following:

My supervisor, Pål Kolstø, for your guidance, support and constructive inputs during the entire process. I would not have been able to finish this thesis without your help.

Sing In Ng, for reading the entire thesis and for helping me out when I have been knocking my head against the wall.

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Last, but not least, my better half, Henrik Grimshei. Thank you for your endless love and support and for sticking out with me during the entire process. You truly are my hero.
Transliteration

Russian proper names have been transliterated to Latin letters by using the BGN/PCGN 1947 system\(^1\):

А а: a
Б б: b
В в: v
Г г: g
Д д: d
Е е: e or ye
Ё ё: ë or yë
Ж ж: zh
З з: z
И и: i
Й й: y
К к: k
Л л: l
М м: m
Н н: n
О о: o

\(^1\) U.S. Board on Geographic Names. Foreign Names Committee Staff, “Romanization Systems and Roman-Script Spelling Conventions”, 93-94.
I have followed this system with one exception. In the case of Mikhail Gorbachev, I have transliterated his last name in accordance with the common spelling, Gorbachev, not Gorbachëv.
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1 Introduction

In the beginning of the 1990s, the world stood as witnesses as the previously great superpower, the Soviet Union, disintegrated and eventually collapsed. The Soviet Union no longer existed, but was split up into fifteen independent successor states across the Eurasian map. Despite these enormous changes, which have been claimed to be the final ending of the Cold War, the Soviet Union disintegrated peacefully. Explanations of these events have been of central concern to social scientists and historians, and the reforms and domestic policy of Mikhail Gorbachev have been the most emphasized factors in this research. However, because of the competitive environment during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, some scholars have raised the question whether the Soviet collapse can be attributed to Western policies. One of these was Alexander Dallin. A year after the Soviet collapse he presented in his article “Causes of the Collapse of the USSR” three hypotheses for possible Western influences on the demise of the Soviet Union:

In regard to explicit policy by Western powers, it is impossible to find direct evidence of its destabilizing impact on Soviet society or polity, though at least three factors can be assumed to have played some role: (1) the unintended consequences of the inclusion of “Basket 3” (on human rights) in the Helsinki accords of 1975; (2) a heightening of the fear of nuclear war; and (3) almost certainly the strains imposed by the defense burden.

The topic question raised in this thesis is whether U.S. policies were a significant factor behind the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In order to provide an answer to this, I wish to set out to confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses of Dallin with new material and information which has been made available over the last twenty years since he published his article.

The direct role of Western policies in the collapse of the Soviet Union is difficult to isolate, and to confine it to a singular factor would be unreasonable, because we must assume that the Soviet Union collapsed as a result of several concurrent factors. That is why I have set out to use the three hypotheses of Dallin, rather than focusing on only one factor. The general scholarly opinion appears to be somewhat divided to the role of the West in bringing down

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the Soviet Union, but most of the researchers who discuss this topic touch on the subjects presented by Dallin. When Dallin published his article, only a small portion of it was devoted to the Western role in the Soviet collapse, and he presented his hypotheses without any further explanation or analysis. By setting out to confirm or disconfirm his hypotheses, I believe this thesis could prove useful by giving a more thorough answer to his statements. In the twenty years that have passed since his article was published, more research in this area has been produced, including archive material which has been declassified, and it is possible for me to gain more material to base my conclusion on. I hope this thesis can provide an analysis from a new perspective that can shed light on some of the issues the Soviet administration had to deal with in its relationship with the West. I wish to state that this thesis does not intend to provide a final cause or “solution” for the Soviet collapse, but rather to shed light on whether Western factors can be included among the several other factors leading to the Soviet collapse.

1.1 Research Questions and Thesis Outline

I have organized the chapters in this thesis in accordance with Dallin’s hypotheses. It begins with the unintended consequences of the human rights portion of the Helsinki accords in chapter two. Since Dallin failed to elaborate further on his hypothesis, it has been necessary for me to find a suitable interpretation of his statement. As far as the unintended consequences of the Helsinki accords are concerned, I first considered it to have included the establishment of Helsinki groups across the USSR and their role in the dismantling of Soviet rule. However, their role in dismantling of Soviet rule can be considered more as internal causes, and not necessarily suitable for this thesis. The question of the role of human rights and the Helsinki accords in the Soviet collapse was discussed by Celeste Wallander in her article “Western policy and the demise of the Soviet Union”. Her approach was to raise the question whether “Western support for human rights within the Soviet Union, particularly in the Baltic republics, constrained Gorbachev’s choice of policies to deal with separatism, and thereby contribute to the breakup of the union?” To provide an answer to Dallin’s first hypothesis, I have chosen to use the same formulation of the question as Wallander. The chapter begins with a brief background presentation of the Helsinki accords and its initial consequences. The analysis of the chapter will focus on answering the question raised by Wallander: After the Helsinki accords had been signed, Western politicians demanded the Soviet leadership to

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comply with the agreements signed in Helsinki for improvement of human and political rights inside the USSR. Did Western support for human and political rights, particularly in the Baltic republics, constrain Gorbachev’s choice of policies to deal with separatism, and thereby contribute to the collapse of the Soviet Union? Recognizing the importance of Baltic separatism in the collapse of the Soviet Union, I ask which role did the Helsinki accords and repeated U.S. support for human rights play in the origins of the Baltic independence movement?

Chapter three contains Dallin’s final two hypotheses, “the heightening of the fear of nuclear war”, and “the defense burden”. The two topics are closely related and in order to provide a better flow in the thesis, I have chosen to merge them together in a single chapter. The fear of nuclear war was heightened with Ronald Reagan’s rejection of MAD, and his intention to deploy the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a space-based shield able to destroy incoming missiles. This undermined the ABM treaty from 1972 and was a departure from the policies of détente. After presenting the background information necessary to put this in context, the chapter seeks to find an answer to the following questions: (1) During the presidency of Reagan, certain conservative members in the American administration thought they could outspend the Soviets into oblivion by presenting them with the Strategic Defense Initiative. Did the Soviet Union attempt to increase their nuclear capacity as a reaction to SDI, and in doing that, undermine their economy leading to its collapse? (2) With several decades of arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States, what were the effects of this on the Soviet economy? Did the arms race during the Cold War severely strain the Soviet economy, leading to its downfall in 1991?

Finally, in chapter four, I will present my conclusions and try to provide an answer to whether Dallin was right in his assumptions; that these three hypotheses were significant factors in the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

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5 Fitzgerald, Way Out There in the Blue, 475.
1.2 U.S. Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union: The Debate

Most of the analyses concerning the collapse of the Soviet Union focus on the internal factors and argue that the collapse was a result of domestic policies under Gorbachev or systemic flaws in the Soviet political model. There have, however, been a debate regarding the international community and its role in the demise of the Soviet Union. The research in this area is nonetheless limited. As I was researching for this thesis, I came over analyses on both sides of the scale; some arguing that the collapse of the Soviet Union was solely a result of aggressive American policies under the Reagan administration, others arguing that Western policies towards the Soviet Union were an indirect factor, and others again arguing that Western policies had no role whatsoever in the events that unfolded in 1991. In this part, I primarily wish to present the existing theories on the hypotheses put forward by Dallin, and then move on to other theories presented by scholars on the influence of Western policies on the Soviet collapse.

1.2.1 The role of human rights

One of the scholars who have taken up the issue of the human rights part of the Helsinki accords, and its role in the Soviet collapse is Celeste Wallander. She argues that the West’s insistence on the improvement of human rights inside the USSR “severely constrained Gorbachev’s options in dealing with the increasing threat of republic separatism, the issue that ultimately brought the attempted coup and collapse in 1991”. Her conclusion is that this can be regarded as a secondary factor in the Soviet collapse as Western policies did not directly force Gorbachev to improve the human rights conditions in the USSR. He was motivated to improve the relationship with the Western countries in order to receive financial assistance from them, and this could not be achieved if he decided to use force to stop separatism in the republics.

Daniel Thomas argues that human rights certainly played a role in the demise of communism and Soviet rule:

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6 Wallander, «Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union», 177.
The Cold War that divided both Europe and the international system for five decades ended with the breaching of the Berlin Wall and the demise of communist rule across Eastern Europe in 1989-1990. These revolutionary changes were set in motion by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe’s establishment in 1975 of human rights as a formal norm for relations among European states.8

The consequences of the Helsinki accords with the creation of Helsinki monitoring groups across the USSR, led activists and dissidents to stand up against the repressiveness of the regime, and engaging foreign media and governments in their cause. Thomas further argues that the human rights norms in the Helsinki accords resulted in the Soviet Union being regularly criticized for their non-compliance of the agreement:9

In the end, Communist rule succumbed to the convergence of popular demands for change and the initiatives of within-system reformers like Mikhail Gorbachev, who were themselves significantly influenced by the arguments of local dissidents and foreign governments that insisted upon compliance with Helsinki norms.10

Sarah Snyder has also hold forth for the importance of human rights and the Helsinki accords in the Soviet collapse:

My research shows that the Helsinki process directly and indirectly influenced both Western and Eastern governments to pursue policies that facilitated the rise of organized dissent in Eastern Europe, freedom of movement for East Germans, and improved human rights practices in the Soviet Union – all factors in the end of the Cold War.11

Snyder’s conclusion differs from Thomas, however, in that she emphasizes the importance of human rights advocacy, rather than human rights norms, as the decisive factor. She argues that even though activists benefited from international norms, it was their work documenting non-compliance of the Final Act that caused the Helsinki principles to be included in high-level diplomacy.12 She states that “the development and influence of a transnational Helsinki

8 Thomas, The Helsinki Effect, 284.
9 Thomas, The Helsinki Effect, 284.
11 Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, 244.
12 Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, 245.
network was due to several key individuals without whom the principles and baskets of the Helsinki Final Act would have had little lasting significance.”¹³

According John Gaddis, a leading Cold War scholar, the effects of the Helsinki accords were quite significant. He states that the Helsinki accords were a “legal and moral trap” for the Soviet leadership as the Helsinki accords became a platform for dissidents and liberal-minded activists, which led to “the people who lived under these systems – at least the more courageous – could claim official permission to say what they thought.”¹⁴

1.2.2 The role of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)

Andrew Busch emphasizes the importance of the Strategic Defense Initiative in the collapse of the Soviet Union. He argues that because the Soviet leadership was not able to stop the program, they were forced to liberalize their society, with former Soviet officials suggesting that the reform policies of perestroika was a military initiative set in motion by their own technological backwardness.¹⁵ According to Busch, “the pressures produced by SDI contributed as much as any single factor to the successful termination of the Cold War.”¹⁶

Mira Duric holds a similar view, arguing that the SDI forced the Soviet leadership to policy changes. With the announcement of SDI, Gorbachev faced two choices, she argues, to either throw himself into a more expensive arms race, or lead a more conciliatory policy towards the U.S:

The technological “threat” that SDI posed the Soviets ultimately persuaded realists in Moscow that cooperation with the US was preferable to a military-technological competition of unlimited duration. The Soviets consequently embarked on a cooperative course with America, whilst simultaneously trying to persuade the US to abandon the SDI. In this respect, the SDI contributed to the Soviet reassessment of foreign, military and strategic policy.¹⁷

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¹³ Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, 245.
Duric concludes that Gorbachev’s reassessment policy played “a crucial role in the end of the Cold War.”

Archie Brown, however, challenges the theory that the Strategic Defense Initiative was an influential factor in the Soviet collapse. According to him, the existing Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles were sufficient to such a degree that it would be risky for the American administration to rely on the SDI project. He further argues that it is misleading to reach the conclusion that the Soviets would change their foreign policy, because the doctrine of MAD would continue for a couple of more decades. The Soviet Union, he concludes, collapsed because of the new leadership and its new ideas.

Pavel Podvig denies that the SDI caused an additional burden on the Soviet economy by forcing them to develop countermeasures to the program, stating that:

The evidence on the Soviet response to SDI that emerges from the internal documents largely corroborates the view that the Soviet Union eventually realized that this program did not present a danger to its security because it would be relatively easily countered with simple and effective countermeasures.

The Soviet economy suffered under its high military expenditures, yet there is no indication that the Soviet response to the Strategic Defense Initiative caused any further damage to the economy, according to Podvig. The similar Soviet programs to SDI, he argues, had existed years before the announcement of SDI, and “did not require any additional commitment of resources. Most of the projects included in the package never went beyond paper research and those that did were among the least expensive ones.”

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1.2.3 The role of the defense burden

One of those who support the theory on the impact of the aggressive American policies under Ronald Reagan is Peter Schweizer. He argues that the demise of the Soviet Union was a direct result from the policies of the Reagan administration. As the Soviet economy was steadily declining, the Reagan administration intended to exploit the situation further for the sake of getting a strategic advantage. Schweizer further states that this strategy of the American administration was led by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director William Casey. According to his analysis, this plan originated in the very early days of Reagan’s presidency and was set out to undermine the Soviet system by running a high-tech defense build-up with the intention of damaging the suffering Soviet economy further, supporting the Solidarity movement in Poland, to give financial and military aid to the Afghan resistance, and driving down oil prices in cooperation with Saudi Arabia in order to reduce the Soviet currency.

Neither Raymond Garthoff or Frances Fitzgerald agrees with Schweizer, with Garthoff stating “the West did not, as is widely believed, win the Cold War through geopolitical containment and military deterrence. Still less was the Cold War won by the Reagan military buildup and the Reagan doctrine, as some have suggested. Instead, ‘Victory’ came when a new generation of Soviet leaders realized how badly their system at home and their policies abroad had failed.” Fitzgerald argues that the changes happened because of the new leadership, and that without it, the Soviet Union might not have collapsed. The main problem lay within the Soviet system itself, and the economic decline in the 1980s was a continuation of the decline from the 1970s, and not a result from the policies of the Reagan administration. When Gorbachev decided to launch drastic reforms in the country it led to the complete collapse of the system, Fitzgerald concludes.

Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein also disputes Schweizer’s theory. If the U.S. defense spending could be “blamed” for the economic decline of the Soviet Union, the Soviet defense spending would have dropped as the relations with the West improved, according to

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24 Schweizer, *Victory*, xv.
25 Schweizer, *Victory*, xvi.
26 Schweizer, *Victory*, xviii-xix.
their argument. This was not the case. According to estimates they have used from the CIA, Soviet defense spending remained relatively on the same level throughout the 1980s, hence, their defense spending “did not rise or fall in response to American military expenditures.”

They conclude that the U.S. military buildup had no effect on gross spending levels in the Soviet Union. If any U.S. initiatives had an effect it would be the SDI, as a certain amount of money was assigned to developing a response to the SDI. But they stress that this effect on Soviet defense spending was at most minimal.

1.2.4 Other theories on U.S. role in the Soviet collapse

The theories presented above do not cover the entire discussion on Western influences in the Soviet collapse. Another theory presented by scholars in this debate is that the mere existence of an outside world had an impact on the dissolution of the USSR. Scholars that can be included here is Walter D. Connor and Dallin. For many years, the Soviet society had been isolated from the world outside its borders, and gradually it was opened up for specialists to travel abroad, while the tourism industry began to evolve. They argue that this increased communication with the international community presented the Soviet citizens with a better alternative, and thus made them question their own system. They further stress the importance of new technology. The old communication system suffered from mediocre quality which restricted the flow of unmonitored communication. In contrast to his predecessors, Gorbachev did not perceive the dissemination of technological innovations to the society as a threat, he set out to upgrade to more advanced technologies and further use them to strengthen the society. Suddenly, the average man received a flood of information about the past and present Soviet, in addition to information about the world outside. The Soviet citizens soon came to realize that their own society seemed underdeveloped compared to the Western world. Knowledge about the history of the Soviet Union and its social problems, which for decades had been hushed up, was now spread out in the open for all to see and hear on television, radio and in newspapers. Glasnost, Connor argues, ended up

29 Lebow and Stein, “Reagan and the Russians.”
30 Lebow and Stein, “Reagan and the Russians.”
32 Dallin, «Causes of the Collapse of the USSR».
33 Dallin, «Causes of the Collapse of the USSR», 293.
destabilizing the Soviet society and regime, as citizens began to question the leadership and why they were worse off than the West.35

Another theory explored by scholars is the impact of the Soviet-Afghan war on the Soviet collapse. A scholar who has investigated this issue is Wallander. The argument in this debate is whether the U.S. funding to the resistance group (the mujahideen) fighting the Soviet army forced a humiliating retreat by the Soviet Union, and further undermining the political support for Gorbachev.36 The U.S., in addition to countries such as Saudi-Arabia and China, provided the resistance group with weaponry such as Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, and financial funds.37 However, Wallander does not link this to the subsequent Soviet collapse. She argues that the causality rate of the Soviet army declined after the U.S. began to supply the Afghan resistance group with the Stinger aircrafts. The U.S. certainly made life more difficult for the Soviet army, she argues, but the Soviet decision to withdraw from the conflict was made irrespective of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.38

1.3 Method and Sources

This thesis relies on both primary and secondary sources, but mostly on primary sources. Memoirs-autobiographies of relevant Soviet actors have proven very useful for analyses of the policies of the Soviet leadership. These sources include memoirs of Mikhail Gorbachev, Eduard Shevardnadze, Anatoliy Dobrynin, Anatoliy Adamishin and diary notes of Anatoliy Chernyayev. Additional primary sources, both to provide different points of view and to expand on the Soviet sources, have also been of vital importance to my analysis. These include memoirs of Western politicians and state archives.

The use of Soviet memoirs has been central to this thesis since it is based on the Soviet perspective of the respective situations. One of the most useful has been Memoirs by Mikhail Gorbachev. This is an extensive work covering the period from when he was elected as Secretary of the CPSU until he left office as President of the Soviet Union in 1991. In addition, I have found the memoirs of Anatoliy Dobrynin and Eduard Shevardnadze most useful, both being central actors in the events I focus on. Most of the memoirs I have used

37 Wallander, «Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union», 165.
38 Wallander, «Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union», 165-166.
have been translated to English (or written in English) except from one the memoirs of Eduard Shevardnadze and one of the memoirs of Mikhail Gorbachev. In Eduard Shevardnadze’s case, his memoirs focus very much on the situation in Georgia and not as much as I had hoped on how the situation unraveled in the Soviet Union. The memoirs of Anatoliy Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States from Kennedy to Reagan, consists mainly of his recollections from Washington, nevertheless, he provides the reader with useful insights and analyses of Moscow’s policy towards the United States.

Another memoir worth mentioning is the co-written memoirs of Anatoliy Adamishin (Soviet deputy foreign minister) and Richard Schifter (U.S. assistant secretary of state). In the discussion between the Soviet Union and the U.S. regarding human rights, these were central actors. Their memoirs have provided me with useful insights into both the Soviet and U.S. perspectives on the role of human rights in the Soviet-U.S. relations.

