

The American Foreign Policy Shift During the Carter / Reagan Era:
Why It Led to Soviet Misperceptions of US Intentions Leading Up to Able Archer 83

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INTRODUCTION

During the administrations of Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan in the late 1970s and throughout the better part of the 1980s, a shift in American foreign policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union led to unforeseen outcomes for both nations from a military strategy and military response perspective. Understanding this shift, the foreign policy conditions before and after the shift, and how these changes resulted in an unexpected response from the Soviet Union is significant and key to explaining the response itself.

To demonstrate how the Soviet response came to be in the first place, I will firmly establish *why* this foreign policy shift led to misperception by the Soviets of the United States' intentions leading up to the Able Archer 83 incident. Because this incident proved to be the culmination of the height of paranoia between both countries at the apex of the Cold War, it is important to clearly establish, via existing scholarly research and evidence, how changes in American foreign policy at the time impacted the way Soviets viewed American intentions – specifically, the areas of political ideology, budgeting and economics, and military preparedness.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This paper will examine *why* the foreign policy shift that occurred between the administrations of President Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan led to misperception by the Soviet Union of the United States' intentions leading up to Able Archer 83.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Able Archer 83 incident refers to a NATO command post exercise in late 1983 during which US communications went silent and military buildup occurred, ostensibly as nothing more than an exercise in preparedness for a nuclear war (Jones, 2016). The Soviet Union, however,

interpreted US silence and its military buildup as an act of aggression and quickly prepared and positioned itself for an impending war. It was one of the most dangerous moments in the duration of the Cold War.

There were several contributing factors that collectively created an incoherent and confusing message to the Soviets in terms of what America was doing militarily during the Carter and Reagan eras. The first of these factors was the fact that, “at least based on its rhetoric, the Reagan administration holds a fundamentally different view of the Soviet Union than that held by most of its predecessors. An ‘evil empire’ soon to be swept into the ‘dustbin of history’ were the images of the Soviet Union presented by this president,” (Smith, 1988: 598). Second, it is essential to consider the budgeting and economic behaviors displayed by the United States and how they impacted the American economy, as well as what was expected to happen to the Soviet economy as a result. A third factor, on a related note, is the military spending increase that the United States (and, consequently, the Soviet Union) implemented during this era, as well as the realities that may have motivated the US to do so.

Various mechanisms were at play in facilitating the process changes that occurred in President Jimmy Carter’s foreign policy. Specific policy making played a key role in shaping American foreign policy during President Ronald Reagan’s first term in office, particularly as it relates to arms reductions. Similarly, it also shaped Soviet interpretations of it. It is critical, too, to consider the environments, choices, and dynamics that play a role in the presidential decision-making process. Keeping these variables in mind is important for the simple added reason that “all decision-making units are susceptible to external influences, no matter how self-contained they are,” (da Vinha, 2016: 627).

It is important to also make a clear distinction between the inner workings of the Carter Administration as well as the Reagan Administration – understanding the intrinsic motivations of each decision-making entity provides insight into both process and policy, especially as it relates to Soviet-American relations. Luis da Vinha (2016) also incorporates a broad overview of what some conditions within foreign policy decision-making may look like, given a particular set of variables. The relevance here is that these can help further isolate dependent from independent variables, thus shedding necessary light on the more direct causes of what led to the Soviet response during Able Archer 83.

Dale Smith continues in discussing budgeting under the Reagan administration, citing that there was an “apparent, increased willingness of the Reagan administration, relative to its predecessors, to run larger deficits,” (Smith, 1988: 603). Correlating this to increased military spending, it is really no wonder how the Soviets could easily (even if mistakenly) sense that an attack on their soil would be imminent. It makes sense, then, that the increasing of American defense spending would force the Soviets to follow suit. “And given the overall weakness of the Soviet economy, such an arms race would ultimately lead to crisis, or even collapse, in the Soviet economic system,” (Smith, 1988: 623).

One interesting aspect of note here is that, while American foreign policy did take a decidedly antagonistic turn as it related to the Soviet Union in 1981 (under President Ronald Reagan), it was actually under President Jimmy Carter that the United States took a foreign policy shift that focused far less on an approach of *détente* and more on Soviet aggression (Nichols, 2002). This change in policy, Thomas Nichols observes, was more of a response to Soviet military expansion than it was a concerted foreign policy strategy change.