In addition to memoirs from central Soviet politicians, this thesis is also based on memoirs from other central actors from the Soviet scientific and military community. These include memoirs of Vitaliy Katayev and Roal’d Sagdeyev. Katayev was initially a designer in the Soviet defense industry before he joined the Defense Industry Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1975. Sagdeyev was a Soviet physicist and later science advisor to Gorbachev. Even though their memoirs mostly consist of their own life and work, they still have provided me with useful insights into the Soviet scientific and military community, and information I have drawn from their memoirs has not been available from the other memoirs used in this thesis.

Using memoirs and autobiographies provides a first-hand experience of historical events relevant for this thesis, however, there are challenges regarding the use of these types of sources as well. It has been stated by Edward Carr that “the facts of history never come to us ‘pure’, since they do not and cannot exist in a pure form: they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder.” By using memoirs and autobiographies as a primary source, I (the reader) am presented with the author’s own interpretation of the situation and it is difficult to
regard this as an objective source. Even so, the subjective interpretations of the authors are nonetheless valuable to this thesis. How the Soviet leadership interpreted the actions of Western politicians can be useful in order to understand their responses. In this regard, I consider the subjective interpretations of the Soviet authors equally as a challenge and as useful information for this thesis. A way of meeting this challenge has been to compare a source to other memoirs dealing with the same thematic. Another challenge in using memoirs as a source is that the author wants to present his or her actions as much as possible in a good light, and most likely has a political agenda which is reflected in the text. But this political agenda is also important to include in the analysis.

This thesis has also made use of notes from Anatoliy Chernyaev’s diary. His diaries have been published and translated online by the National Security Archive, to whom he donated his diaries from 1972 to 1991. Nevertheless, the use of diary entries also have their challenges. Diaries can be a useful primary source as they provide a (seemingly) un-edited first-hand account of events. There are, however, some problems associated also with the use of diaries; they may consciously have been written with the intention of publicizing them later or they may have been edited after they were written. In the case of Chernyaev’s diaries, this seems to be a problem. Some of the diaries which are published online have several parts missing from them. This could either be intentional, or simply months of absence from the diary. Finding the reason for the parts missing can be difficult, but it is important to be aware of the fact that probably a lot of information is left out. When this has occurred, I have tried as far as possible to provide additional information from other primary sources.

Supplementary sources for this thesis have been available online U.S. government documents dating from both the Reagan era and the George H.W. Bush era. Ideally, I should have been able to access Russia’s state archives, but this has proved difficult. Therefore, the only state archives I have been able to use are American. Most of the online sources have been accessed from the National Security Archive. This is a non-governmental institution located at the George Washington University. In their online libraries and archives, they have released recently declassified documents which have proven quite useful for this thesis. Additional online sources have been accessed from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum.

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45 National Security Archive, «The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev. Former Top Soviet Adviser’s Journal Chronicles Final Years of the Cold War.»
46 Kjeldstadli, Fortida Er Ikke Hva Den En Gang Var, 188.
and the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. Using unedited documents provides me with a point of view that is less affected by bias or the relevant actor’s afterthought. Nevertheless, this kind of primary sources present challenges. It is important to keep a critical eye on the documents used, as they most likely have been affected by the perceptions of the writer. The documents are biased in the sense that they are American sources, and hence, American perceptions of the policies of the Soviet Union.47

As far as the recently declassified documents are concerned, these only present a selection of the Soviet documents. A vast amount of the documents remains classified, or information may be intentionally left out. I noticed in a few of the documents that pages were missing48, leaving me with incomplete or misleading information of events and dialogues.

My aim for this thesis has been to stay focused on memoirs from central Soviet actors, but it has been equally important to provide additional information from relevant Western actors. The memoirs of Jack Matlock49 (U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union) and the co-written memoir of President George H. W. Bush and his National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft50, have provided me with analyses from their point-of-view, in addition to being central actors in the relevant events.

Beside the primary sources, it has been necessary to work with secondary sources as well. A lot of books have been written about the Cold War and I have had plenty of works to choose from. However, only a few of them deal with the thematic I have focused on and I’ve had to leave out a certain number of books. Some of the books I have used as a general overview includes The Soviet Tragedy by Martin Malia, The Great Transition by Raymond Garthoff and A Failed Empire by Vladislav Zubok.

The effects of the Helsinki accords and the role of human rights activism in the dismantling of Soviet rule has been extensively covered by Daniel C. Thomas51 and Sarah B. Snyder52. Both

47 Carr, What is History?, 19.
49 Jack Matlock, Autopsy of an Empire.
50 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed.
51 Thomas, The Helsinki Effect.
52 Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War.
of their works argue that the Helsinki accords and the subsequent human rights activism in the USSR played a significant role in ending the Cold War.

Certain secondary sources have provided me with information I have not been able to find myself, especially as far as the Russian state archives are concerned. Both Hoffman and Evangelista have made extensively use of material they have accessed from the Defense Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The results from their research corresponds with each other, and it has been especially valuable in my research on the Strategic Defense Initiative. A lot of information regarding the Soviet version of “Star Wars” remain unknown, however, both Hoffman and Evangelista have set out to look for this information in the archives. It sheds new light on how the Soviets decided to counter the SDI, and it has proven quite useful for this thesis. These documents were allegedly collected by Vitaliy Katayev, whom is mentioned above. Hoffman’s book is a well-documented work and he examines the competition in nuclear arms between the USSR and the U.S. during the Cold War. In Unarmed Forces, Evangelista makes use of archives and interviews to show how the interaction between scientists, scholars and activists played a role in Soviet decision making.

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53 Hoffman, The Dead Hand.
54 Evangelista, Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War.
55 Hoffman, The Dead Hand, 24.
2 The Helsinki Accords of 1975

2.1 Background

The Helsinki Accords (or the Final Act) came during the period of détente, and was the final act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The Soviet Union (together with their East European allies) had proposed a European security conference in the 1960s, with the aim of gaining a formal recognition of its postwar territorial acquisitions in Eastern Europe, including guarantees of inviolability of borders and non-intervention in their internal affairs. However, in order to achieve this recognition and guarantees, the Soviet Union had to make compromises in other fields. If the West were to agree to the principles put forward by the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union had to agree to including a section on human rights in the final accord. They were quite reluctant to agree to basic human rights principles, nevertheless they eventually had to yield.56

The Helsinki Accords were signed in 1975 in Helsinki, Finland, by thirty-five states.57 The accords consisted of four points, or “baskets”: (I) Questions related to Security in Europe; (II) Co-operation in the Field of Economics, of Science and Technology and of the Environment; (III) Questions relating to Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean, and; (IV) Follow-up to the Conference.58 The section on human rights was briefly included under Basket I, and further expanded upon under Basket III. Basket III committed the signatory countries to the improvement of human contacts (such as reunification of families, marriage between citizens of different states, travelling and tourism, sport and expansion of contacts) and information (such as circulation/access to/and exchange of information, co-operation in the field of information and working conditions for journalists).59

The purpose of the Helsinki Accords was to improve the relations and to ease the tension between the Eastern and Western blocs. However, the section on human rights turned out to be an ongoing source of tension between the two blocs in the years to come. While the Soviet

56 Thomas, «The Helsinki Accords and Political Change in Eastern Europe», 207-208.
57 The signatory states included all European states (except from Albania and Andorra), the United States, Canada and the Soviet Union. The Helsinki Accords are non-binding and do not have treaty status.
leadership hesitated to include the part on human rights in the accords, they saw an opportunity to use other parts of the agreement as a safety net against the human rights part. Principle 6 in Basket I on “non-intervention in internal affairs” would be used as an answer to potential Western accusations on non-compliance with the human rights provisions.\footnote{Thomas, «The Helsinki Accords and Political Change in Eastern Europe», 208-209.}

However, when the Helsinki Accords were signed, neither the Western nor the Eastern bloc expected them to cause any major turn of events. Kissinger has reportedly stating them to have been “meaningless”.\footnote{Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, 32.} During the negotiations leading up to the signing of the accords when the U.S. had pressured the Soviet Union to agree to the third basket, President Nixon had told Brezhnev that the statements in the accords had only been theoretical and not a “fact”.\footnote{Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, 32.}

In the end, the Soviets considered the Helsinki Accords a success. During the conference, Brezhnev stated that the Soviets regarded the results of the negotiations as a formal end to the Second World War.\footnote{Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, «Address by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Leonid Brezhnev to the third stage of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe Helsinki, 30 July to 1 August 1975», 1.} He further made it clear that a prominent part of the Final Act was the part on non-intervention in internal affairs:

> The experience of the work of the Conference provides important conclusions for the future, too. The major one which is reflected in the final document is this: no-one should try to dictate to other peoples on the basis of foreign policy considerations of one kind or another the manner in which they ought to manage their internal affairs. It is only the people of each given State and no-one else, who have the sovereign right to resolve their internal affairs and establish their internal laws.\footnote{Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, «Address by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Leonid Brezhnev to the third stage of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe Helsinki, 30 July to 1 August 1975», 3.}

The Soviet statements represent only one view of what the signatory states wished to achieve with the Helsinki Accords. Other signatory states, such as Great Britain considered the portion of human rights as a significant part of the Helsinki conference. The public response from the U.S., however, was somewhat more negative. The Helsinki Accords were criticized...
for giving in to Soviet interests, especially in regard to the Baltic states, as many believed that the Final Act formally recognized the Soviet annexation of them.\footnote{Snyder, \textit{Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War}, 35-36.}

This part of the thesis sets out to provide an analysis and answer to Dallin’s first hypothesis, that the unintended consequences of Basket III of the Helsinki accords possibly played a role in the Soviet collapse. My approach to his hypothesis is to examine whether Wallander is right in her claim: Did Western support for human and political rights, particularly in the Baltic republics, constrain Gorbachev’s choice of policies to deal with separatism, and thereby contribute to the collapse of the Soviet Union? Wallander has stated that:

\begin{quote}
The West’s refusal to pour money into the Soviet Union without evidence of structural reform, and Western leaders’ maintenance of principled support for human and political rights, severely constrained Gorbachev’s options in dealing with the increasing threat of republic separatism, the issue that ultimately brought the attempted coup and collapse in 1991. Western policies – including the long history going back to Helsinki, of cautious and responsible support for human rights activists – did not directly force Gorbachev’s hand, but they did constrain his choices.\footnote{Wallander, «Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union», 177.}
\end{quote}

I further wish to examine which role the Helsinki accords and the repeated U.S. support for human rights played in the origins of the Baltic independence movements. As Wallander has argued: “because of the crucial role of ethnic and republic separatism in the demise of the Soviet Union, any evidence that the West encouraged such trends, whether directly or indirectly, would be important.”\footnote{Wallander, «Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union», 171.}
2.2 Unintended Consequences

2.2.1 Human rights in Soviet-U.S. relations pre-Gorbachev

The consequences of the Helsinki Accords were soon to become evident across the Soviet Union. Satisfied with getting their post-World War II borders recognized, the Soviet leadership decided to publicize the complete document from the Helsinki conference in the newspapers, which was widely distributed. With the complete Helsinki document available to the entire population, Soviet activists began to take measures to monitor the implementation of the Final Act, and Helsinki monitoring groups sprung up across the Soviet Union as an immediate consequence of the Helsinki Accords.

The first Helsinki monitoring group was established only a year after the Final Act was signed, on May 12, 1976. A press conference was held in the apartment of Andrey Sakharov (a Soviet human rights activist and dissident), where the formation of the Moscow Helsinki Group was announced. The idea of the formation of this group came from human rights activists Yuriy Orlov, Andrey Amal’rik, Anatoliy Shcharanskiy and Valentin Turchin, with the intention of monitoring the implementation of human rights in the Soviet Union in accordance with the Final Act. They set out to receive information from Soviet citizens on violations of the Helsinki agreement, and further make this information available to the public and the countries that had signed the Final Act.

The Ukrainian Helsinki Watch Group was established in Kiev in November 1976, only six months after the first Helsinki Watch Group was established in Moscow. Like their Moscow counterparts, their aim was to ensure the implementation of human rights in accordance to the Helsinki Accords. Many of its founding members had, because of nationalist activities, served time in prison. The group was in many respects an important precursor for activities that would take place in Ukraine later, as their group’s focus was on national self-determination and to eliminate repression of nationalist activities.

Only two weeks after the Ukrainian Helsinki Watch Group was established, the Lithuanian Helsinki Group was founded. Their goal was to monitor human and civil rights, and they were

69 Moskovskaya Khel'sinskaya Gruppa, «Istoricheskiy Ocherk».
70 Thomas, The Helsinki Effect, 163.
supported by the Lithuanian Catholic Church. The group overlapped with the church’s agenda and they did not become a focus for independent activity, like the Moscow or the Ukrainian groups.\textsuperscript{71}

The next Helsinki Group appeared in Georgia in January 1977. One of its founders, Zviad Gamsakhurdiya, was to become an important person in the national protest in the late 1980s and the first President of Georgia in 1991. The next Helsinki Group was founded four months later in the neighbor republic Armenia. The group documented the repression of Armenian culture and the Armenian language, and issued several reports of human rights abuses.\textsuperscript{72}

The Soviet leadership quickly responded to the creation of the Helsinki Groups, and their initial response was, if anything, not in compliance to the Helsinki Accords. Just a few days after the announcement of the Moscow Helsinki Group, the leaders in Kremlin warned its founder, Yuri Orlov, that if the group and its members did not stop their activity, they would feel “the full force of the law.”\textsuperscript{73} Monitoring of the members of the Moscow Helsinki Group began in 1976 based on their “anti-social elements”.\textsuperscript{74}

Neither of the signatory parties expected Basket III to have a significant effect on human rights conditions, and it was widely considered that the section on human rights would be forgotten as soon as the conference was over. Nevertheless, two factors would keep the human rights issues alive: (1) the establishment of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe and; (2) basket IV of the Helsinki Accords (follow-up to the conference). These two organs intended to monitor the implementation of the Final Act, and any non-compliance to the agreement signed in Helsinki would be discussed in future follow-up conferences.

The U.S. Congress established a committee for monitoring the implementation of Basket III almost immediately after the Helsinki Accords were signed in 1975. This came after a visit to the Soviet Union by congresswoman Millicent Fenwick.\textsuperscript{75} Human rights activists Yuri Orlov and Anatoliy Shcharanskiy had by this time already considered to appeal to the international

\textsuperscript{71} Thomas, \textit{The Helsinki Effect}, 163-164.
\textsuperscript{72} Thomas, \textit{The Helsinki Effect}, 164.
\textsuperscript{74} National Security Archive, “About the Hostile Actions of the So-called Group for Assistance of Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements in the USSR.”
\textsuperscript{75} Savranskaya, «Unintended Consequences: Soviet Interests, Expectations and Reactions to the Helsinki Final Act», 183.
community to monitor the implementation of the Final Act in the USSR. They met with congresswoman Fenwick during her trip to the USSR, and they suggested that Western politicians should use the Final Act to pressure the Soviet government to abide by the obligations they had agreed to, as well as monitoring how well the Soviet government put the Final Act into practice.\textsuperscript{76} Shortly after, the U.S. Congress established the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.\textsuperscript{77}

The fourth basket proved to be an important part of the Helsinki Accords, which stated that the signatory countries would regularly meet to monitor compliance with the agreements signed in Helsinki. The intention by including the fourth basket was to make each signatory state attentive to the commitments they had signed up for in the agreement.\textsuperscript{78} By having regular conferences to monitor compliance with the Helsinki Accords, the Soviets had to defend themselves against accusations of violations over the agreements if they did not improve their human rights conditions. This also provided the West with a forum in which they could pressure the Soviet Union for improvements on humanitarian issues.

The first follow-up meeting to the Helsinki Conference was held in Belgrade in 1977. In the preparatory talks leading up to the conference, it was agreed to report how the signatory states had complied with Basket III in the Helsinki Accords. The conference did not intend to use name-and-shame accusations, so without mentioning any names, the U.S. delegation encouraged the parties to show “respect for those people who in their own countries are trying to implement the agreement.”\textsuperscript{79} Nevertheless, the intention of not naming-and-shaming was abandoned as activists and politicians called for increased criticism of abuses of human rights within the Helsinki agreement. Several human rights activists in Moscow announced a hunger strike in response to repressions against the Moscow Helsinki Group, Sakharov sent a personal appeal to the West calling for a stronger Western criticism on human rights violations in the Eastern bloc, with a group of U.S. representatives and senators demanding the same.\textsuperscript{80} As the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe had been established before the Belgrade Conference, their monitoring work leading up to the conference were presented here, and Soviet breaches of the Helsinki agreement were

\textsuperscript{76} Orlov, \textit{Dangerous Thoughts}, 188-189.
\textsuperscript{77} Savranskaya, “Unintended Consequences: Soviet Interests, Expectations and Reactions to the Helsinki Final Act”, 183.
\textsuperscript{78} Coughlin, “Monitoring of the Helsinki Accords: Belgrade 1977”, 515.
\textsuperscript{80} Thomas, \textit{The Helsinki Effect}, 145-147.
criticized. The Soviets refused to agree to new human rights commitments, and the conference ended with an agreement to meet at a conference in Madrid in 1980.

Pressure from Western politicians did not stop the persecution of dissidents within the USSR. Soviet deputy foreign minister at the time, Anatoliy Adamishin, later stated that “our old leadership despised Western ‘human rights tricks’”, and further noted that Western pressure for improvement of human rights was if anything, counterproductive. In 1977, the Soviet government began to consider taking measures to end the activities of the Helsinki groups. In a memo to the CC CPSU in 1977, Andropov stated that “these groups inflict serious political damage on the Soviet state”, and that “the Committee of State Security and the office of the USSR Prosecutor General are currently developing further measures to terminate the hostile activities of the individuals mentioned above”. Arrests of central figures both in the Moscow, Ukrainian and Georgian Helsinki Groups began in 1977. These included Anatoliy Scharanskiy, Yuriy Orlov and Aleksandr Ginzburg from the Moscow Helsinki Group, while Lyudmila Alekseyeva was forced to emigrate from the country.

In the subsequent years, the Soviet leadership continued to arrest and expel several of the key members of the Helsinki Groups around the country, such as Tat’yana Osipova, Viktor Nekipelov and Yuriy Yarym-Agayev. Andrey Sakharov was forced into exile to Gorky, with his wife, Yelena Bonner, accompanying him. This caused the Moscow Helsinki Group to dissolve, as many of its key members were not able to continue their work on monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords. The Soviet government considered its actions as a success, and the first deputy chairman of the KGB declared in 1981: “as a result of measures taken by the KGB, implemented in strict accordance with the law and under the leadership of Party organs, the anti-social elements, despite the West’s considerable material and moral support, did not succeed in achieving organized cohesion on the platform of anti-Sovietism.”

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82 Thomas, The Helsinki Effect, 148.
83 Adamishin and Schifter, Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War, 45.
84 National Security Archive, «About measures to end the hostile activity Of members of the so-called ‘Group For Assistance in the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements in the USSR’»
85 Sell, From Washington to Moscow, 72.
86 Sell, From Washington to Moscow, 72.
87 Thomas, The Helsinki Effect, 211.
2.2.2 Enter Gorbachev: Human rights in Soviet-U.S. relations

Gorbachev’s time as General Secretary would witness the release of several dissidents and a more active dialogue with the U.S. as far as the human rights situation in the USSR was concerned. Yet, at the start of his presidency, he held on to the same view as his predecessors; the issue of human rights remained a part of their internal affairs, and was of no concern to the outside world. When George H. W. Bush as vice-president visited the USSR to attend Chernenko’s funeral in 1985, he met with the newly elected Gorbachev, and raised the issue of human rights. He was, however, met with the same old answer that he had no business in meddling in the USSR’s internal affairs.\(^{88}\)

President Reagan did not hesitate to raise the issue of human rights as soon as Gorbachev took office as the new General Secretary. Reagan stated in his first letter to him that progress on human rights issues remained an important matter for the Americans.\(^ {89}\) He followed up with a letter the next month, stating that “we believe strongly that strict observance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the Helsinki Final Act is an important element in our bilateral relationship.”\(^ {90}\) Gorbachev replied by stating that the Soviet leadership would not engage in talks regarding the human rights situation in the Soviet Union, and that these issues would be dealt with according to Soviet law.\(^ {91}\)

Despite rejecting any talks on human rights within the Soviet Union, Gorbachev seemed to have taken the issue into account. In June 1985, he had stated that the USSR needed to raise their “own banner of human rights” and started the work on creating a Soviet committee on human rights.\(^ {92}\) In a memorandum from senior advisor Aleksandr Yakovlev to Gorbachev the same year, Yakovlev stressed the need for:

Real guarantees for the individual practicing his rights. There should be a law on individual rights and their guarantees, a law on personal integrity, personal property and domicile, on privacy of correspondence, telephone conversations and personal life. There should be organizational forms of practicing the rights to hold rallies,

\(^{88}\) Adamishin and Schifter, *Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War*, 89.

\(^{89}\) Margaret Thatcher Foundation, «Cold War: Reagan to Gorbachev (affirms ‘personal commitment … to serious negotiations’).»


\(^{91}\) Margaret Thatcher Foundation, «Cold War: Gorbachev to Reagan (stock reply to 30 April Reagan letter) [declassified 2000].»

freedom of speech, religion, press, assembly, and the right to free travel. We want everybody to have great civic responsibilities, but that is only possible if there are great civil rights.  

The future discussions on human rights with the U.S. administration would change somewhat when Gorbachev replaced foreign minister Andrey Gromyko with Eduard Shevardnadze in the early months of his leadership. Gromyko, like all his predecessors in the leadership, had kept a hard stance on the issue of human rights. Referred to as “Mr. Nyet” by the Americans, his response to the continuing American complaints regarding human rights violations had been that it was a matter of internal affairs and no business of the Americans. With the appointment of Shevardnadze as foreign minister, despite his lack of experience, Gorbachev felt that they shared “a common approach to many key problems, including foreign affairs.” In a short period of time, negotiations with the U.S. regarding human rights would bear fruits.

In July 1985, the foreign ministers of thirty-five countries met in Helsinki to mark the tenth anniversary of the Helsinki Accords. This was, in Shevardnadze’s words, his “coming out party.” Here he met with U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz for the first time, with Schultz making it perfectly clear to him that “until the Soviet Union adopts a different policy on humanitarian issues, no aspect of our dealings will be truly satisfactory.” Shevardnadze, being somewhat reluctant to continue any conversation on the issue, nevertheless struck Schultz as less hostile towards the subject than Gromyko.

The tone changed somewhat by the next meeting between Shevardnadze and Schultz. Shevardnadze made a proposal that from now on, they would begin their negotiations by addressing observance of human rights. Shevardnadze later stated that “I think my preemptive game surprised George. Human rights had been the Americans’ favorite hobbyhorse, and a taboo for us. Suddenly, here was the Soviet minister making a move like this. After a while my suggestion became our tradition, steering our talks, to use his words, onto a two-way

94 Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, 161.
95 Adamishin and Schifter, Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War, xii.
96 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 180.
97 Shevardnadze, The Future Belongs to Freedom, 60.
98 Adamishin and Schifter, Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War, xii.
During this meeting, Schultz handed a list of political prisoners over to Shevardnadze, asking him to release them from prison. A year after their second meeting, several of these prisoners were released, including Yuriy Orlov, with a promise from Shevardnadze that he would continue work on releasing other dissidents and political prisoners.\(^{100}\)

Why did the leadership in Kremlin soften up on the issue of human rights? Was there a change in attitudes towards human rights issues, or was it merely a political maneuver aimed at Western politicians in order to improve relations? Shevardnadze has stated in his memoirs that he soon enough realized that human rights was an inevitable premise for improvement in international relations.\(^{101}\) Notes from a meeting in the Politburo in 1985 suggests that the leadership in Kremlin was more concerned over Western responses, rather than with improving human rights conditions in itself, when confronted with the issue of whether to allow Yelena Bonner (who was in internal exile in Gorky at that moment) to travel abroad to receive medical treatment. The issue was discussed in consideration of the expected meetings Gorbachev was set to have with both Reagan and Mitterrand, and it was argued that if they let her travel, it would make the impression that they had taken a humanitarian step. The international political ramifications if they did not let her travel was discussed, and they decided to let her travel.\(^{102}\) This suggests that the Soviet leadership was more concerned with their reputation internationally, rather than having softened up on the human rights issue.

Nevertheless, the conciliatory policy towards the U.S. administration was not well received within all ranks of the Communist Party. Shevardnadze states that several people in the Communist Party held tight to old dogmas such as “we do not need to be shown how to behave.”\(^{103}\) Shevardnadze has stated that:

> It was difficult to persuade even my colleagues on the simplest point: Since we had signed the Helsinki Final Act and had assumed obligations under international conventions and agreements, we had thereby acknowledged the right of other

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\(^{100}\) Adamishin and Schifter, *Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War*, xiii.

\(^{101}\) Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 86.

\(^{102}\) Sakharovskiy Tsentr, «Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya politbyuro TSK KPSS 29 avgusta 1985 goda.»

\(^{103}\) Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 85.
participants in these agreements to inquire into all issues and to insist that we observe
the obligations we had undertaken.  

The U.S. continued to press for improvement of human rights in the Soviet Union during the
first summit meeting between the two presidents in Geneva in 1985. Gorbachev has stated in
his memoirs that “Reagan began by saying that if the Soviet Union intended to improve its
relations with the U.S., it would do well to change its reputation with respect to individual
freedom. (…) I said that I did not think that the U.S. had a right to impose their standards and
way of life upon other countries.”

Signs of change began to appear in 1986 when Gorbachev embarked upon the reform of
glasnost (openness, or transparency). The reform of glasnost was intended to aid Gorbachev
in his economic reforms (perestroika), as it was believed that economic reforms could not
succeed unless there was a mutual open relationship between the state and its citizens.
Glasnost called for more information, truth and public engagement in politics. Glasnost
wished to encourage the public into political activity, and called for dissidents to continue
their activist work, which included to encourage the Helsinki Groups to “renew their
demands”.

The next follow-up to the Helsinki Conference began in Vienna in the autumn of 1986, and
would last until January 1989. The Soviet opening statement came unexpected upon the
delегations, as Shevardnadze proposed to hold an international conference on human rights in
Moscow. Yet, if this conference were to be held, the Western parties demanded the Soviet
Union to make significant improvements on the human rights condition in the USSR. If this
was done, the Western leaders would agree to hold the conference in Moscow. During the
three years of the Vienna conference, several steps were taken by the Soviet leadership to
improve human rights conditions in their own country.

Previously that year, Yuriy Orlov had been released from prison, and this practice continued
with Gorbachev stating in a Politburo meeting that: “It is necessary to free political prisoners
from jails. They are there for saying the words that I, as the Secretary General, am saying

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104 Shevardnadze, The Future Belongs to Freedom, 86.
105 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 408.
107 Gorbachev, Razmysleniya o Proshlom i Budushchem, 68; and Kuzio, Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence,
67-68.
108 Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, 175-178.
However, Gorbachev’s change in attitude towards dissidents and human rights probably was a result of ongoing pressure from the West, and not necessarily motivated by any affinity for dissidents. He stated in a Politburo meeting in November that year that it was necessary to:

> Put an end to the routine. For us, it only produces dissidents. Somebody wants to go abroad for three months, and we give him only one, and that’s it. Anyway, if he wishes to run away, you think it’s trouble. It is not a loss, it is a gain if all kinds of trash got out of the country. What, essentially, did we have to give up? Orlov and Shcharanskiy? Let us sweep out with a broom everyone whom we can send abroad without hurting our security.\(^\text{110}\)

In December 1986, Gorbachev called Andrey Sakharov telling him that he could return to Moscow. Several other dissidents were released as well.\(^\text{111}\) Gorbachev had tried to avoid the issue of human rights to become a part of the agenda in foreign affairs, but by the second half of the 1980s, the Soviet leadership realized that there would be no progress in the relationship with the West unless they agreed to discuss and improve human rights conditions. And by 1987, Gorbachev agreed to discuss the issue with foreign leaders. In 1988, U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack Matlock, recounts Shevardnadze’s response when he appealed to get dissidents released from prison: “He immediately agreed to look into the cases and either resolve them favorably or explain why that was impossible. And then he said he would do this not because we requested it but because it was in the Soviet interest.”\(^\text{112}\)


\(^{110}\) Gorbachev-Fond, “V Politburo TSK KPSS. Po zapisyam Anatoliya Chernyaevyva, Vadima Medvedeva, Georgiya Shakhnazarova (1985-1991)», 107-108. Notes from this Politburo session is also presented in National Security Archive, “Anatoly Chernyaev, Notes from the Politburo Session”, 3. The English translation contains valuable information (the three final sentences in the quote above) which has been left out in the Russian document.


\(^{112}\) Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, 150.
2.2.3 The Baltic case in Soviet-U.S. relations

As more and more dissidents were released from prisons in the second half of the 1980s, several of them continued their political work, thanks to the reform policies of glasnost and perestroika, which allowed for more criticism towards the regime and forming of popular unions. This would soon lead to the rise of nationalism throughout the Soviet republics, which first and foremost became evident in the Baltic republics.113

What would later become independence movements in the Baltic republics first began as environmental movements. Protests broke out in Tallinn in 1987, in which the protesters demonstrated against the Soviet authorities and their plans of starting phosphate mining in the republic, while in Lithuania there was major discontent regarding the Ignalina nuclear power plant. These environmental movements were in many ways the predecessors of the subsequent nationalist movements.114

In 1988, Popular Fronts were established in all three Baltic republics, “Sajudis” in Lithuania, “Popular Front for the Support of Perestroika” in Estonia, and the Latvian Popular Front. These fronts were established as support for the reform policies of Gorbachev. At the same time national flags, festivals and churches were revived, which contributed to a national self-awareness. The Popular Fronts demanded more economic, cultural and ecological autonomy, as well as restrictions on immigration from other parts of the Soviet Union.115 What followed was the Soviet Supreme elections that took place in the Soviet Union in 1989. This was the first democratic election since the interwar period, and the Popular Fronts considered this an opportunity to join in on the elections. Popular Front backed candidates emerged as winners in all three Baltic republics, thus strengthening their position in their respective republics.116

A major lever for the subsequent independence movement in the Baltic republics was the case of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, where the Baltic states had been incorporated in the Soviet Union during the Second World War. According to the official Soviet story, the Baltic republics had voluntarily agreed to join the Soviet Union, but in the end of the 1980s, historians from the Baltic republics began to question the official story of

113 Smith, «Estonia. Independence and European Integration», 42-44
115 Hiden and Salmon, The Baltic Nations and Europe, 149-150.
how the Baltics joined the USSR. In 1988, the Baltic republics publicized the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and at the same time urged the Soviet Congress of People’s Deputies to investigate it. The leadership in Moscow claimed that there was no secret protocol in the pact, but eventually an investigation committee was set up. It concluded that the secret protocol did indeed exist, and stated it to be illegal. In August 1989, the Popular Fronts of the republics gathered two million people to demonstrate against the illegal incorporation of the republics into the USSR by forming a human chain stretching from Estonia to Lithuania. With the secret protocol officially stated as illegal, the Baltic republic’s focus on gaining more republic autonomy shifted towards the restoration of their independence. Gorbachev issued a statement after the demonstrations in the Baltics stating that “organizers of the events tried to stir up the mood to the present nationalistic hysteria. Slogans, which were imposed on thousands of people, showed enmity towards the Soviet system, towards Russians, to CPSU, towards the Soviet army”. He further urged the communist leadership in the Baltic republics not to put perestroika in jeopardy by allowing the nationalistic uprisings. He further stated that “the fate of the Baltic people poses a danger”.

After the results of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact investigation had come to light, independence of the Baltic republics became a topic more frequently discussed. Gorbachev’s reaction to the increasing talks of Baltic independence was to suggest a federal solution to the problem. This was a little too late. Gorbachev and his administration had, since the start of his time as General Secretary, not devoted enough attention to potential nationalistic conflicts, and for a long time he held on to the notion that the Baltic republics “won’t go anywhere…they will eventually steady down.” Adamishin has stated that one of the major reasons for the ethnic problem was “how badly Gorbachev and his team misunderstood the country they governed.” Gorbachev has also stated that “at the time we did not realize the seriousness of the processes that were taking place. We were late with responding adequately

117 Smith, «The Resurgence of Nationalism», 132.
118 Lane, «Lithuania. Stepping Westward», 106-107; and Kolstø, Kjempen Vakler, 246.
119 Smith, «The Resurgence of Nationalism», 133.
120 National Security Archive, «O Polozhenii v Respublikakh Sovetskoy Pribaltiki», 4-5.
121 Hiden and Salmon, The Baltic Nations and Europe, 156.
122 Adamishin and Schifter, Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War, 272.
123 Adamishin and Schifter, Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War, 272.
to what was happening.” In 1988, Gorbachev claimed to have “solved” the nationalities problems, stating:

Comrades, we’re entitled to say that we have settled the nationalities question. The revolution paved the way for equality of rights among the national groups, not only on the legal level but also on the social and economic level, and made a notable contribution to equalizing the economic, social and cultural levels of development of all the republics and regions and of all the peoples. The friendship among the Soviet peoples is one of the greatest triumphs of the October Revolution. In itself this is a unique phenomenon in world history, and for us one of the fundamental pillars of the power and solidity of the Soviet state.

During the first meeting between Gorbachev and newly elected U.S. President Bush in Malta in 1989, the issue of the turmoil in the Baltics came up. Bush made it clear to Gorbachev that because of the annexation of the Baltics during the Second World War, the U.S. had always considered the occupation and the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact as illegal, and would continue to do so. Nevertheless, Bush assured Gorbachev that the U.S. did not intend to egg on the independence movements any further, on the condition that Gorbachev refrained from using force on the opposition movements in the Baltic republics. If the Soviet leadership decided to use force in the Baltics, the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union would stagnate.

By the time the question of Baltic independence came up, Gorbachev’s efforts to avoid their secession were insufficient. After a visit to Lithuania in January 1990, he told the Lithuanian government that the work on a new law on secession was underway. In the eyes of the Popular Front leader of Lithuania, a new law on secession was unrelated to the Baltic case, as they were not legally a part of the USSR. The same view was held by the two other republics; the occupying state could not be the one in charge of restoring the independence of the illegally incorporated republics. They had to present the case to international law in order to restore their prewar statehood.

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124 Gorbachev, Razmyshleniya o Proshlom i Budushchem, 96.
125 Adamishin and Schifter, Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War, 272.
126 Matlock, Autopsy on an Empire, 273.
127 Hiden and Salmon, The Baltic Nations and Europe, 158-159.
In 1990, on March 11, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet declared the independence of Lithuania, followed by Estonia on March 30, and Latvia on May 4.\textsuperscript{128} In order to slow down the increasing demands for independence, the Soviet leadership adopted a new Law on Secession in April of that year. The new law required two-thirds of the population to vote for secession in a referendum, a five-year transition period and the approval of the Soviet legislature.\textsuperscript{129} This undoubtedly made secession harder, and in the republics the new law was called a “law against secession.”\textsuperscript{130} As a result of the declarations of independence, Gorbachev imposed economic sanctions on Lithuania in April 1990, and the Soviet military kept a higher profile there than in the other republics. Nevertheless, this did not hinder the republics from continuing their path towards independence.\textsuperscript{131} The Soviet leadership were discussing ways to handle the Baltic crisis, and in March 1990, the question was raised in the Politburo whether the use of force was necessary to calm the situation in the Baltic republics.\textsuperscript{132} Shevardnadze then told the U.S. ambassador Matlock that “Jack, I will resign from my position if it is discovered that we have returned to dictatorial methods of management. I do not wish to be a member of a government with blood on its hands.”\textsuperscript{133} According to Matlock, Gorbachev was constrained in his choice of dealing with the Baltics at this point. In the upcoming summit in Washington in May 1990, Gorbachev hoped to sign a trade agreement with the U.S., and the use of force in the Baltic republics could end any possibility of signing this agreement. As the Soviet economy spiraled further down, the prospects of receiving financial aid from the U.S. could ease the economic burden.\textsuperscript{134}

In May 1990, Gorbachev travelled to Washington to a summit meeting with Bush. In the preparatory talks leading up to the summit, the situation in the Baltics was a major talking point between the two foreign ministers. According to Matlock, Shevardnadze told the U.S. delegation that “if forced to choose between good relations with the United States and the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union as they defined it, Gorbachev would opt for the latter.”\textsuperscript{135} Regarding the meetings in Washington, Gorbachev has later stated that he was “not sure whether the Americans would agree to sign it. On the eve of my visit to Washington,
opponents of the trade agreement spoke out in the American press and in Congress, arguing
that there was no point in making economic presents to the Soviet Union unless Moscow
adopted a law of freedom of emigration and allowed Lithuania and the other Baltic republics
to leave the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{136} During the summit meeting, Bush agreed to sign the trade
agreement on two conditions: (1) that the Supreme Soviet passed the emigration bill; (2) that
Gorbachev lifted the economic sanctions against Lithuania.\textsuperscript{137}

In January 1991, military action was taken in the Baltics when Soviet troops attacked a TV
station in Vilnius, killing fourteen people.\textsuperscript{138} Gorbachev has stated that he did not order the
attack, and that the people who gave the command have not been identified.\textsuperscript{139} President Bush
reacted immediately by sending a letter to Gorbachev, stating that he had authorized programs
to bring financial support to the Soviet Union. Bush further stated that Gorbachev in 1990 had
agreed to refrain from using force in the Baltic states, and unless this changed he would have
to terminate the programs of financial support.\textsuperscript{140} At this point, Gorbachev was constrained in
his choice of policies as far at the Baltic republics were concerned. The use of force to calm
the situation in the Baltics could ruin his chances of receiving badly needed economic
assistance from the U.S. Yet, this also illustrates the ramifications of Gorbachev’s failed
economic reforms. Had Gorbachev succeeded in his attempt to revive the Soviet economy, he
would not have faced the pressures exerted by the U.S. administration to the same degree, and
his actions in the Baltic republics may have played out in a different manner.