Nichols discusses Soviet concerns, addresses also human rights concerns at the time, and makes mention of “the Soviet ascendancy” (Nichols, 2002: 27). He does this while mentioning that Soviet responses and actions, as détente was beginning to erode, led to Carter’s decision to adopt a more confrontational strategy in terms of foreign policy. Of particular interest is Nichols’ observation that, “The perception that the Soviets were amassing military power in order to hold the West at bay in the face of ongoing Soviet global expansion was strengthened when Moscow committed the huge blunder of modernizing Soviet nuclear forces in Europe in 1977,” (Nichols, 2002: 29). This might help explain why Reagan decided to take an even further hardline stance against the Soviets when he assumed the American presidency.

Additionally, Bernard Nossiter quotes President Carter as being critical of President Ronald Reagan’s “one-sided attitude of belligerence toward the Soviet Union” and of “radical changes” as they relate to the foreign policy of the United States in 1981 (Nossiter, 1981: A7). Carter underscored how the US policy of détente, which had been policy under the last three presidents, should be taken seriously by Reagan. Carter also went on to refer to Reagan’s foreign policy in a harsh and negative light, citing Reagan’s “acceptability of limited nuclear wars” (Nossiter, 1981: A7). This last piece provides a rather revealing and sobering look at how Reagan’s foreign policy may have encouraged the Soviet response during Able Archer 83.

Carter’s framing, in December of 1981, of President Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy within a milieu of “belligerence” as it relates to the Soviet Union will prove helpful in my research in terms of further highlighting the stark differences within the shift of foreign policy that occurred with both presidents’ administrations. Harshly critical of Reagan’s foreign policy record, Carter’s view of Reagan’s departure from treaties as a means of controlling or mitigating the use

of nuclear weapons is also a key point in showing, quite clearly, that Reagan was almost *intent* on starting nuclear war on some level (Nossiter, 1981).

While Smith (1988), da Vinha (2016), Nichols (2002), and Nossiter (1981) each examine the conditions that existed in both the United States and the Soviet Union during the Carter and Regan administrations from various angles of analysis and thought, their individual conclusions contain elements of strength and weakness which deserve some commentary. For the purpose of brevity, commentary of Smith's article is included below.

Smith (1988) addresses whether Reagan's foreign policy shift is a temporary aberration or more of a lasting, permanent shift. The strength in this lies in the fact that Smith's analysis provides context that helps explain the level of seriousness with which the United States' actions could be perceived by the Soviets. Either way, whether this shift was temporary or permanent, the Soviets could be seen as justified in their response. Another strength to Smith's approach is his discussion of the government budgeting process, in terms of resource allocation, one aspect of which focuses on military expenditures. This is valuable because it sets the general framework that allows us to determine, quite easily, whether the American approach at the time fell outside of the budgeting standard in terms of military spending increases, which would give yet another cause for concern to the Soviets. As such, Smith's research provides an exceptional amount of data for analysis in this research.

HYPOTHESIS

Mearsheimer and Walt (2013) have concluded that, "Theory creating and hypothesis testing are both critical components of social science, but the former is ultimately more important," (427). This research will incorporate a substantial amount of theoretical knowledge to arrive at the proposed hypothesis of my research, which is centered around my observations that the

hallmarks of US foreign policy vis-à-vis Soviet Union in the early 80s were mired in aberrations, uncertainty, and errors in the execution of said policy. In order to demonstrate this idea, I will begin with a thorough articulation of the Perpetual Peace Model (PPM) in International Relations (IR) theory.

MODEL ARTICULATION

As a domestic politics level mode of analysis, the Perpetual Peace Model contains various key elements that hold it together as a viable, respected, and accepted model in the arenas of foreign policy making and IR, as well as for persons studying the political sciences. In her article, “Models of International Organization in Perpetual Peace Projects”, Archibugi suggests boldly that, “This model...traces the origins of war to the absence of a supranational authority to which states might appeal. Thus the elimination of war requires the reproduction at the international level of what happens when states are formed: the creation of a Union composed of the sovereigns of individual states with the right to use force delegated to it. Supporters of the pyramidal model never intended that this Union should be created by recourse to war – the very thing they have sought to abolish – but by voluntary participation on the part of states,” (1992: 297). As such, because the creation of foreign policy by both of the states that are the focus of this paper – namely the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – is simultaneously a deliberate action on each of their parts, the use of PPM here would make the most sense.