Despite the clear U.S. rhetoric towards Gorbachev of not using force in the Baltics, the U.S.
hesitated to recognize their independence. The Bush administration feared that if they were
too quick to recognize the Baltic independence, it would cause more harm than good. The
U.S. hoped for the Baltic republics to come to an agreement with the leadership in Moscow if
they were to gain full independence, and the U.S. administration considered their job to
persuade Moscow into a peaceful settlement of the conflict.\textsuperscript{141} During a state visit to Moscow
in July 1991, Bush expressed his predicaments to Gorbachev, that his administration had
decided to support Gorbachev’s policy, stating that “I want the reforms in the Soviet Union to

\textsuperscript{136} Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 539.
\textsuperscript{137} Matlock, \textit{Autopsy on an Empire}, 381.
\textsuperscript{138} Brown, \textit{The Gorbachev Factor}, 280.
\textsuperscript{139} Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 578.
\textsuperscript{140} Matlock, \textit{Autopsy on an Empire}, 469-470.
\textsuperscript{141} Bush and Scowcroft, \textit{A World Transformed}, 216-217.
be successful just as much as any European does”. Nevertheless, Bush explained that he was coming under increasing pressure from various sides, both from the republican party and the media. The Sajudis leader, Landsbergis, had asked Bush to stop over in Vilnius on the way home. Bush assured Gorbachev that he would not go, but he stressed to Gorbachev that the best solution here would be to let the Baltic republics go. Nevertheless, after the failed coup towards Gorbachev in August 1991, Bush came under more pressure both from inside and outside the U.S. to recognize the Baltic independence. Vytautas Landsbergis, the leader of the Lithuanian parliament, sent a letter to Bush asking for immediate “renewal of recognition for Lithuania.”

Late in August, Bush called on Gorbachev to tell him that the U.S. could not postpone recognition any longer, and they agreed that Bush would recognize the independence of the Baltic republics on September 2. The Soviet leadership followed suit a few days later, and the Baltic republics were the first Soviet republics to be officially recognized by Kremlin on September 6. Even though the U.S. administration fully supported the independence of the Baltic republics, this recognition was not given to other Soviet republics. By the time of the August coup, several other republics had declared themselves independent. Richard Schifter recounts that in the heat of the Baltic independence movement, the Georgian leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdiya, called on the U.S. to recognize their independence:

I told him, to his great disappointment, that while the US supported Baltic independence, it would not advocate Georgian independence. We would support the right of the people of Georgia to participate in free elections and to have their language and culture recognized, but we would not support the dissolution of the USSR.

In 1991, just a few weeks before the coup in August, Bush paid a visit to Kiev. He had in advance assured Gorbachev that his upcoming trip was not intended as a symbol of support.

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142 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 621.
143 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 621.
144 Plokhy, The Last Empire, The Final Days of the Soviet Union, 197.
145 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 538.
146 Brown, The Gorbachev Factor, 303.
147 Brown, The Gorbachev Factor, 303.
148 Richard Schifter was Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.
149 Adamishin and Schifter, Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War, 194.
for the independence movements.\textsuperscript{150} In Kiev, Bush gave a speech warning against separatist tendencies in the republics stating:

Yet freedom is not the same as independence. Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred. We will support those who want to build democracy.\textsuperscript{151}

The speech given by Bush in Kiev is a clear indication that the U.S. did not wish to see the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The U.S. advocacy for, and recognition of Baltic independence was a result of their long-standing, - non-recognition policy of the illegal incorporation of the Baltic republics during the Second World War. The recognition granted to the Baltics was not extended to other Soviet republics when they increasingly demanded for independence.

2.3 Conclusion

When the Helsinki Accords had been signed, the Soviet leadership decided to publish the entire agreement from the conference. As the Soviet citizens were made aware of the Final Act, it caused activists to use it as leverage to establish Helsinki groups with the intention of monitoring Soviet compliance with the Helsinki accords. Soviet authorities quickly silenced these groups by sending human rights activists to labor camps. The Soviet leadership at the time failed to see the significance of the inclusion of Basket IV, which stated that the signatory countries would meet regularly to monitor compliance over the Helsinki accords. The inclusion of Basket IV allowed the West to regularly criticize the Soviet Union for not adhering to the human rights principles in the Final Act. The Soviet leadership dismissed criticism of how they dealt with their internal affairs and it had, at least initially, a minimal effect on the harsh crackdown of human rights activists. Initially clinging to the same practice, Gorbachev realized soon enough that human rights were an integral part of his relations with the U.S. If the USSR were to achieve a normalization of their relationship with the U.S., it was made clear to them that they had to improve the human rights condition in the USSR. The Soviet leadership’s will to put human rights on the agenda in top-level meetings

\textsuperscript{150} Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 621.
\textsuperscript{151} Bush and Scowcroft, \textit{A World Transformed}, 515.
with the U.S., including the subsequent release of dissidents, seems to have been motivated by
a need to do so, and not necessarily due to a genuine embrace to human rights principles. The
decision to let Yelena Bonner travel abroad for instance, seems to have been motivated by the
international attention surrounding the issue, and during a Politburo meeting discussing the
release of dissidents, Gorbachev referred to them as “trash”. Wallander states that “on
balance, what we find is that although Western countries were cautious and discreet, their
consistent high-level support for human and political rights in the Soviet Union did play a role
in magnifying the constraints that Gorbachev faced and the policies he chose.”\textsuperscript{152} It is
reasonable to conclude that the U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union was indeed a high-level
support for human and political rights, and the empirical data indicates that it probably did
constrain Gorbachev’s choice of policies as far as human rights were concerned.

Wallander further states that:

The Baltic governments were undoubtedly helped in their independence efforts by the
Western policy of refusing to recognize the incorporation of Latvia, Lithuania, and
Estonia into the Soviet Union in 1940. They were also aided by the principles of the
Helsinki Final Act, which made human and minority rights a legitimate matter of
international discussion.\textsuperscript{153}

Because of the contents of the Helsinki accords, they could most certainly have been used as
leverage for the Baltic independence movements. Yet, human rights and the Final Act were
not the means used by the Baltic republics. When the Popular Fronts eventually transformed
themselves into independence movements, they called for the publication of the secret
protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, in which the Baltic republics had illegally been
incorporated into the USSR during the Second World War. When the Soviet leadership later
publicly stated the pact to have been illegal, the Baltic republics called for their pre-war
territories to be restored, as they in fact never had legally been a part of the Soviet Union. The
Baltics did not need to make use of the Helsinki accords, as the illegality of their
incorporation was strong enough leverage in itself.

As far as the role of the United States in the Baltic independence movements were
concerned, the U.S. had never recognized the Baltic republics as legally a part of the

\textsuperscript{152} Wallander, «Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union», 171.
\textsuperscript{153} Wallander, «Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union», 174.
Soviet Union because of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. When the republics called for their territories to be restored, the U.S. urged the Soviet leadership to let them go. However, despite the U.S. policy of non-recognition, they hesitated to publicly recognize their independence. The U.S. were concerned with the ramifications this would cause to Gorbachev’s reforms, and they did not wish to see the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Wallander has stated that the U.S. role in republic separatism in the Baltics were “Western leaders’ maintenance of principled support for human and political rights, severely constrained Gorbachev’s options in dealing with the increasing threat of republic separatism.” During the turmoil in the Baltic republics, the U.S. government warned Gorbachev against resorting to the use of force to calm the situation, stressing that this would damage their bilateral relationship and economic cooperation. Gorbachev was, because of the suffering economy, dependent on economic aid from the U.S. The U.S. was not willing to grant him this aid if he decided to take violent actions to crack down on separatism movements in the Baltics. In essence, Wallander’s conclusion that this constrained Gorbachev’s choices in dealing with separatism is reasonable. Nevertheless, what Wallander fails to mention is that if the Soviet economy had not been in such a poor state at the time, the Soviet leadership would probably not have been as receptive to outside pressure. If Gorbachev’s reforms had not failed so spectacularly, one could be tempted to raise the question whether he would have responded to U.S. pressure in a different way. The bilateral relationship between Gorbachev and Bush was, as far as Baltic separatism is concerned, probably of more importance than previously assumed, but in the very end, the constraints imposed on Gorbachev was the result of his own doing as it illustrates the ramifications of his failed economic reforms.

The role of the Helsinki accords and human rights in the Soviet collapse can be seen through its effect on pushing forward reforms in the Soviet Union, reforms which were crucial in the subsequent separatism movements in the republics. When Gorbachev embarked upon his reform policies of glasnost, he opened up for increasing freedom of speech and press, and further encouraging the citizens to be more politically active. These were freedoms expressed in Basket III of the Helsinki accords, which called for

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154 Wallander, "Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union", 177.
“improvement of the circulation of, access to, and exchange of information.” Yet, it is important to stress that the role of human rights and the Final Act in pushing forward reforms in Moscow were of a secondary nature. From the beginning, the glasnost reforms were intended to aid Gorbachev in his economic reforms, as it was believed that perestroika could not be able to work without participation of the Soviet citizens. The role of the Helsinki accords and human rights was through Gorbachev’s focus on Basket IV of the Final Act, which stated that the signatory countries would meet regularly to monitor compliance of the Helsinki accords. Basket IV proved to be a constant reminder for Gorbachev of the commitments they had agreed upon in Helsinki in 1975, as the Soviet Union was being regularly accused of signing the Final Act in bad faith, including a continuous U.S. pressure to improve the human rights condition in the USSR if they were to achieve a normalization of their bilateral relationship.

156 Kolstø, Kjempen Vakler, 80.
3 The Soviet Defense Burden and the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars")

3.1 Background

The Cold War\textsuperscript{157} was characterized by a growing production of nuclear weapons and a subsequent competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for dominance in nuclear arms. When the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear weapon in 1949, the United States no longer held atomic monopoly\textsuperscript{158}, and a nuclear arms race between the two superpowers would continue until the signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) forty years later. A fear of nuclear war and mutual destruction dominated this period, and by being continually suspicious of each other, the tension between them only escalated. A brief period of eased relations, détente, led to a short-lived improvement in the bilateral relationship. However, with the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and Ronald Reagan’s win in the 1980 U.S. presidential election, détente ended.\textsuperscript{159} The Soviet Union and the United States never used nuclear weapons against each other during the Cold War, however, they kept each other in a state of fear by deploying missiles, submarines and strategic bombers aimed at each other. The fear of nuclear war led to the production of more and upgraded weapons, which became increasingly more destructive, accurate and had a faster delivery.\textsuperscript{160} Because of the competitive environment between the two superpowers, technological and military research was intensified, and weapons and technology became ever more advanced. The nuclear weapons used by the Americans in the early days of the Cold War weighed thousands of pounds, taking them several hours to reach their targets. At the end of the Cold War, however, American missiles could reach the Soviet Union in just thirty minutes.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{157} I have defined the Cold War from the end of the Second World War until the signing of the START treaty in 1991. The Soviet Union and the United States had been allied during the Second World War, however, their ideological inequalities emerged when their common enemy (Germany) had been defeated. With the signing of the START treaty both agreed on a major disarmament of their strategic nuclear weapons, thereby ending the arms race which had been characteristic of the Cold War.

\textsuperscript{158} Crockatt, \textit{The Fifty Years War}, 82.

\textsuperscript{159} Moss, \textit{A History of Russia. Volume II: Since 1985}, 448.

\textsuperscript{160} Hoffman, \textit{The Dead Hand}, 15.

\textsuperscript{161} Hoffman, \textit{The Dead Hands}, 15.
This highly tensed environment, which led to the rapid production of weapons, caused the superpowers to allocate more resources to defense related industries. As for the Soviet Union, the burden of defense became clear when the country hit their period of stagnation in the 1970s. Dallin stated that:

This was also the one area where U.S. policy may have had an impact. Given the Soviet leadership’s commitment after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 to catch up with American military might, including R&D in advanced technology, a totally disproportionate share of Soviet GNP (clearly over 15 percent, by some estimates a lot more) was allocated for the arms race – in an economy whose total product was a good deal less than that of the U.S. The result of these investments was to seriously distort the economy at precisely a time when the decline in its growth rate required cuts in allocations to other parts of the economy, including welfare, services, and consumption.¹⁶²

The Soviets did indeed allocate enormous resources to defense, and in the process, neglected the civilian industry. When Ronald Reagan became U.S. President in 1980, he had won the election on a strongly anti-Soviet rhetoric. He promised to build up the U.S. army, declared the Soviet Union an “evil empire”, and launched the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). The leadership in Kremlin was alarmed by this, and the two nations were further alienated. Some have credited Reagan for ending the Soviet Union by presenting the Soviets with an economic burden they could not handle.¹⁶³ But is this too self-congratulatory? Did the arms race during the Cold War severely strain the Soviet economy, leading to its collapse? And did Ronald Reagan accelerate Soviet defense spending by building up the U.S. army? Did the SDI pose such a threat to the leadership in Kremlin that they attempted to increase their nuclear capacity as a reaction to SDI, and in doing that, undermine their economy? Or did they attempt to counter with their own version of SDI in the midst of their economic crisis, causing it to decline further? Can any of these questions lead to a new understanding of the collapse of the Soviet Union? This chapter seeks to find an answer to Dallin’s two hypotheses, “a heightening of the fear of nuclear war” and “the strains imposed by the defense burden”.

3.2 The Burden of Defense Becomes Evident

When the Soviet economy collapsed at the end of the 1980s, it had been deteriorating for a while. After several decades of economic growth, the Soviet economy stagnated in the 1970s, and despite efforts on Gorbachev’s part to restructure the economy, it kept on declining and eventually it collapsed. How could it be that an economy, which had recently experienced economic growth,164 deteriorated to such a degree that it eventually collapsed? Is it reasonable to ascribe this to the competitive arms race? In this part of the thesis, I wish to elucidate on the role of the defense burden in the stagnation-period of the 1970s.

The Soviets began to invest more money in military- and defense-related industries in the 1960s, and the decision to increase allocations to defense can be attributed to the Cuban missile crisis. As the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoliy Dobrynin stated in his memoirs from 1995:

The Soviet leadership could not forget a blow to its prestige bordering on humiliation when it was forced to admit its weakness before the whole world and withdraw its missiles from Cuba. Our military establishment used this experience to secure itself a new large-scale program of nuclear arms development. This was bound to lead to a new stage in the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union.165

The Soviet leadership began its quest to match the American build-up by increasing their ground forces, upgrading the navy and to catch up to the American level in nuclear weapons. Of course, an increase in allocations to the military sector was not a new phenomenon for the Soviet Union, as this had been the case during the Second World War. However, an increase in military expenditures during war time is to be expected. The circumstances during the Cold War was of a different nature, as the Soviet Union poured money into the military sector during peace time. It led to an enormous build-up of the military and a competition for military preponderance between the two superpowers. By 1969, the Soviets and the Americans were on the same level as far as nuclear weapons were concerned.166

How much resources that were allocated to the military build-up of the Soviet Union has proved difficult to find an answer to, and Malia asserts that the “Soviets themselves never

165 Dobrynin, In Confidence, 93.
166 Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, 371.
really knew.” Gorbachev confirms this, saying that most people in the Politburo did not have any access to the numbers, although they knew they were high. CIA have estimated the military expenditures to have been 15 percent of GNP, however, Gorbachev claimed them to have been as much as 20 percent of GNP, and a total of 40 percent of the state budget. The figures presented below represent estimates made by World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfer (WMEAT) in 1985. This figure shows their estimates of the Soviet military expenditures as a percentage of GNP from 1973-1980.


Even though it is difficult to get any exact numbers on the Soviet defense expenditures, one can see a pattern that they remained high, at around 14-15 percent of GNP. The question remains whether the increase in defense expenditures played a significant role in the economic stagnation of the 1970s, and whether it affected other parts of the Soviet economy. There seems to be a consensus that the civilian sector was mostly affected by the increase of military expenditures. Robert Allen argues that this was especially the case as far as

168 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 215.
170 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 215.
civilian innovation was concerned, as resources in R&D were redirected away from the civilian to the military sector. The increase of allocations to the military is well illustrated by Vitaliy Katayev, a member of the Defense Industry Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, who claims that this led to an overproduction of military weapons:

Nobody tried to figure out how many weapons the army really needed. This led to a poor understanding of the production capacity that would be sufficient for the military industry. The ministry of defense was always asking for as much military equipment as possible. Gosplan, the state planning agency, set deliveries on the basis of the country’s economic possibilities; however, it gave priority to military orders. The military-industrial complex was obliged to annually increase its overall production by at least 2 to 3 percent, so production of specific weapons was not stopped even after the military’s needs had been met.

Katayev provides an interesting point-of-view of the forces driving the Soviet military expenditures. The overproduction of military weapons suggests that it might not have been the Americans, or the arms race per se, who were the motivation behind the Soviet military buildup, but rather that the leaders in Kremlin would have continued to increase their military capacity, even in the absence of a U.S military buildup. He suggests that the production of military weapons was rather driven by flaws in the planned economy, whose output targets were to be achieved despite having already reached their necessary quantities. This is supported by a study conducted by Charles Wolf Jr. and Benjamin Zycher, examining the “military dimensions of communist systems”. They concluded that:

Communist systems tend toward greater development of their military dimensions, relative to corresponding civil dimensions, than do non-communist systems. More specifically, this tendency is substantial and statistically significant, with respect to three quantitative measures: the proportion of GNP represented by military outlays; the percentage of the population in the active military services; and the development of military technology compared with civil technology.

174 Katayev, A Memoir of the Missile Age: One Man’s Journey, 115.
175 Wolf and Zycher, «Military Dimensions of Communist Systems».
They argue that communist systems are more inclined to provide more privileges to the military sectors, such as higher salaries, than the civilian sectors. Furthermore, the focus on military evolvement tends to affect the economy as a whole, in contrast to non-communist systems.\textsuperscript{177} An explanation for this, they argue, could be that “power-maximization is at the core of their political commitment” and that “overdevelopment of the military dimensions of communist-systems might be explained as a reaction to a perceived and relentless external threat.”\textsuperscript{178}

Due to the redirection of resources away from the civilian to the military sector, the civilian sector suffered from a chronic lack of resources followed by a subsequent decline in inventions between 1960-1985.\textsuperscript{179} Thane Gustafson argues that this hit the civilian machinery especially hard.\textsuperscript{180} An example of this is the oil facility Glavneftemash. It was an important asset in the Soviet oil industry, responsible for two-thirds of the Soviet production of oil-equipment. However, it suffered, due to lack of resources. Despite its huge productions, it was highly ineffective and its machinery was outdated.\textsuperscript{181} Gustafson states that “Glavneftemash was working at 99 percent capacity, but its output was antiquated and substandard.”\textsuperscript{182} This led to a poor quality in products in the civilian sector.

Another effect of the defense burden on the civilian economy was the general lack of manpower in civilian R&D. As argued above, the defense ministry managed to get a hold on more resources in R&D, and this was especially the case when it came to employees.\textsuperscript{183} Data have indicated that there was an increase of 62 percent of employees in military related machinery branches between 1962 and 1980, while for the civilian branches there was only an increase of 35 percent. The data further suggests that 70 percent of the employees in the civilian branches were employed in the machine building and metal working industries, whose production further was delivered to military manufacturers.\textsuperscript{184}

Rowland Maddock also raises another question which is important to include in the analysis of the effect of increased military expenditures on the civilian R&D. It has been argued that

\textsuperscript{177} Wolf and Zycher, «Military Dimensions of Communist Systems», 15.
\textsuperscript{179} Allen, «The Rise and Decline of the Soviet Economy», 867.
\textsuperscript{180} Gustafson, Crisis Amid Plenty: The Politics of Soviet Energy under Brezhnev and Gorbachev, 193.
\textsuperscript{181} Gustafson, Crisis Amid Plenty, 190.
\textsuperscript{182} Gustafson, Crisis Amid Plenty, 190.
\textsuperscript{183} Allen, «The Rise and Decline of the Soviet Economy», 867.
\textsuperscript{184} Maddock, «The Soviet Defence Burden and Arms Control», 384.
planned economy is flawed in the sense that it is not able to produce effective, scientific research. This is because planned economy is not able to react to sudden changes and new challenges, which is both a goal and an essential part of scientific research.\textsuperscript{185} The reason that development of military research worked so well in this respect, he argues, was because it was protected from:

the most debilitating consequences of civilian planning. These procedures are effective partly to the degree that they are able to transfer the burden of inefficiency to the unprotected civilian enterprises which must cope with delays, re-routing of planned inputs and low quality inputs.\textsuperscript{186}

Scientific research and progress was supposed to fulfill the demands of the Soviet leadership, and not necessarily for the pursuit of scientific knowledge in itself.\textsuperscript{187} That being said, the Soviet military sector was not completely shielded from poor quality in products. Even though the Soviets might have outdone the U.S. in quantity of space and military equipment, the quality was somewhat lower of the Soviet products. One example is satellites. In 1982, the Soviets had 2,069 satellites in orbit, while the U.S. had 997 satellites. However, just a year later only 103 Soviet satellites remained in orbit (about five percent), while the U.S. had 179 satellites (about 18 percent) left in orbit.\textsuperscript{188} Katayev has also expressed that the military sector was not completely shielded from the destroying consequences of the civilian sector, stating that defects in materials delivered to the military sector led the military designers to use more material than necessary.\textsuperscript{189} One can only assume/speculate that this made the costs in military production even higher, leading the military to spend more money than originally intended.

This case of increased defense expenditures led to a rapid technological development in the military sector, probably with an overproduction of military equipment. However, it was at the expense of the civilian sector. With fewer resources available in the civilian sector, productivity growth and innovation declined.\textsuperscript{190} Maddock argues that the tradeoff of equipment and updated machinery between the military and civilian sectors is an important aspect for a country’s overall economic growth: “The data show a consistently faster rate of

\textsuperscript{185} Maddock, «The Soviet Defence Burden and Arms Control», 384; and Yegorov «Post-Soviet Science: Difficulties in the Transformation of the R&D Systems in Russia and Ukraine», 601.
\textsuperscript{186} Maddock, «The Soviet Defence Burden and Arms Control», 384.
\textsuperscript{187} Kontorovich, «The Future of Soviet Science», 114.
\textsuperscript{188} Goldman, Gorbachev’s Challenge, 143.
\textsuperscript{189} Katayev, A Memoir of the Missile Age: One Man’s Journey, 114-115.
\textsuperscript{190} Allen, «The Rise and Decline of the Soviet Economy», 878.
military expansion, which is especially damaging to civilian prospects, because more than any other component of investment machines effectively embody new technology, which is otherwise only weakly stimulated in Soviet society.”¹⁹¹

3.3 A New Dilemma Arises: The Strategic Defense Initiative

Amid all the military buildup and uncertainty characterizing the Cold War, were there any guarantees against nuclear war? When two states have acquired approximately the same strength in nuclear weapons, and both are able to eliminate their opponent, it would be pointless for one side to attack the other. If that should happen, the adversary would strike back, and the two states would end up mutually destroying each other. However, this also provides a certain safety for both parties. If both nations have the capability to inflict unacceptable damage to the other, then the fear of nuclear war prevents them from doing so. This is the doctrine of mutual assured destruction (MAD). This doctrine was applicable during the Cold War, and it kept the two superpowers from engaging each other in nuclear war.

Another guarantee against nuclear war was the ABM Treaty, which was a result of the SALT agreement. The treaty was signed at the peak of détente in 1972, with the aim of reducing the number of anti-ballistic missiles. The practice of reducing anti-ballistic missiles was based on the theory that they could undermine MAD, and that ABM’s might provoke a pre-emptive first-strike against the nation holding such systems. The idea behind the ABM Treaty was that it could make the Cold War less threatening and more manageable, and end the probability of extending the arms race into missile defenses.¹⁹²

The ABM Treaty was explicit in what was and what was not permitted. Each side was permitted to deploy two systems; one to protect their capital and another to protect their ICBM launch area. However, the Treaty limited the number of interceptor missiles on each side to no more than one hundred at launch sites. The Treaty prohibited the development,

testing, and deployment of ABM systems whether sea-based, air-based, space-based, or mobile land-based.\textsuperscript{193}

The launch of Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983 would affect the guarantees against a potential nuclear war between the two superpowers. It gave rise to a heightening of the fear of nuclear war, and the doctrine of MAD and the ABM treaty would be rendered useless. But were the effects of the SDI a significant factor in the demise of the USSR? Before I proceed to the analysis, it is necessary to explain how and why the SDI came about, and what it consisted of.

3.3.1 Ronald Reagan and the Strategic Defense Initiative

The idea of the Strategic Defense Initiative is quite well reflected in the foreign policy of the Reagan administration. When it came into office, they had during the elections led a heavy anti-Soviet campaign with harsh accusations against the Soviet Union. By departing from détente, the foreign policy of the Reagan administration was substantially devoted to pushing back their ideological counterpart, the Soviet Union, including a massive build-up of the military.\textsuperscript{194} In Reagan’s address to the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983, he declared the Soviet Union an “evil empire”.\textsuperscript{195} This aggressive stance toward the Soviet Union and communism was a characteristic feature of the rhetoric Reagan led during his first term as president.

The question facing the Reagan administration on how they should deal with the perceived threat and expansion of the Soviet ideology was laid out in the National Security Decision Directive 75 from 1983. This directive consisted of three elements on how the U.S. could shape Soviet decision-making. First, they would contain and reverse Soviet expansionism, which would later become known as the Reagan Doctrine.\textsuperscript{196} This consisted of supporting anti-communism opposition throughout the world by offering them both financial and logistics support in order to “roll back” communism. This would later result in operations in Nicaragua, Angola, Cambodia and Afghanistan, with the aim of clearing away

\textsuperscript{193} U.S. Department of State, «Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems.»

\textsuperscript{194} LaFeber, \textit{America, Russia and the Cold War}, 316-318.

\textsuperscript{195} Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, «Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida. March 8, 1983.»

Second, the U.S. government would “seek to promote the process of change in the Soviet Union towards a more pluralistic political and economic system in which the power of the privileged ruling elite is gradually reduced”. The third and final element was to make the Soviets reach agreements in their mutual interests.

The foreign policy of the Reagan administration further included a massive build-up of the U.S. military. The U.S. Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, expressed a need to restructure the military on the basis that they had been outperformed by the Soviet Union as far as the military budget was concerned. Weinberger was the one trying to sell the defense budget to the congress, and stated that they would have to convey it to the Soviet leadership that if they launched a first-strike against the U.S., they would be met with strikes back that they could not recover from. The increase in the U.S. military budget during the Reagan-period was striking. Compared to the last defense budget of the Carter administration, which proposed 171.4 billion dollars in military spending, the last defense budget proposed by the Reagan administration (in 1989) was 300 billion dollars.

The launch of the Strategic Defense Initiative was keeping in line with National Security Decision Directive 75 and Reagan’s intention of building up the U.S. military. Ronald Reagan launched the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, or “Star Wars”) in 1983. By announcing the plans for SDI, Reagan was rejecting MAD and the ABM Treaty, and by doing this, he was shaking the ground of the power balance, and the doctrine of MAD would fall apart. If one of the nuclear powers was in the process of gaining a clear advantage, like establishing a missile defense system that would have the capability of intercepting the rival’s missiles mid-air, the one without this advantage could be tempted to launch an attack against the other before this system was in place. There was also the possibility that the nation holding such a defense would consider itself unassailable and could without fear of retaliation, attack the vulnerable counterpart. The mere thought of this possibility, increased the fear of nuclear war.

Ronald Reagan’s attitude towards U.S.-Soviet relations put a stop to détente and MAD. He once stated that détente “had been a one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue
By launching SDI, Reagan directly challenged the Soviet Union and put a final nail in the coffin of détente. SDI would weaken the Soviet nuclear position, and improve the comparative edge of the United States. But the Strategic Defense Initiative also demonstrated Reagan’s own views as far as nuclear weapons was concerned: he was not pro nuclear weapons, and he wanted to completely abolish them. This came across in his address to the nation in 1983, when he publicly announced the plans for the Strategic Defense Initiative:

“Wouldn’t it be better to save lives than to avenge them? Are we not capable of demonstrating our peaceful intentions by applying all our abilities and our ingenuity to achieve a truly lasting stability? I think we are. Indeed, we must. (…) Let me share with you a vision for the future which offers hope. It is that we embark on a program to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive. Let us turn to the very strengths in technology that spawned our great industrial base and that have given us the quality of life we enjoy today. What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant US retaliation to deter a Soviet attack, that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?”

The idea behind the Strategic Defense Initiative was that it would be a total space-based shield that would work as a defense against nuclear missiles. It proposed to intercept missiles before they reached their targets. The technology of the program was supposed to be able to identify and destroy incoming missiles in three stages: as they were launched, as they travelled, and as they approached their targets.

There is no doubt that Reagan had high hopes for this project to work. However, there were several technical obstacles that had to be overcome. Ideally, he wished for the program to be completely bulletproof, and that it could be relied on one hundred percent. No possible incoming missiles could be left undetected nor undestroyed, and the defensive command and control system had to be able to block out any interference and remain intact. Basically, the

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205 LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 319.
program required technology that did not yet exist. There was also a possibility that the Soviet Union would develop weapons that could counter the SDI, and if that happened, the space-based elements of the program would be vulnerable to an attack. Besides, the financial aspects also had to be addressed.  

No matter how large the technical challenges were, the Soviet responses to the project seemed to be a bigger obstacle. The program caused a massive uproar in Moscow because of the ramifications it could bring. Not only did the leadership in the USSR criticize the program as a threat to world peace and stability, but if the program turned out to be successful they would suffer both economic and strategic losses. The USSR had invested in heavy ICBMs, which would be wasted, they would also be forced to counter with their own replicated defense system, and last but not least, the United States would have major strategic advantages. The technological backwardness and economic decline of the USSR did not allow for investments in such a program, let alone that the program would work at all.

The theory that the SDI and the U.S. military buildup during Reagan’s presidency was meant to bankrupt the Soviet Union by pressuring their already weak economy has also been somewhat expressed by Soviet politicians from that time. The Soviet ambassador to the U.S., Anatoliy Dobrynin has stated that:

> Signs of stagnation appeared at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s, gradually affecting the country’s economic and social development. This in turn increasingly tempted the American leadership to bring the highest possible economic, political, psychological and military pressure to bear, thus retarding the general development of the Soviet Union and weakening of our international position.

A CIA report from 1983 discussing the possible Soviet responses to the Strategic Defense Initiative concluded that the Soviets would probably respond in two ways; a short-term response and a long-term response. The short-term response would probably be through negotiations to make the Americans abandon their ballistic missile defense plans, while the long-term response, it argued, would be to continue the development of their own missile defense systems.

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207 Crockatt, *The Fifty Years War*, 320.
210 Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 475.
systems or possibly develop new advanced systems.211 “This would place a substantial additional pressure on the Soviet economy and confront the leadership with difficult policy choices”212, the report stated.

3.3.2 Soviet reactions 1983-1985

After Reagan announced the intention of developing the Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983, there was no clear immediate response from Kremlin before Mikhail Gorbachev took office as General Secretary in 1985. During the period 1983-1985, the foreign policy of the Soviet Union was somewhat unclear. This was mainly due to the rapid change of leadership in the communist party. When Brezhnev died in 1982, Yuri Andropov took over as General Secretary of the USSR. However, he only remained in office for one year and three months before his successor, Konstantin Chernenko, took over. Chernenko did not last much longer, and only thirteen months in as General Secretary he also died. Both being old and affected by declining health, they were away from office for periods of time.213

That is not to say that there was no reaction at all from the Soviet leadership before Gorbachev. After the announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative, the immediate reaction from Moscow was overall negative. Andropov and his men in Kremlin was convinced that the United States was plotting a war against them, and they were alarmed by the announcement of SDI combined with the “evil empire” rhetoric of Reagan.214 Andropov accused the United States of not engaging in the efforts to avoid nuclear war, and that the prospects of the Strategic Defense Initiative would leave the Soviet Union defenseless with no opportunity for a retaliatory strike. He further stressed that if the U.S. continued and succeeded in the development of this system it would escalate the arms race leaving the Soviets with no other choice but to respond in the same way.215 “All attempts at gaining military superiority over the U.S.S.R. are futile. The Soviet Union will never allow them to succeed. It will never be caught defenseless by any threat. Let there be no mistake about this

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213 Crockatt, The Fifty Years War, 308-309.
215 Burns, “Andropov Says U.S. is Spurring a Race in Strategic Arms.”
in Washington”, Andropov stated in an interview.\textsuperscript{216} Judging by these statements, the Soviet leadership were prepared to answer this challenge by military means. The Soviet scientific and military community did not know exactly what to make of the announcement of SDI, and the general opinion towards it was mixed. According to the Soviet Ambassador to the U.S., Anatoliy Dobrynin, some military designers was quick to express the need to counter the American initiative.\textsuperscript{217} But the overall consensus was not one of imminent danger. Some in the scientific and military community saw no reason to believe that the technology of SDI would be functional, at least not to the degree Reagan had claimed. But they were not completely at ease with the prospects of SDI. The biggest concern was the prospects of the Americans taking the lead in military technology, and even though they were skeptical about the feasibility of SDI, they thought that the Americans might be able to produce a partially effective defensive shield.\textsuperscript{218}

Some of the steps taken by the Soviet leadership shortly after the announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative was to submit a draft treaty to the UN on banning testing of anti-satellite weapons (the ASAT moratorium).\textsuperscript{219} This treaty proposed to ban testing and deploying space weapons, including the removal of existing anti-satellite systems. This treaty was proposed in August 1983, just a few months after the announcement of Star Wars. It might seem like a direct response to Reagan’s Star Wars program, however, the idea of banning space weapons was nothing new. A similar treaty had been proposed by the Soviet leadership in 1981, and the 1983 treaty was rather an extension of the treaty proposed in 1981. Because of this, it is difficult to isolate this proposal as a direct response to the Strategic Defense Initiative. The United States did not consent to the treaty.\textsuperscript{220}

Even though the leaders in Kremlin was alerted by the announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative, the prospects of the upcoming U.S. ballistic missiles, Pershing II, seemed to be of greater concern. In the 1970s, the Soviets had deployed SS-20 missiles (intermediate-range ballistic missiles) aimed at both Europe and Asia. The Western response was to approve the deployment of the ballistic missiles, Pershing II, in Europe aimed at the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{216} Burns, “Andropov Says U.S. is Spurring a Race in Strategic Arms.”
\textsuperscript{217} Dobrynin, In Confidence, 528.
\textsuperscript{218} Garthoff, Detente and Confrontation, 1027; and Zubok, A Failed Empire, 273.
\textsuperscript{219} Evangelista, Unarmed Forces, 237-238.
\textsuperscript{220} U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, Anti-Satellite Weapons, Countermeasures, and Arms Control, 97-99.
\textsuperscript{221} Hoffman, The Dead Hand, 60.
These upcoming deployments in Europe were discussed at a Politburo meeting in May 1983. The missiles were regarded as a security threat to the USSR because of their accuracy and speed, and their ability to fly under radars. During the Politburo meeting it was discussed how they could hinder the planned deployments. There was no mention of the ramifications of the Strategic Defense Initiative during this meeting, even though the program had been announced just two months earlier.222

In the autumn of 1983, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States deteriorated further. In September, a Soviet military plane shot down a Korean commercial airline flying from Alaska to Seoul. The plane had entered Soviet airspace, and the Soviets who shot it down had mistaken it for an American spy plane. Reagan was outraged and called it a “crime against humanity”. Kremlin did not publicly admit to the accident until a month later, and the two superpowers lashed out against each other, with Andropov publicly stating that no improvement in the bilateral relationship would become a reality while Reagan was in office.223

The hostility between the USSR and the U.S. culminated in November 1983, during the negotiations over Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) in Geneva. The Soviet Union had proposed a compromise to the U.S.; if the U.S. stopped their planned deployment of the Pershing II missiles in Europe, the USSR would reduce the number of their intermediate-range missiles. Washington rejected this proposal. With the approval of the West-German government, the U.S. began the deployment of Pershing II. In protest, the Soviets walked out of the INF-negotiations in Geneva. The USSR also broke off the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) that autumn, mainly because of the U.S. stance on the Strategic Defense Initiative.224

When the Reagan administration had tried to convince the congress of the benefits of taking up the Strategic Defense Initiative, they argued that it would prove useful in the future bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union. They claimed that the Strategic Defense Initiative would push the Soviet leadership into making concessions in nuclear disarmament on U.S.