To be sure, however, the model must be presented as it relates to domestic choices, decisions, and actions by the state, wherein it was *a series of failures* (to include misinterpretations and misperceptions) made by both states that led to *an eventual and complete breakdown* of the foreign policy process and outcome. Central to this breakdown, at least on the American side,

are the checks and balances on our democracy's institutions – a PPM element which must be present in order for the model to function as intended. During the first term of Reagan's administration, control of the Senate was in Republican hands, effectively giving power to the Republican party over the Executive, the Judicial, and the, arguably, more powerful (and certainly more elite) half of the Legislative branch of government. As perhaps an unexpected result, this given lack of checks on our nation's institutions, therefore, played a direct and key role in the ultimate breakdown that occurred in policy outcome – one that very few persons could have predicted.

In terms of a general operationalization of variables, as a means of demonstrating how I envision testing my model, how I intend to measure its testing, and the empirical data that I will use to support it, several independent variables will also be analyzed as a means of giving credence to my deliberate choice in using it for this research purpose. These include first drawing on a general use of IR theory in order to provide a working frame of reference, the hostility of US rhetoric at the time, information from now declassified National Security Decision Directives 32 and 75, background information on Able Archer 83 (specifically) amid Exercise Reforger, as well as on the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), the Reagan Doctrine, and the unexpected dilemma of political and military uncertainty posed by the succession of Soviet leadership in the early 80s.

MODEL TESTING

British philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in his 17th century book, *Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, noted that, “In a body politic, for the well ordering of foreign traffic, the most commodious representative is an assembly of all the members,” (Hobbes, 1985: 217). In PPM, this notion of all citizens as a homogenous entity

holds true as forming the body politic that Hobbes referred to three centuries ago – which still rings true today – the same citizens who form interest groups, bureaucracies, and political parties, all of which help to hold PPM and other democratic models together as functioning theoretical rationalizations for behavior at the state level.

It is important to go back to this most basic definition because, without this key structural component of the PPM model (i.e. people/citizens), the entire model ceases to function. In the case of Able Archer 83, the bureaucracies on both sides of the equation were all certainly in place. These bureaucracies included the US Department of State, the military-industrial complex, and the Politburo in the USSR. In addition, it is vital to include the audiences to Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech, which included the British House of Commons and the National Association of Evangelicals – both of which act as representatives of interest groups, a key component of PPM. I will address Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech later in this paper (Reagan, 1983). However, it was the poor, suspect communication between the bureaucracies that resulted in their eventual collective nonperformance. This failure in communication between bureaucratic entities was evidenced most clearly in the breakdown of the bilateral Strategic Arms Limitation Talks II (SALT II) of 1979, a treaty which was intended to be ratified during the Carter Administration as well as by Leonid Brezhnev's Politburo – neither of which actually occurred.

The next logical segue to follow leads to first drawing on a general use of IR theory in order to provide a working frame of reference for the remaining evidences. Presidents are more likely to use force in year three or four of the presidential election cycle (Rucki, 2019); this serves as the single highest correlation from two other potentialities of using force. Evidence to support this theory is seen in the fact that the year 1983 was Reagan's third year in office; the military

buildup during Able Archer 83 occurred that year. Similarly, President George W. Bush invaded Iraq and President Lyndon B. Johnson invaded Viet Nam during the third or fourth years of their respective presidential election cycles. Today, to bring an element of contemporary relevance to this theory, President Donald Trump is currently seeking a US military buildup against purported but unsubstantiated threats from Iran; Trump is currently in his third year in office.

Here, additional background information on Able Archer 83 amid Exercise Reforger will be provided as evidence and equally as a means to better position the arguments that follow. First, there were some major variations in standard operation procedure in this exercise; the deviations from the norm alarmed the Soviet military and leadership establishment to the point where they firmly believed that an attack by the United States was imminent, thinking they would be attacked under cover of routine exercise (Jones, 2016: Introduction). One of the key differences from previous military exercises was that conversations began between Reagan and British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher; these had not occurred before. Also, the US invaded Grenada in October 1983; as a result, there was an increase in the communications between Washington and London leading up to Exercise Reforger. In addition, extended periods of silence were also observed, which panicked USSR leadership. A final key difference is that, during the exercise, mock nuclear warheads were loaded onto airplanes. Because of the collective presence of these elements, the Soviets felt that the likelihood of nuclear war had increased greatly as compared to before. This point serves as a major explanation as to why Soviet misperception of the United States' intentions occurred.