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222 Archive material from this Politburo meeting has been presented both in Hoffmann, The Dead Hand, 61, and Evangelista, Unarmed Forces, 241. They have both taken use of archival material from the Defense Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

223 Fitzgerald, Way Out There in the Blue, 228.

224 Garthoff, The Great Transition, 134.
However, it is apparent that the return to disarmament talks proved even more difficult for the Soviet leadership after the announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative. As Dobrynin noted, “the impact of Reagan’s hard-line policy was exactly the opposite from the one intended in Washington. It strengthened those in the Politburo, the Central Committee, and the security apparatus who had been pressing for a mirror-image of Reagan’s own policy”.

After a period of declining health, Andropov died in February 1984, and he was succeeded by Konstantin Chernenko. Because of Chernenko’s short tenure, there was no significant change in the policies of the USSR, and the issue of SDI was still at a stalemate. In 1984, Kremlin announced an increase in the published defense budget of 12 percent, accompanied with a rhetoric claiming that Western imperialists attempted to force the Soviet Union into an arms race that intended to cripple their economy. It was further stated that the Soviet economy could handle this potential military buildup better than the U.S. The announced increase in military expenditures, Garthoff argues, was a rather small increase, intended as a demonstrative sign to the U.S.

One of the issues on Chernenko’s agenda was the subject of banning weapons in space. A meeting between the two nations was proposed to take up the issue of “militarization of outer space”. However, an agreement on key topics to cover was never reached. Washington insisted on discussing INF and START at the meeting, but the Soviets refused. What the Soviets wished to extract from this meeting was a ban on antisatellite weapons, which the U.S. wanted rephrased to “limitations”. The Reagan administration was not interested in negotiating the issue of SDI either, and so the talks were not held.

A further step towards dialogue was reached in January 1985 in a meeting between Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko and Secretary of State George Schultz. The meeting was to set an agenda for the upcoming negotiations in nuclear and space arms control. The different views between the two nations on the banning of space weapons was the main topic discussed. The Strategic Defense Initiative was briefly touched upon. A couple of months later, Chernenko

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225 Zubok, A Failed Empire, 273.
226 Dobrynin, In Confidence, 482.
227 Garthoff, The Great Transition, 189.
died after a period of declining health. The new General Secretary was to become the younger and healthier Mikhail Gorbachev.

### 3.3.3 Soviet reactions under Gorbachev

No attempt to re-start a dialogue with Washington had been made in the immediate years before Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary, and the matter of the Strategic Defense Initiative remained “unsolved” during the Andropov/Chernenko years. With Gorbachev as head of state, the Soviet Union saw its first summit meeting with the United States since the 1970s, and even though the Strategic Defense Initiative remained a thorn in the side of the relationship, the two superpowers had at least initiated a dialogue. Continuing from this dialogue, the superpowers reached an agreement in 1987 when they signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

Some of the first actions Gorbachev set out to achieve was to improve the Soviet foreign policy. He considered this an immediate priority, because if he were to implement drastic reforms at home, it was necessary to lessen the burdens from the arms race and the strained relationship to the outside world. He stated that “this understanding was the starting-point for everything”.230 His foreign policy was to become known as “New Thinking”, and it was a departure from the isolation and the ideological dogmas that had prevailed since the time of Stalin.231 Some of the old ideological dogmas still existed among the party apparatus, and he set out to replace certain people in the leadership. One of them included the foreign minister, Andrey Gromyko, who was replaced with the somewhat less experienced party secretary from Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze.232

Winding down the arms race became one of Gorbachev’s first priorities.233 The arms race had been draining the Soviet economy, and their means to keep up with it declined. The Strategic Defense Initiative and the threat of moving the arms race into space presented Gorbachev with the possibilities of a more expensive military build-up and a technological defeat they could not handle.234 Chernyayev has stated “new thinking” was motivated by the need to

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improve the economy and reduce the defense burden.\textsuperscript{235} For these reasons, it was necessary to find a way to deal with the possible deployment of the Strategic Defense Initiative, and Gorbachev’s way of responding to this threat was through negotiations.

**The Geneva Summit 1985**

Immediately after Gorbachev took over the seat as General Secretary of the USSR, Reagan, who had wished for a summit between the two nations for some time, sent him a letter proposing to meet in the nearest future. During the summer of 1985 they both agreed on a summit meeting in Geneva in November.\textsuperscript{236} This was to become the first top-level meeting between the Soviet Union and the U.S. since 1979.\textsuperscript{237} In the pre-talks leading up to the summit in Geneva, the Strategic Defense Initiative was the main stumbling block between Moscow and Washington. They both had rather different views of what they wished to accomplish in Geneva. Arms control was the issue on the Soviet agenda. For them, the upcoming summit was an opportunity to achieve a mutual agreement on arms reduction and to put restrictions on the Strategic Defense Initiative. Washington however, had no intention of budging on the SDI, and Reagan clearly announced that he was not willing to make a trade-off with the USSR by giving up the SDI for Soviet arms reduction.\textsuperscript{238} The American administration’s agenda for the summit in Geneva was not to let arms control dominate the talks, and rather focus on issues like third world conflicts (the U.S. were prepared to end their involvement in these conflicts if the USSR in return agreed to withdraw from them) and human rights in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{239}

On November 19, the first talk between the two leaders began in Geneva. A meeting that was scheduled to last fifteen minutes ended up taking more than one hour. During the first round of talks, the arms race, human rights and regional conflicts were discussed.\textsuperscript{240} According to Dobrynin, the first round of talks was friendly and light, and considered a success.\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{235} National Security Archive, «The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev 1985», 102.
\textsuperscript{236} Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{237} Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 403.
\textsuperscript{238} Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 227.
\textsuperscript{239} Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, 88-89.
\textsuperscript{240} Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 405-406.
\textsuperscript{241} Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 588.
During the following talks, the main obstacle proved to be the subject of the Strategic Defense Initiative. Reagan handed Gorbachev a paper with proposals for arms control, and Gorbachev pointed out his main objections to these proposals:

- The first objection was on the proposed fifty percent ban of strategic offensive arms. On this Gorbachev agreed on the condition that space weapons were to be included. Reagan assured Gorbachev that the Soviets had no reason at all to fear the Strategic Defense Initiative, and he did not know yet what it would consist of, and that it might take several years for it to even be functional. He further offered to share the technology of SDI with the Soviet Union, suggesting open laboratories with experts monitoring each other’s work. Gorbachev insisted that the research of SDI should be confined to laboratories, with no development, testing or deployment of space weapons. Reagan could not understand why Gorbachev kept referring to SDI as space weapons, as it was only meant for defense. Gorbachev’s objections to SDI was rooted in his belief that this would only escalate the arms race into space. He argued to Reagan that a defense system like SDI might be able to defuse a small strike, but it would not be able to stand against numerous missiles. A defense system could only work properly against a weakened retaliatory strike, Gorbachev said, not against a first strike.

- The second objection was to the proposal of a separate INF agreement, limiting land-based missiles. Gorbachev insisted that British and French missiles were to be included, and that the agreement should not only be confined to land-based missiles but also cruise missiles launched from aircrafts.

- His third objection was to the proposal of research of strategic ABM defenses. He stated that this type of research should not include testing or deployments. Further they discussed the limits of the ABM treaty, as they clearly had different interpretations of it. Gorbachev said the AMB treaty only allowed for research in anti-

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243 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 407.
ballistic defenses, while Reagan’s interpretation was that testing of these systems were allowed.\textsuperscript{246}

The discussion ended in a standoff. Reagan had no intention of giving up on SDI, and Gorbachev had no intention of giving in to his demands.

Gorbachev left the first day of negotiations in a foul mood, according to Shevardnadze, telling him “prepare the plane, we’re leaving. It is impossible to negotiate with this American administration”. However, Shevardnadze convinced him not to leave.\textsuperscript{247} It was apparent that Gorbachev was annoyed and confused as to why the American administration had such a hard time giving up the SDI. He stated “Ronald Reagan’s advocacy of the Strategic Defense Initiative struck me as bizarre. Was it science fiction, a trick to make the Soviet Union more forthcoming, or merely a crude attempt to lull us in order to carry out the mad enterprise – the creation of a shield which would allow a first strike without fear of retaliation?”.\textsuperscript{248}

The next day, they resumed their round of negotiations, mostly disagreeing on the same issues as the day before. At the end of the day, they had not reached an agreement and no treaty was signed at the Geneva summit. The negotiations only resulted in a joint communique, stating “nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”. They further agreed on two more summits in the future, one in Moscow and another in Washington.\textsuperscript{249} Despite the fact that no major agreement between the two nations were made at this time, the Geneva talks were considered a success. This was the first summit meeting between the USSR and the U.S. in several years, and being able to communicate with each other was necessary for future negotiations.\textsuperscript{250} Contrary to what the Americans wished to achieve at the summit, arms control and SDI took up most of the negotiations, and proved to be the central reason why they could not reach an agreement in Geneva. But with two such different hopes and agendas for the summit, it is not surprising that it ended the way it did.


\textsuperscript{247} Shevardnadze, \textit{Kogda Rukhnul Zheleznyy Zanaves}, 88.

\textsuperscript{248} Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 407.


\textsuperscript{250} Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence}, 592; and Shevardnadze, \textit{Kogda Rukhnul Zheleznyy Zanaves}, 88.
The Reykjavik Summit 1986

A few months after the summit in Geneva, Gorbachev announced his proposal for a nuclear-free world by the year 2000. Shortly after, Chernyayev wrote in his diary: “Gorbachev’s statement. It seems he really decided to end the arms race once at all costs. He is going for that very “risk”, in which he has boldly recognized the absence of risk, because no one will attack us even if we disarm totally. And in order to revive the country and set it on a steady track, it is necessary to free it from the burden of the arms race, which is depleting more than just economics.” Gorbachev was eager to continue the dialogue with Washington on nuclear disarmament, and in the summer of 1986, he and Reagan agreed to a summit meeting in Reykjavik. During the time leading up to the summit, Gorbachev began to consider unlinking the Strategic Defense Initiative as criteria for an agreement on arms control, stating “maybe it’s time to stop being afraid of SDI?”. But he was soon influenced by the military-industrial complex not to give up the fight on SDI and keep it as criteria for nuclear disarmament. Gorbachev’s agenda for the upcoming summit was to propose deep cuts in the Soviets nuclear arsenal, and in return insist on Reagan to give up the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Preparing for the summit in Reykjavik, Gorbachev decided to agree to deep cuts (nevertheless, in return for SDI). An incident happening in Ukraine in 1986, seems to have heightened Gorbachev’s fear for nuclear weapons, and might have influenced his decision on reducing their nuclear arsenal. In April 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded, and the radioactive debris was spread with the winds across Europe. The incident horrified Gorbachev, with Schultz stating to Reagan that it had “left a strong anti-nuclear streak in Gorbachev’s thinking”. For Gorbachev, the accident gave him the opportunity to warn against the dangers of nuclear weapons, both at home and in future disarmament negotiations.

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253 Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 620.
254 Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 621.
256 Hoffman, *The Dead Hand*, 246.
In October 1986, Gorbachev and Reagan met for their scheduled negotiations in Reykjavik. Gorbachev came prepared to the meeting, with a package proposal to the American administration. His first proposal was a mutual fifty percent reduction in strategic nuclear arsenals, which included ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and strategic weapons. The Americans agreed to this proposal. The next proposal was to eliminate all intermediate-range missiles in Europe, agreeing to Reagan’s zero option. This issue of INF had been discussed previously between Gorbachev and Reagan at the Geneva summit. Back then, Gorbachev had insisted that the agreement was to include the British and French missiles, which Reagan rejected. Now, however, Gorbachev dropped this demand. After some discussion, the Americans agreed to this proposal as well. The final proposal from Gorbachev was for both to adhere to the ABM Treaty with a non-withdrawal period of ten years. Here Gorbachev stressed the principles of the Soviet understanding of the ABM Treaty, which allowed research and testing in laboratories, but not outside of them. In other words, a clear restriction on the issue of the Strategic Defense Initiative. This last proposal, however, proved to be the main stumbling block in the negotiations at Reykjavik. According to Jack Matlock, Reagan reacted as if he “had been asked to toss his favorite child into an erupting volcano”. He refused to limit the Strategic Defense Initiative to the laboratory. The negotiations produced no agreement and ended in a stalemate.

Unlinking the Strategic Defense Initiative

In the time after the meeting at Reykjavik, Gorbachev was sure that the American administration would turn around on the package deal he had proposed to them. But in the weeks following the summit, the leadership in Kremlin received no signals from Washington that they might be changing their mind. Gorbachev was not sure what he could make of this. During 1986-1987 Gorbachev began to consider his package deal to the Americans,

259 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 417.
261 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 418.
263 Matlock, Autopsy on an Empire, 97.
264 Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, 416.
265 Hoffman, The Dead Hand, 274.
and the idea of removing the Strategic Defense Initiative as a criterion for arms reduction became an option.

Several factors seem to have affected Gorbachev’s decision to withdraw the Strategic Defense Initiative from the package deal. For one, leading Soviet scientists encouraged Gorbachev not to use the Strategic Defense Initiative as a criterion for signing an arms control agreement with the United States. Initially, as briefly mentioned earlier, some Soviet scientists did not consider the Strategic Defense Initiative as an immediate threat to their security. When the U.S. program was first announced, their suggested answer was to push for arms control, rather than seeking ways to counter SDI. Some Soviet scientists, like physicist Roal’d Sagdeyev, expressed that the Soviet leadership had given the Strategic Defense Initiative too much importance, saying “if Americans oversold SDI, we Russians overbought it”. However, the most vital factor in this issue was probably the Soviet physicist and dissident Andrey Sakharov. After Gorbachev allowed him to return to Moscow after his imprisonment in Gorky, Sakharov stated at the International Disarmament Conference in February 1987 that Gorbachev should not let the Strategic Defense Initiative keep him from reaching an agreement on arms control.

The opinion of Gorbachev’s advisor Aleksandr Yakovlev has also been attributed as a crucial factor in Gorbachev’s decision. In a memorandum to Gorbachev in February 1987, he concluded that the best way to come to an agreement on reducing nuclear arms was to separate the Strategic Defense Initiative from the package he had offered in Reykjavik. His proposal was to rather pursue a separate agreement on INF, in order to remove “a very serious threat. It would boost our reputation in Europe.” He further said it was unlikely that Washington would withdraw from SDI, especially after the summit in Reykjavik, because their position on SDI had become more aggressive. Yakovlev also stressed the need for disarmament, especially the 50% cut in strategic weapons, as this would provide benefits

267 Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces* 238-239.
269 Hoffman, *The Dead Hand*, 278.
economically (as well as politically, military and morally).\textsuperscript{273} Just a couple of days after Gorbachev received Yakovlev’s memorandum, he officially stated that they were seeking separate deals on arms control.\textsuperscript{274}

A final, crucial factor that might have contributed to Gorbachev’s decision was the Soviet defense and military community. Some of them were not pleased with Gorbachev’s intention to implement an agreement on INF, and at the same time agreeing to concessions on the issue of SDI. Shevardnadze and defense minister Sokolov were often in disagreements on disarmament talks, which made it difficult for Gorbachev to pursue an agreement with the U.S. at the speed he wished to.\textsuperscript{275} But Gorbachev soon gained momentum to replace people in the ministries disagreeing with his policies. In May 1987, the Soviet defense and military community had to answer to Gorbachev when the nineteen-year old German, Mathias Rust, landed a small airplane in the middle of the Red Square. The air defenses who was supposed to be able to identify foreign aircrafts, and who was especially on the look-out for American bombers, failed enormously that day as Rust managed to fly past them all. They had spotted Rust, but failed to recognize it as an aircraft, but rather a flock of birds.\textsuperscript{276} The failure of the military and the defense establishment presented Gorbachev with a convenient situation. Many of the generals and military leaders, including Sokolov, who had opposed Gorbachev’s plan to unbundle the package to the Americans lost their job, and Gorbachev made sure to hire people he thought he could rely on. This made it easier for Gorbachev to pursue disarmament talks with the U.S. without any major opposition at home.\textsuperscript{277}

In March 1987, Gorbachev announced that they were willing to negotiate with the American administration on a separate INF treaty. The preparations for the signing began a month after when Secretary of State George Schultz travelled to Moscow.\textsuperscript{278} During his time in Moscow, the Soviet leadership agreed to the removal of both their intermediate-range missiles and their short-range missiles.\textsuperscript{279}

\textsuperscript{274} Hoffman, \textit{The Dead Hand}, 279.
\textsuperscript{275} Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence}, 624-625.
\textsuperscript{276} Hoffman, \textit{The Dead Hand}, 288-289.
\textsuperscript{277} Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence}, 625-626.
\textsuperscript{278} Gorbachev, Memoirs, 440.
\textsuperscript{279} Zubok, \textit{A Failed Empire}, 300.
In December 1987, Gorbachev travelled to the United States to sign the INF treaty. The treaty eliminated all intermediate-range and short-range missiles, including the removal of their existing intermediate-range missiles deployed in Europe; the Soviet SS-20s and the Western Pershing- and ground-launched missiles. Gorbachev later characterized the deployment of SS-20 missiles in Europe as a failure, stating their deployment as “an unforgivable adventure, embarked on by the previous Soviet leadership under pressure from the military-industrial complex”. Gorbachev signed the INF Treaty without demanding any limitations on the Strategic Defense Initiative.

The bilateral relationship between the two nations improved in the late 1980s, and the Cold War was officially coming to an end when the next U.S. president, George H. W. Bush came to Moscow to sign the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). By signing the treaty both parties agreed to huge reductions in their strategic nuclear weapons, with the Soviets agreeing to a 35 percent reduction and the U.S. to a 25 percent reduction.

### 3.4 Did U.S. Military Buildup in the 1980s Increase the Soviet Military Budget?

By looking at the bilateral relationship and negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States, there is no indication that the Soviets decided to increase their nuclear capacity in response to the Strategic Defense Initiative. Gorbachev did rather the opposite, he pushed for disarmament negotiations. Did Gorbachev’s political signals correspond with the money actually allocated to defense during his time in office? When looking at estimates, how much did the Soviet Union spend on defense during the 1980s? Is it possible to see a Soviet reaction to the U.S. military buildup? Finding proper estimates of resources allocated to the military-industrial complex during this period (or even before for that matter) has proven a rather challenging task. Most researchers operate with different figures and estimates, and the official Soviet numbers are not reliable. For instance, according to the Soviet official figures the military expenditures were at 2.5 percent of GNP in the years prior to 1989, while it was raised to 8.4 percent of GNP (probably a result from more honesty in the statistics, and not

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281 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 443-444.
necessarily a major escalation of the defense budget), or 12 percent of the national income\textsuperscript{283} in 1989. Gorbachev stated that the military expenditures reached 18 percent of the national income in the middle of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{284} Because of this unreliability and different statements from the Soviet sources it has been necessary to look for estimates elsewhere.