States have one function: to survive. As such, could it be said that the United States was acting in accordance with this concept? Can the same be assumed for the Soviet Union, especially vis-à-vis its response to US actions? Also, how can correlations be established

between things that cannot be readily observed? We have already seen and shall continue to observe later in this paper the fact that correlations can be explained through causal mechanisms; therefore, it is essential to find a few correlations in order to be able to demonstrate this theoretical aspect effectively. As a final step in this analysis, we need to find some mechanism that links all of the correlations, whether this link is institutional, social, or military in nature.

When democracies threaten with force against an adversary, they are more likely to alter the behavior of the target than a non-democracy making the same threat. It is also true that uncertainty raises costs. Therefore, as was learned in the US war against Viet Nam, it is both militarily and socially prudent and strategic to keep the public on board with the aims of its leadership and to control media access as a means of framing the leadership's narrative and rhetoric. Here, it is fitting to introduce another set of empirical evidence centering around the hostility of US rhetoric at the time – specifically with reference to both Reagan's presidential campaign as well as his now famous "Evil Empire" speeches, in which he infamously depicted the Soviet Union as being a source of evil on the planet which must be either completely transformed at all costs, or simply eradicated by means of targeted warfare (Reagan, 1983).

In his speech, given in March 1982 to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, Reagan observed the inherent danger in ignoring "...the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an *evil empire*, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil," (Reagan, 1983). This speech helped Reagan frame a narrative that could be sold to the citizens, via the media and as a message from the elites, where the United States was rooted in good and virtue, while the Soviet Union was rooted in evil. Such messaging could then fuel the "transmission belt" of the PPM – free public debate – in favor of the institutions and political

parties, not to mention leadership and the elites themselves.

Along the lines of a transformation, in Rowland & Jones' (2016) "Reagan's Strategy for the Cold War and Evil Empire", the authors make a salient argument:

Reagan believed that if the Soviets were confronted with a U.S.-led competition, especially in the form of an arms race, they would conclude that they could neither afford nor keep up with that competition, and would agree to reduce nuclear arms.... Reagan implied that this would include a realization that the USSR could not win the Cold War, that the Soviets would see aspects of the Western "way of life" as attractive, and that they would begin to change their system. (Rowland and Jones, 2016: 433)

Next, it is worth taking a look at information from now declassified National Security Decision Directives 32 and 75, as further empirical evidence to support the research hypothesis. National Security Decision Directive 32 (May, 1982) addresses clearly the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons on behalf of the US military in its engagements. In the section aptly titled, "Force Integration", the Directive notes that, "An examination of our current and projected force capabilities reveals [that] we might be forced to resort to nuclear weapons early in a conflict...the possible use of nuclear weapons must remain an element in our overall strategy" as well as the fact that "...we must enhance the survivability of our offensive forces," (Federation of American Scientists, 2019: 7). The Directive also aligns with all three components of the Unipolar Systems Hypotheses, which ascertain that: a) the unipolar power will expand its interests globally; b) subordinate states will challenge the authority of the unipolar power, and; c) states who occupy the concept of hegemony will eventually collapse (Rucki, 2019). Paradoxically, this last point could be used against both the US and USSR in their quest for world power – being yet another reason why Soviet misperception occurred.

National Security Decision Directive 75 (January, 1983) uses a much softer tone in explaining its position concerning the curtailment of Soviet interests abroad in terms of its

expansionism as a state, while clearly stating the main purpose of US foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. “To contain and over time reverse Soviet expansionism by competing effectively on a sustained basis with the Soviet Union in all international arenas – particularly in the overall military balance and in geographical regions of priority concern to the United States. This will remain the primary focus of US policy toward the USSR,” (Federation of American Scientists 2019: 1).