When estimating the costs of the Soviet defense burden, researchers have often used numbers calculated by the CIA.\textsuperscript{285} Some scholars have stated the CIA estimates to be the most reliable numbers presented, such as Fred Chernoff: “while other US intelligence agencies also work on such estimates, the CIA commits more resources than all the others, and its figures are by far the most important in the domestic political debate over defense spending – both because they are taken to represent the official US estimates and because they are defended in depth under annual scrutiny by the U.S. congress.”\textsuperscript{286} Philip Hanson, however, is more skeptical of the CIA estimates, stating that analysts from CIA regularly overestimated the strength of the Soviet economy.\textsuperscript{287}

In the two figures presented below, estimates of Soviet military expenditures are compared with U.S. military expenditures. In figure 2, a comparison is made of their military expenditures of GNP, with data extracted from World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfer\textsuperscript{288} (these estimates were made in 1990). Figure 3 shows annual growth in Soviet and U.S. military spending. These data have been extracted by Fred Chernoff from the Central Intelligence Agency.\textsuperscript{289} By using data from two different organizations, I wish to see whether there is a pattern when comparing Soviet and U.S. defense expenditures.

\textsuperscript{283} Note that military expenditures are presented here as both percentage of GNP and of national income. These are two different things: GNP is the total value of all the final products and services produced by a country in one year. National income, or GNI, is defined by The World Bank as «the sum of value added by all resident producers plus any product taxes (less subsidies) not included in the valuation of output plus net receipts of primary income from abroad». The World Bank, «GNI per capita, PPP (current international $).»

\textsuperscript{284} Ellman, «Money in the 1980s. From Disequilibrium to Collapse», 118.


\textsuperscript{287} Hanson, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy}, 3.

\textsuperscript{288} U.S. Department of State, «World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfer 1990», 81-85.

\textsuperscript{289} Chernoff, «Ending the Cold War: The Soviet Retreat and the U.S. Military Buildup», 118.
According to the estimates made by WMEAT, the Soviet military expenditures remained at a relatively stable level of 12 percent of GNP between 1979-1988, with a drop to 11 percent in 1989. Even though the Soviet allocated a higher percentage of its GNP to the military than the...
U.S., it seemingly did not respond to the U.S. military buildup. The Soviet military expenditures remained high, and did not significantly rise or fall in response to the U.S. When using these estimates, there is no relation between American military buildup and Soviet defense expenditures.

The same conclusion can be reached from figure 3. Both figures show that the Soviet defense burden remained more or less the same as before the U.S. military buildup, with no significant increase thereafter. Chernoff argues that “in asserting a particular relationship between the US and Soviet military spending, the buildup argument assumes that the Soviet Union reacts to US decisions.”290 His research concludes that “the results show virtually no effect caused by the US military buildup of the 1980s on Soviet military spending.”291

According to figures released from the WMEAT in 1995, the military expenditures of the Soviet Union decreased further from 11 percent of GNP in 1989 to 10.3 percent of GNP in 1991.292 Dmitri Steinberg also argues that the defense expenditures dropped in the period 1989-1990, signifying an attempt at disarmament.293 These estimates coincide with a speech Gorbachev made to the United Nations in 1988, where he announced the decision to decrease their military expenditures significantly.294 However, it has been claimed that the defense expenditures of the Soviet Union in 1990 were higher than the estimates above. According to experts from the Committee for Science and Education of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the defense expenditure of 1990 was at 20 percent of GNP.295

Because of the different estimates presented above, the final period in the 1980s can be quite difficult to interpret as far as defense spending is concerned. If the U.S. military buildup influenced Soviet defense spending, the Soviet outlays for defense should show a decline as the U.S.-Soviet relationship improved in the late 1980s.296 According to estimates by CIA in figure 3, this was not the case as Soviet defense spending increased. Figure 2, however, shows a decline in Soviet defense spending at the end of the 1980s, signaling that the bilateral relationship may have influenced Soviet defense spending.

294 Strayer, Why did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change, 125.
295 Ellman, «Money in the 1980s. From Disequilibrium to Collapse», 118.
296 Lebow and Stein, “Reagan and the Russians.”
3.4.1 The priority for defense changes

The priority for defense underwent changes with Gorbachev as General Secretary, and his approach to the military industry proved to be quite different from the approach by the men preceding him. During the years before he came into office, the Soviet approach in international relations had been based on military might. This was especially the case during the Brezhnev-period, when the military had a high national priority.\footnote{Holloway, «State, Society, and the Military Under Gorbachev», 7-8.} Already early in Gorbachev’s presidency, he expressed a lack of interest in the development of heavy weapons, and rather wished to focus on the development of science and technology, according to Sagdeev.\footnote{Sagdeev, The Making of a Soviet Scientist, 266.}

Gorbachev and the people in his administration were aware of the burden of defense the country was and had been facing. Gorbachev himself does indeed stress the heavy burden military expenditures had on the Soviet economy\footnote{Gorbachev, Memoirs, 215.}, but he stops short of claiming this, or any other single factor, to have been the primary reason for the sorry state of the Soviet economy. He stated that the problem was “rather in the archaic nature of our economic mechanisms, in the rigid centralization of administration, in over-reliance on planning, and in the lack of genuine economic incentives.”\footnote{Gorbachev, Memoirs, 217.} Shevardnadze has also stressed the heavy burden of military expenditures, attributing it importance in the economic troubles of the country:

We became a superpower largely because of our military might. But the bloated size and unrestrained escalation of this military might was reducing us to the level of a third-rate country, unleashing processes that pushed us to the brink of catastrophe. Our military expenditures as a percentage of gross national product were two and a half times greater than those of the United States. Although we take pride in achieving military parity with the Americans, we could not even dream of equaling them in the manufacture of disposable syringes, food products, and basic necessities. The catastrophic shortages of these goods hardly strengthen our security or serve our national interest.\footnote{Shevardnadze, The Future Belongs to Freedom, 54.}
Gorbachev considered it necessary to reduce the burden of defense. He wished to abandon the old policy of dependence on military might in foreign relations, with the aim of seeking diplomatic solutions and agreements on disarmament rather than continuing the arms race.\textsuperscript{302} A new military doctrine was worked out, based on “reasonable sufficiency”. This was supposed to guide the military in a new direction; instead of building up its forces with the aim of winning a potential war, they were to use all means to prevent war. Implementing the new military doctrine was to reduce the economic costs that went hand in hand with the previous defense policy, including its negative effects internationally.\textsuperscript{303} Gorbachev has stated that “reasonable sufficiency” was necessary in order to “drastically reduce our defense budget – an indispensable condition for improving our economy”.\textsuperscript{304} Sagdeyev has expressed a similar interpretation:

Soon Gorbachev’s interests moved in the direction of international security and military buildup, trying to break the deadlock with medium-range nuclear missiles in the European theater. I believe that outside the understandable general strategic considerations, Gorbachev wanted the chance to reduce the future military budget as a part of his program for the revival of the country.\textsuperscript{305}

Already early in his presidency, Gorbachev expressed the need to calm the tension internationally and reduce defense expenditures. A few months after he took office he made it clear to a group of military leaders in Minsk that their resources would be limited.\textsuperscript{306} However, there were no clear signs of reductions in the defense budget in the immediate years (as can be seen from figure 2 and 3), and the defense expenditures remained at a relatively stable level. According to Christopher Davis, there was even an increase in allocations to defense after Gorbachev took office.\textsuperscript{307} This is consistent with estimates from the CIA in Figure 3, where a slight increase in defense expenditures can be detected.

After 1988, signs began to appear that Gorbachev had decided to reduce the defense budget. That year, he announced to the United Nations that they intended to reduce defense spending

\textsuperscript{303} Holloway, «Gorbachev’s New Thinking», 73.
\textsuperscript{304} Gorbachev, Memoirs, 437.
\textsuperscript{305} Sagdeev, The Making of a Soviet Scientist, 267.
and their military forces in Europe.\textsuperscript{308} From 1988 to 1991, the armed forces were reduced from 5.7 million to 4.6 million.\textsuperscript{309} Gorbachev also decided to deal with the problem of the civilian industry, who had been neglected partly in favor of the defense industry. He urged the defense industry to increase its production for the civilian industry, and after 1988, several branches of the defense industry took over the production of civilian goods. For instance, the Ministry of the Aviation Industry was set to take over the production of machines for processing fruit, vegetables and macaroni, the Ministry of the Defense Industry was to produce equipment for meat and poultry processing plants, while the Ministry of Medium Machine Building was to produce milk-processing equipment. By 1990, civilian production took up forty percent of the overall production from the defense industry.\textsuperscript{310}

After the implementation of “reasonable sufficiency”, Katayev states that this stopped the overproduction of military equipment and weapons: “We were able to understand what military production capacity the country needed. This doctrine helped overcome some psychological barriers about the stockpiling of weapons and the continuous process of its production.”\textsuperscript{311} However, the defense sectors overtake of civilian production proved to have its limitations. Managers and engineers who usually constructed weapons and aircrafts were set to produce civilian goods. Not only were they hesitant to make this transition, but without the proper skillset the result from their work was poorly executed.\textsuperscript{312} Their over-qualification resulted in over-complicated products, and Adelman and Augustine has excessively illustrated it as follows: “The tale of the Soviet defense factory reconfiguring itself to make titanium wheelbarrows is indeed a technological breakthrough of the first magnitude – but only for someone willing to spend $10,000 on a wheelbarrow that will last for 1,000 years.”\textsuperscript{313} The managers had little, if any knowledge, about markets, consumer preferences, pricing, distribution or accessing supplies. The result was that prices on consumer products produced within the defense industry were higher than they would have been if they had been produced by a specialized civilian industry. In trying to convert the defense industry into producing civilian goods it hardly increased consumer output.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{308} Aganbegyan, \textit{Inside Perestroika}, 185.
\textsuperscript{310} Holloway, «State, Society and the Military Under Gorbachev», 11-12.
\textsuperscript{311} Katayev, \textit{A Memoir of the Missile Age. One Man’s Journey}, 116.
\textsuperscript{312} Adelman and Augustine, «Defense Conversion: Bulldozing the Management», 33.
\textsuperscript{313} Adelman and Augustine, «Defense Conversion: Bulldozing the Management», 33.
\textsuperscript{314} Adelman and Augustine, «Defense Conversion: Bulldozing the Management», 33.
The conversion of the defense industry to civilian production illustrates the poor economic choices made by Gorbachev and his administration. Instead of improving the economy by reducing the burden of defense and at the same time find a solution to the demands in the consumer sector, the result was higher prices and declining quality in the already low-quality consumer goods.\textsuperscript{315} Even if the defense expenditures posed a heavy burden on the Soviet economy, it was the failures of Gorbachev’s economic reforms that further spiraled the declining economy downwards. This is supported by Dobrynin:

The increased Soviet defense spending provoked by Reagan’s policies was not the straw that broke the back of the evil empire. We did not bankrupt ourselves in the arms race, as the Caspar Weinbergers of this world would like to believe. The Soviet response to Star Wars caused only an acceptable small rise in defense spending. Throughout the Reagan presidency, the rising Soviet defense effort contributed to our economic decline, but only marginally as it had in previous years. The troubles in our economy were the result of our own internal contradictions of autarky, low investment, and lack of innovation. (…) All this does not of course mean that the Cold War and the Reagan presidency had no impact on the Soviet Union, its economy, and its problems. They did. But it is senseless to consider the huge changes in the Soviet Union and then in Russia as the fulfillment of a scenario written in the interests of the United States. Ascribing any role, let alone a crucial one in the life of a nation, to the policy pursued by a particular American president would be a great exaggeration and indeed a historical error. The fate of the Soviet Union was decided inside our own country, in which no small part was played by Mikhail Gorbachev himself, the first and last president.\textsuperscript{316}

\textbf{3.4.2 Another strain on the defense burden? The Soviet answer to “Star Wars”}

Another burden arguably placed on the long-suffering Soviet economy was the Strategic Defense Initiative. It has been argued that the SDI and the arms build-up during Reagan’s presidency forced the Soviet Union to keep up with the arms race by countering the SDI with their own space-based shield, leading to the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{317} But did the

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\textsuperscript{315} Adelman and Augustine, «Defense Conversion: Bulldozing the Management», 34.
\textsuperscript{316} Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence}, 611-612.
\textsuperscript{317} Busch, «Ronald Reagan and the Defeat of the Soviet Empire», 455.
\end{flushleft}
Soviet leadership pursue a development of their own SDI? During the negotiations at the Geneva summit in 1985, Gorbachev claimed that they had plans for their own SDI, saying to Reagan: “I think you should know that we have already developed a response. It will be effective and far less expensive than your project, and be ready for use in less time.” He does not reveal any more details about this program, but clearly states in his memoirs that this was not an empty threat to the American administration. Little has been known about the Soviet version of “Star Wars”, let alone if they actually pursued any development on the program at all. In recent years, more information about the Soviet “Star Wars” has appeared, however, this information remains scarce. The information about the Soviet program has been provided by a Konstantin Lantratov, a former press officer in the Russian space industry, and information accessed by researchers from the archives of the Defense Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (documents collected by Vitaliy Katayev). Could the small amount of information I have been able to access answer the research question: Did the Soviet Union attempt to counter the SDI, and in doing so, undermine their economy contributing to its downfall?

The possibility of launching weapons to space was not a radically new idea for the Soviet leadership when Reagan announced the SDI. In fact, a program that would later evolve into a Soviet version of “Star Wars” was started years before the issue of SDI appeared. This program was called “Skif”, or “Polyus-Skif”, and it was initiated as early as 1976. Research on space-based weapons was under the direction of the umbrella organization “Energiya”, whose focus was “on research into the possibilities of creating weapons for conducting battle operations in space and from space.” The “Skif” project, including a similar program “Kontakt”, was under the direction of the Energiya organization. The intention of the “Kontakt” program was to target satellites in a low orbit around Earth, but it was never completed.

Experimental work on the “Skif” project was initiated in 1981. Originally, the main purpose of “Skif” was to destroy intercontinental ballistic missiles, and it would be connected to the

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318 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 407.
319 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 407.
Salyut space station. This plan, however, was abandoned as destroying ICBMs proved too difficult. The project was instead led in the direction of destroying anti-missile satellites (which did not exist at the time), as this would be an easier task rather than locating and destroying moving ICBMs mid-air. The development of “Skif” moved rather slowly as it was challenged by the development of an effective laser to accompany it.325

The work on “Skif” was sped up, however, after the U.S. announcement of SDI, resulting in more political and financial support for the project.326 Research on a new laser for the project was developed, and in 1984 the newly developed spacecraft “Skif-D” was approved by the government.327 Podvig argues that “there is no direct evidence that would link the decision to accelerate the “Skif” program to the SDI. The most likely reason the “Skif” program got an overhaul in 1984 was the approaching start of operations of the Energiya launcher”.328 The Energiya launcher was originally intended to launch the space shuttle “Buran” into orbit, but the work on the shuttle was delayed and it would not be ready for the launch of Energiya. Energiya proved to be a perfect fit for the launch of “Skif” as the launcher was big enough to handle the Skif laser. The project was moved up, and renamed “Skif-DM”.329 The project was considered a top-priority by the defense industry, and a test flight was scheduled in the spring of 1987.330

The launch of Skif was set on May 15, 1987. Inside the spacecraft was a mock-up of the space-based laser weapon.331 When the Skif-DM was approved for a test flight by the state commission, it was on the condition that several of the intended experiments on board the spacecraft had to be cancelled, like the tests that would imitate the work of the laser and radar tracking of targets. The cancellation of the experiments probably resulted from the hard stance the Soviet leadership had taken on weapons in space in negotiations with the American administration. If the Soviets were to strengthen their position at future negotiations, they had to tread more carefully and consider the effects of their own space program.332 A couple of days before the planned test of Skif, Gorbachev apparently seemed to have second thoughts on the project. He had told the designers that the Politburo would not let them launch the

325 Lantratov, ““Zvezdnyye Voyny’, Kotorykh Ne Bylo”, 3.
331 Hoffman, The Dead Hand, 287.
rocket, and asked them if they could wait a few months. He changed his mind, and the test went through. The Polyus launched from the Energia rocket, which performed perfectly. However, problems appeared when the Polyus separated from the Energia; the spacecraft was supposed to turn 180 degrees and be fired further into orbit. The Polyus instead turned 360 degrees, and faced in the wrong direction, it shot down towards the Earth and crashed in the Pacific Ocean. Any further progress on the program came to a halt in September 1987, and it was never resumed. Lantratov argues that the improvement in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States, combined with the declining Soviet economy hindered any further financing of the project, stating that “the decline of the Cold War led to the decline of the Soviet “Star Wars”.”

### 3.5 Conclusion

The research and information provided in this chapter should make it possible to answer the research question posed in the introduction:

1. Did the arms race during the Cold War severely strain the Soviet economy, leading to its downfall in 1991?

The decision to increase allocations to defense was closely related to the tense relationship between the two superpowers, and high defense expenditures was partially a reason for the economic troubles in the 1970s, troubles which the Soviet leadership could not manage and culminated in the failure of Gorbachev’s economic reforms in the 1980s. Nonetheless, it seems likely that once the defense expenditures had been raised, they would probably have continued in this manner even in the absence of an external U.S. military buildup. The statement from Katayev indicates that it was neither the arms race, the U.S. military buildup, or any external factor that caused the defense burden to have remained at a high level, but rather the failures of planned economy and its need to meet output targets at all costs. That being said, the Cold War probably created an atmosphere for not lowering the outlays for defense.

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333 Hoffman, *The Dead Hand*, 287.
As for the military buildup during the Reagan administration, estimates available do not show any Soviet response to U.S. military buildup. The military expenditures did not rise or fall in response to the U.S. military outlays. Even though the Soviet defense burden was high, this was not a result from the U.S. military buildup, as the Soviet outlays remained quite stable during the entire period. However, all of this must be treated carefully, as we do not know the full extent of the Soviet defense expenditures. Gorbachev’s way of dealing with the defense burden strengthens the theory that it was the failure of his own economic reforms that ultimately brought the Soviet Union to collapse. By converting the defense industry into producing civilian goods, he thought this would improve the shortages of the civilian market and at the same time lower the defense expenditures. This had little effect on the production of civilian goods, and if anything, made the conditions worse and led to higher prices and a further decline in their quality. His economic reforms were a failure, and further spiraled the economy into complete collapse at the end of the 1980s. To the very end, the Soviets themselves made the decision to keep up with their defense spending combined with poor choices made by the leadership. Their hands were not forced by the U.S. government.