Here, it is fitting to discuss yet another important piece of evidence, the Reagan Doctrine of 1985. The US Department of State notes:

“Breaking with the doctrine of ‘Containment,’ established during the Truman administration – President Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy was based on John Foster Dulles’ ‘Roll-Back’ strategy from the 1950s in which the United States would actively push back the influence of the Soviet Union. Reagan’s policy differed, however, in the sense that he relied primarily on the overt support of those fighting Soviet dominance. This strategy was perhaps best encapsulated in NSC National Security Decision Directive 75. This 1983 directive stated that a central priority of the US in its policy toward the Soviet Union would be ‘to contain and over time reverse Soviet expansionism,’ particularly in the developing world,” (US Department of State, 1985).

Again, there is a focus that relies on active intervention on behalf of the US as a means of curtailing the Soviet interest of expanding its influence both regionally and especially in the Western Hemisphere, e.g. Cuba.

In the “Arms Control” section of *Soviet Foreign Policy Today*, it is of note to mention Leonid Brezhnev’s thoughts on the Soviet position on Euromissiles as it pertains to the years 1981 to 1983 (Livermore, 1990):

“Brezhnev also sounded a note of warning that in coming months would go hand-in-hand, in Soviet appeals to the West European public, with attempts to portray the anticipated US missile deployment, part of the Able Archer 83 weapons buildup, as a belligerent and threatening gesture: He pointed out that the West European countries that hosted the US missiles could become targets of heavy Soviet nuclear ‘retaliatory’ strikes aimed at ‘neutralizing’ the US missiles (of course, such strikes would have to be anticipatory and pre-emptive, rather than ‘retaliatory’). Hence the missiles represented a grave danger to their hosts. This was a response to the development of a “two-track”

plan, approved by NATO Foreign Ministers, for a 'contingent deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe to offset recent deployments of Soviet SS-20 missiles on the continent'," (Livermore, 1990: 79).

Brezhnev went on to note, curiously, what Soviet perception of such a plan was at the time:

"Try to imagine yourself in our position. Could we look on with indifference as we were being surrounded on all sides with military bases, as larger and larger numbers of carriers of nuclear death, in whatever form – sea-based or land-based missiles, bombs, etc. – were being targeted on Soviet cities and factories from various parts of Europe? The Soviet Union had to create means for its own defense, not for threatening anyone – least of all Europe. It created them and deployed them on its territory in numbers counterbalancing the arms of those who had declared themselves our potential adversaries..." (Livermore, 1990: 79).

Brezhnev's view here explains rather succinctly, using real-world examples, why the Soviets felt the need to augment their military capabilities.

As a brilliant counterpoint, Brezhnev continued with a look at the reaction of the US when the tables were turned, so to speak, concerning Cuba. Brezhnev demonstrated an ability to deftly position similar actions taken by the US as being justified through its ideology of "American exceptionalism" (ideology being another vital component of PPM), yet when the USSR took those actions, it was viewed as an aggressor and its actions were a danger and threat to the rest of the democratic world – a fine example of political hypocrisy at its best (Livermore, 1990: 80).

Brezhnev took it a step further, unmasking US intentions in this vein, suggesting that, "What they need is the disruption of the talks as a kind of alibi for continuing the planned arms race and the planned transformation of Western Europe into a launching pad for new American missiles aimed at the USSR. They are building a deadlock into the talks in advance, so they can say, 'Look, the USSR isn't reckoning with the West's opinion, so all the US can do is deploy its missile'," (Livermore, 1990: 81).

In stark opposition to the notion of American exceptionalism, Brezhnev then made a plea which served as another independent variable as it relates to this research, when he stated:

“The Soviet Union is not seeking preferential treatment. We insist on only one thing – that the US and the NATO alliance as a whole measure our security and the security of our allies by the same yardstick as they measure their own. We see the aim of the forthcoming talks as translating the principle of equality and equal security into the language of specific commitments by the two sides. The Soviet Union would like the results of the talks to lower the level of confrontation instead of raising it and to open the path to further steps toward military détente in Europe... We have already said that, if the US takes a sensible position and if NATO’s plans for new missiles are dropped, we will be prepared to reduce the overall number of Soviet missiles. I must add that we will be prepared to reach agreement on quite substantial reductions on both sides,” (Livermore, 1980: 81).

This is a demonstration of Brezhnev’s bargaining power as it relates to the de-escalation of weaponry; Brezhnev’s expectation, although unmet, was that the US would come to the table prepared for real bargaining and real arms reduction action instead of utilizing inflammatory rhetoric and vacuous hyperbole as the cornerstones of its foreign policy as it related to the Soviet Union at the time. Perhaps as a fitting aside here, then, is a quote from Reagan during his speech at the British House of Commons in June of 1982: “Must freedom wither in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil?” (Reagan, 1983).

The analysis will now shift to a very real dilemma that contributed exponentially to paranoia on the US side, the unexpected political and military uncertainty posed by the question of succession of Soviet leadership in the early 80s played an enormous role. This is due to the fact that the lack of knowledge of the direction that Soviet foreign policy would take vis-à-vis the United States posed an associated risk in terms of a potential change in USSR policy.

As we know them and as history recalls, the facts of the question of succession occurred as follows (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020):

- *Leonid Brezhnev died in November 1982*
- *He was succeeded by Yuri Andropov, who died in February 1984*

- *Later, Konstantin Chernenko succeeded Andropov in February of 1984 until his death the following year*

As such, the United States was left to its own devices in guessing whether the foreign policy of the incoming Soviet leader would take a decidedly tougher or softer approach as it related to the US. For this reason, it was almost as if the United States had no choice but to continue pursuing an aggressive anti-Soviet policy, to preserve its own security and military interests in the region.

As a final piece of both evidence and an independent variable, the public announcement by Reagan of the development of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in March 1983 played a key role in the Soviet response to American actions at the time. The intent of the SDI was the development of a sophisticated anti-ballistic missile system whose purpose would be to prevent attacks from other countries, most notably the Soviet Union. The result here is that the USSR mistook SDI as reality; ultimately, this is an error in perception on their part, which was aided and abetted by US directives, since the US wanted it to be true. More importantly, however, is a lesson that was learned after SDI took place, which is the fact that conflicts can be won by using economics intelligently and strategically instead of simply resorting to war. This piece correlates with the “wars v. democracy” component of PPM.

Before offering a conclusion, it is important to make mention of several quotes relevant to the crafting and development of foreign policy, as they relate directly to this discussion in multiple ways. To be sure, “War is not normal; war is a mistake – most of the time,” (Rucki, 2019). The lessons of the SDI can corroborate this fact. It is often mentioned in reference to foreign policy and the players therein, as coined by the Greek historian Thucydides, that “the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must,” (Thucydides, 431- 404 BC). Most importantly, and key to this research on both the US and USSR sides, as a salient example of wisdom, is the

fact that, “You shouldn’t be in charge of anything you’ve never done” (Rucki, 2019). This leads to the creation of gaps in experience that are then hastily filled, at best, with assumptive suggestion.

CONCLUSION

In order to fairly and accurately assess why the American foreign policy shift during the Carter/Reagan era lead to Soviet misperception of US intentions leading up to Able Archer 83, it is essential to understand three elements: how this policy shift occurred and what led to it, what the foreign policy conditions were before and after it, and how these changes resulted in an unexpected response from the Soviet Union. The research provided explores the various reasonings that exist in each of these areas, giving concrete evidences to the points made therein. The relationship between the US an USSR during the Cold War bore the potential to have improved during its latter years, but the suspicions that each country held toward and about one another ran deep and formed over the course of many years, thereby almost limiting the possibilities for success in most areas of each country’s foreign policy.

Focusing on the existing political ideology between the United States and the Soviet Union at the time and gauging our military preparedness will help to continue uncovering the reasoning behind the decision-making processes involved in these areas. It is important to continue probing further the areas discussed in this research (political ideology, budgeting and economics, and military preparedness) as a means of exhausting any as of yet undiscovered potentialities of causation and correlation. Ultimately, it will be revealing whether this reasoning provided enough justification for both countries to reach the brink of nuclear war with one another. History and the evidence provided in this research demonstrate that the socio-political and military conditions present in both the US and USSR were, at best, a maelstrom of confusion and

mutual suspicion. As such, the shift in foreign policy that occurred in both states, as outlined above, clearly demonstrates that the conclusions arrived at by the key decision-making actors in both states were an almost natural response to such conditions.

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