2. Did the Soviets attempt to increase their nuclear capacity as a reaction to SDI, and in doing that, undermine their economy?

The response to the Strategic Defense Initiative from the administration of Andropov and Chernenko do not indicate that they initiated any major rearmament efforts or any disarmament effort. All in all, they did not make any major responses to the Strategic Defense Initiative. Even though they threatened Washington by responding to SDI with their own measures, including raising the defense budget, most of this seemed to have been demonstrative efforts on their part. In the very end, the Soviets ended up seeking a mutual treaty on a ban on space weapons. The fear of SDI seemed to have lost some priority over the upcoming deployments of the Pershing missiles. The mere fact that SDI was not mentioned at all during the Politburo sessions indicates that the Soviet leadership at the time did not consider this a pressing matter. The announcement of SDI certainly led to even more strained relations between the two superpowers, making it harder for the leadership in Kremlin to return to negotiations. At most, the SDI damaged the already poor bilateral relationship further.
When Gorbachev entered the political scene, he represented a new face on the previously old and outdated Soviet leadership. In the early years as General Secretary he kept a hard stance on the issue of SDI, refusing to reach any agreement with the U.S. leadership unless the Strategic Defense Initiative was strictly limited. For Gorbachev, the prospects of a defensive shield would throw the global strategic balance out of order, with the Americans having a clear technological advantage. Early on, Gorbachev realized that the country needed to curb their defense spending, and the prospects of SDI could throw them into a new costly arms race. If he were to lower the defense burden, he had to seek negotiations with the American administration on disarmament. Even though he considered the SDI a threat, he decided to meet this threat through diplomatic measures. When the first top-level meeting in several years was initiated however, he insisted that the U.S. should remove the SDI if they were to reach any agreement on disarmament. By influence from both scientists and politicians in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev later decided to delink SDI from a possible disarmament agreement with the INF treaty. Certain Soviet scientists had advocated the need to push for arms negotiations all along, and Yakovlev reminded him of the economic advantages of doing this. Certain people in the defense and military complex, who may have constrained Gorbachev’s choices in delinking SDI previously, lost their influence when Gorbachev replaced them with people he could trust. This created favorable conditions for Gorbachev to pursue an agreement on disarmament without any major opposition from this complex. By introducing “new thinking” in foreign relations, and a military doctrine of “reasonable sufficiency”, Gorbachev aimed to improve the tense relationship and hinder any further development of the arms race. If anything, SDI may have pushed Gorbachev towards negotiation, not towards increasing their military capacity.

Probably the most visible direct response to the Strategic Defense Initiative was the Soviet attempt to launch their own version of Star Wars. The information that has been available on the Soviet response to SDI leaves a certain indication that the Soviet leadership did indeed try to counter with their own space-shield. That being said, this initiative was not based on newly developed technology in the immediate aftermath of the U.S. announcement of SDI. On the contrary, their Skif project rested on old technology developed in the 1970s, which received a boost in the atmosphere created by the American initiative. However, evidence indicates that the planned launch of Energiya, including the delayed development on the Buran space shuttle, gave incentives to speed up the work on the Skif project. Hence, the decision to speed up the project seems to be two-fold, partly by the announcement of SDI and the planned
launch of Energia, and that the circumstances leading to the projects test-run was somewhat a coincidence. Nevertheless, the project failed. Both the Politburo and Gorbachev apparently seemed to have had second thoughts regarding the project, considering the effects it would cause in their bilateral relationship with the West, and especially the U.S. In any case, the planned test run was not cancelled. But when the project failed, the Soviets did not attempt to revive it. Because the project rested on old technology, and was merged with the Energia launch, it does not appear reasonable to assume that huge amounts of resources was invested in the project. Yet, previous examples of irrational Soviet investments do not exclude the possibility that the Soviet leadership poured money into the project. But without proper estimates of Soviet defense expenditures, it would be close to impossible to assume how much additional funds that actually went into the project. If one were to rely on the estimates presented by the figures above, they do not imply a major increase in money allocated to defense during this period. The cancellation of the project indicates that no further resources were allocated to the Soviet answer to SDI. Saying that their response to SDI further damaged the Soviet economy to the brink of collapse seems too far-fetched. With the little information available on the project, I find it difficult to reach that conclusion.

In the discussion of American policies’ influence on the choices taken by the Soviet leadership, it could be reasonable to ask what the leadership in Washington expected. Did they actively pursue a policy that would undermine the Soviet economy, by forcing them to increase their nuclear capacity? Even though the CIA report from 1983 (discussing possible Soviet reactions to SDI), states that the Soviets might decide to take military measures, this report only considers likely responses, and not necessarily the intentions of the U.S. government. According to National Security Directive 75, which laid out the U.S. policy in relation to the Soviet Union, they would “above all, to ensure that East-West economic relations do not facilitate the Soviet military buildup.”336 Furthermore, when they were trying to sell the Strategic Defense Initiative to the Congress, they stated that this could make the Soviets agree to disarmament efforts. This does not indicate that the U.S. government actively aimed to bankrupt the Soviet Union by forcing them to increase their nuclear capacity.

The same conclusion applies to the intention of Ronald Reagan himself. He and Gorbachev shared the same goal; the complete abolition of nuclear weapons. However, they disagreed on

how this was supposed to happen. For Reagan, SDI was considered as a tool to abolish them, stating in his diary:

If SDI worked and we then entered into an era when the nations of the world agreed to eliminate nuclear weapons, it could serve as a safety valve against cheating – or attacks by lunatics who managed to get their hands on a nuclear missile. And, if we couldn’t reach an agreement eliminating nuclear weapons, the system would be able to knock down enough of an enemy’s missiles so that if he ever pushed a button to attack, he would be doing so in the knowledge that his attack was unable to prevent a devastating retaliatory strike.337

Gorbachev did not consider SDI as means to abolish nuclear weapons. For him, the SDI was an extension of the arms race and pursuing arms negotiations was the better alternative. Because if the Soviets could come to an agreement with Washington on disarmament, there would be no need for a defense shield.

In this regard, I find it difficult to reach the conclusion that the Strategic Defense Initiative caused the Soviets to increase their nuclear capacity. The result was rather the opposite, Gorbachev pushed for negotiations on arms agreements, with SDI probably strengthening his view of a nuclear free world.

337 Fitzgerald, Way Out There in the Blue, 263.
4 Conclusion

In the beginning of this thesis I presented three external factors, set forth by Alexander Dallin, which may or may not have had an influence on policy changes in the Soviet Union and its subsequent collapse. By looking at U.S. promotion of human rights, the Strategic Defense Initiative, and the Soviet defense burden (allegedly a result from the arms race and U.S. military buildup), this thesis has set out to examine whether these three factors played a role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. This has been done by consulting memoirs, autobiographies, diaries, including online archive material, to provide a Soviet point-of-view on whether any of these factors contributed to the disintegration of the USSR.

I have shown how the Soviet and U.S. leadership negotiated the above-mentioned issues during summit meetings, how the Soviet leadership responded to U.S. policies and how this affected Soviet actions and policies. This thesis has found the following:

Dallin stated that the unintended consequences of Basket III (on human rights) in the Helsinki accords possibly played a role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. What I have discovered in this thesis is that Basket IV (follow-up to the conference) was as important as Basket III. By having regular follow-up meetings, the Soviets (and the other signatory countries) were regularly addressed in terms of how they adhered to the principles put forth in Basket III. In this sense, both Basket III and IV created a heavy pressure on the Soviet leadership as they were being regularly criticized for not respecting the human rights principles in the Final Act.

How U.S. pressure on improvement of human rights conditions played a role in the Soviet collapse can be seen through its role in pushing forward liberal reforms in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev wished to deescalate the arms race and sought an improvement in the bilateral relationship with the United States. However, the U.S. administration explained on several occasions to the leadership in Kremlin that without improvement in human rights conditions, their future relationship would not be satisfactory. Eventually, this was followed by the release of several dissidents as well as the implementation of more liberal reform policies in the Soviet Union. This could of course be reform policies taken irrespectively of U.S. pressure, yet the research presented in this thesis indicates that Gorbachev was not consistent regarding these policy changes. The release of dissidents seems to have been motivated by other reasons than a genuine embrace of human rights principles, as both the decision to let
Yelena Bonner travel abroad as well as the release of other dissidents was discussed in the Politburo in light of the Western attention surrounding these issues.

The liberal reform policies implemented by Gorbachev were crucial factors in the subsequent independence movements in the Soviet republics, and as such, can be seen as a factor in the demise of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude that the reform policies were solely a result of U.S. pressure. The liberal reforms were advocated by people in Gorbachev’s administration, such as Yakovlev, who expressed to Gorbachev that “we want everybody to have great civic responsibilities, but that is only possible if there are great civil rights.”

Gorbachev embarked on the reform policies of glasnost with the understanding that perestroika could not work without the participation of the Soviet citizens. As such, the role of the United States here can be considered secondary.

This thesis has further examined the role of human rights and the effect U.S. policies had on republic separatism in the Baltics, as the Baltics were important precursors in the independence movements in the other Soviet republics. This thesis has found no cause-effect relationship between the Helsinki Final Act and Baltic independence movements. The Baltic independence movements had strong leverage due to the illegality of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and did not need to rely on the principles of the Final Act. However, the bilateral relationship between President Bush and Gorbachev was of importance in the final days of the Soviet Union, as Washington may have played a role in how Gorbachev dealt with separatism in the Baltic republics. By refusing to give Gorbachev badly needed economic assistance if he decided to use force to crack down on independence movements, the U.S. may have constrained Gorbachev’s choice of policies. Yet, as stressed above, had Gorbachev’s economic reforms not been as disastrous, he probably would not have been as susceptible to pressure from the U.S. And as this thesis has shown, the problems in the Soviet economy were a result of Gorbachev’s own doing. It is tempting though to ask whether Gorbachev would have acted differently if this demand was not asked of him, but this however, is a counterfactual analysis that is outside the scope of this thesis. How Gorbachev would have acted without U.S. pressure on non-violence in the Baltics may however be an interesting question for future research on this topic.

As for the role of the Strategic Defense Initiative, it has been claimed that this was a plan of the American administration to outspend the Soviets by presenting them with an economic challenge they could not handle. Did the Soviet leadership respond to the Strategic Defense Initiative by increasing their nuclear capability, and in the process further weakening their already suffering economy? In this thesis, I have found no evidence supporting this. The leadership in Moscow was indeed alarmed by the announcement of a space-based anti-missile shield; however, the early responses from the Kremlin indicated that they were more preoccupied by how they should respond to the planned deployments of the U.S. Pershing II missiles in Europe. The most direct response to SDI taken by the Soviet leadership was the development of their own space-based weapon, the “Skif” project. Did “Skif” result from the announcement of SDI, and did it cause an additional burden on the Soviet economy? If this project added an extra burden on the Soviet economy, however, it is unlikely that this was a result of the planned development of SDI. The “Skif” project was initiated as early as 1976, with experimental work beginning in 1981, two years before the announcement of SDI. The project did receive a boost after the announcement of SDI, but not necessarily because of SDI alone. The planned launch of the “Energiya” launcher was also a contributing factor for the speeding up of the project. However, the project (literally) crashed and died in 1987, not to be resumed. Anatoliy Dobrynin has stated in his memoirs that “the Soviet response to Star Wars caused only a small rise in defense spending”. Estimates presented in this thesis do not indicate any major increase in Soviet defense expenditures during this time. Nevertheless, without official Soviet figures, a conclusion cannot be reached by relying on these estimates alone as they do not represent the actual numbers allocated to the defense budget.

Using only the estimated figures in this thesis would leave the conclusion incomplete. With no official figures available, it has been necessary for me to look at the actions and responses from the Gorbachev administration to the Strategic Defense Initiative to find an answer. With regard to the Soviet leadership, their actions did not indicate any rearmament effort in response to the Strategic Defense Initiative. The prospects of SDI presented Gorbachev with the threat of the Americans having a strategic advantage, as well as of a more expensive arms race. Gorbachev could face this threat by continuing the competitive arms race, or seeking negotiations on arms reductions with the U.S. administration. Being well aware of the burden military expenditures had placed on the Soviet economy, Gorbachev chose the latter course.

339 Dobrynin, In Confidence, 611.
Gorbachev engaged in the first top-level meeting with the American administration in years, seeking an improvement in relations by negotiating arms reductions. Gorbachev’s policies at home, “new thinking” and “reasonable sufficiency” was a way of improving relations and reducing the burden of defense. As far as Gorbachev’s policies are concerned, in combination with estimates on military expenditures, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Soviet leadership did not respond to SDI by increasing their nuclear capacity, further weakening the Soviet economy. The Strategic Defense Initiative did not spend the Soviets into oblivion, rather it was a factor for the Soviet leadership to improve their relations with the U.S. and seeking arms reductions.

This thesis has also examined whether the conventional arms race with the United States severely hampered the Soviet economy, leading to its collapse. I have found no indications that the U.S. can be blamed for/or take credit for the Soviet defense burden. It is important to stress here that I do not claim that the Soviet defense burden had no effect on the state of the Soviet economy, nor that it can be totally delinked from the Soviet collapse. I have shown above the deleterious consequences Soviet defense spending had on the civilian economy, but evidence suggests that this was not a result of U.S. policies. This conclusion has been reached by comparing Soviet and U.S. defense expenditures as a share of GNP to look at a Soviet response to U.S. military buildup, as well as by consulting memoirs from both Soviet politicians and people working in the Soviet military-industrial complex.

During Reagan’s presidency, he embarked on a huge buildup of the U.S. military and raised the defense budget considerably. If the U.S. were to be blamed for the Soviet defense burden, there would be a correlation between Soviet and U.S. military expenditures e.g. the Soviet military expenditures would rise or fall in response to the U.S. military expenditures. According to the estimates presented here, the Soviet military expenditures remained rather constant from the end of the 1970s and through the 1980s, apparently not responding to the U.S. military buildup. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, relying on these estimates alone will not do.

This thesis has found that the Soviet military-industrial complex produced weapons for the military in high quantities, and even after the necessary amounts had been met, the production did not stop, leading to an overproduction of military equipment. This indicates that allocations delegated to the military were unaffected by a U.S. military buildup. This supports the theory that the Soviet state failure was rather in the Soviet system itself, and not a result
from U.S. policies. An example of this overproduction can be found in the aluminum-industry, in which one-quarter of the Soviet aluminum deposits went directly into the Soviet defense industry, while the leftover was set to produce low-quality consumer goods.\textsuperscript{340} According to former Soviet intelligence agent, later turned military analyst, Vitaliy Shlykov:

The main reason for this gross overproduction was the military’s need to keep the aluminum industry in a state of permanent readiness. In other words, in the event the Soviet armed forces were mobilized, defense-related industries would already have at their disposal the resources needed to immediately accelerate the production of planes, tanks, and other weapons. Given this huge, mandated overproduction, the Soviet economy had no incentive to raise its productivity rates or reduce its defense-related consumption levels.\textsuperscript{341}

The problem of the Soviet defense burden can also be considered to have resulted from the worldview of the Soviet leadership, who considered the world to be full of potential enemies, and as a result keeping the country in constant preparedness. This is supported by Wolf Jr. and Zycher, who in their study concluded that communist systems are more inclined to develop their military capacity to a higher degree than non-communist systems, partly due to their perception of a constant external threat, “whether that threat actually exists or not”.\textsuperscript{342}

Gorbachev wished to decrease Soviet military expenditures, and his way of approaching this problem was to start a defense conversion in which the defense industry was changed to produce civilian goods to a greater degree than previously. This failed spectacularly, leading to even worse quality and higher prices for civilian goods. This illustrates how badly Gorbachev understood how to handle the economy and how badly his reforms worked. The collapse of the Soviet economic system was a key factor in the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and this cannot be ascribed to U.S. policies, but rather to flaws in the Soviet economic system and the failure of Gorbachev’s economic reforms.

As stated in the beginning of this thesis, my aim has been to examine whether U.S. policies were a significant factor behind the dissolution of the Soviet Union by looking at it from a Soviet point-of-view. Statements from central Soviet politicians indicates that the collapse of

\textsuperscript{340} Shlykov, «The Economics of Defense in Russia and the Legacy of Structural Militarization», 158.
\textsuperscript{341} Shlykov, «The Economics of Defense in Russia and the Legacy of Structural Militarization», 158.
the Soviet Union was a consequence of internal factors, as the Soviet Ambassador to the U.S., Anatoliy Dobrynin, has stated above. This is supported by both Shevardnadze and Gorbachev:

I have already mentioned that incompatible and contradictory forces were forcibly kept in the foundation of the Soviet Union. In the end, they destroyed the foundation. The deep differences between hastily collected, completely different peoples, states, cultures and religions, ignoring economic laws, creating a utopian and doctrine-driven lifestyle, claiming world domination, refusing to recognize human rights, and the role of an individual in history, the inability to understand and take into account the requirements of time – all this was accumulating for a long time and created an explosive situation. The unpredictability of possible ways of developing this situation was a matter of concern even for those Western politicians to whom the Soviet Union was an “evil empire”. The historical mission of Gorbachev’s perestroika, like my own role in politics, was to settle this complicated process and adapt it to the demands of the times. But we were regularly late, and these delays had grave consequences.343

What happened with the Soviet Union is, in large part, was the result of internal processes. Democracy and glasnost that unfolded in the Soviet Union set in motion very big forces within our huge country that was facing so many problems. So political struggles began and there were several attempts made to put restrictions on the President, on the General Secretary. There were attempts made during the Congresses of People’s Deputies, in the Supreme Soviet and in the Central Committee and they even held closed meetings. For example, on one occasion, they did it under the guise of a meeting of hero cities. But they discussed one problem and that was how to get rid of Gorbachev. So, it was because of domestic internal processes, internal struggles and not everyone in our country liked democracy, particularly in 1989 when we had the first free and fair elections in our country. Where people could nominate their own candidates, and elect their own candidates and so a totally new generation came to power.344

In my view, then, the Soviet Union did not collapse as a result of U.S. policies. The U.S. can be considered to have played a role in the events that unfolded through their constant reminder of the commitments the Soviets had agreed on in 1975 in Helsinki, and this constant reminder

344 Youtube, «BBC HARDtalk – Mikhail Gorbachev – President of the Soviet Union 1990-1991 (10/11/14).»
reminder was a factor, though not a key factor, in bringing about policy changes in the Soviet Union.
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