

**“A Force to be Reckoned With”:
The Antinuclear Revolution and
the Reagan Administration, 1980 - 1984**

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“If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky, that would be like the splendor of the mighty one. Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” In quoting the Bhagavad Gita, J. Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb, pronounced the start of the atomic age, after witnessing the Trinity test blast of the world’s first nuclear weapon at the Los Alamos lab, New Mexico, July 16, 1945. Nuclear weapons became not only the basis for an arms race throughout the Cold War, but a rallying cry for those who feared the existence of such weapons would lead the world to a stark choice: “one world or none”—that is, either the human race could live in a world without nuclear weapons, or no world would be left to occupy.¹ While indeed nuclear weapons faced fierce opposition from numerous individuals during the Cold War, the 1980s marked the height of the nuclear anxiety. With the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor meltdown of 1979 still rattling in the public conscience, the incoming Reagan administration only contributed to the ongoing nuclear anxiety by undertaking a massive arms buildup while making careless statements regarding nuclear war. As the doomsday clock of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* inched closer to midnight, a “Call to Halt the Arms Race” sounded the charge for a movement that would challenge a re-emerging Cold War consensus, in turn, shaping American society throughout the early 1980s.

In a recent presidential address to the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations, Thomas Schwartz argued for historians to recognize the “ongoing importance” of traditional domestic politics on American foreign policy.² Heeding Schwartz’s call, this analysis uses internal documents to reveal the high level of concern the Reagan White House placed on the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign—a movement responsible for the largest political demonstration in the history of the United States. In a short time, the Freeze campaign surpassed in size the movement to end the Vietnam War of the 1960s and early 1970s, casting a wide-

reaching effect across American society. Originating in discussions within the scientific and arms control communities, the campaign spread into small American towns, and became a pressing concern within religious debate. Indeed, with an escalating arms race, in the popular and political culture, nothing short of the “fate of the Earth” was at stake. The overwhelming fear of nuclear catastrophe and of a coming apocalypse can be seen in movies and songs throughout the decade. Debates over the freeze dominated radio and television talk shows, as movie stars and celebrities, prominent intellectuals and scholars, bishops and reverends, and governors and congressional leaders, lined up for and against the idea. Both houses of Congress debated the idea of an arms freeze, with the House of Representatives endorsing it.

Just as the idea of the Freeze was debated in society, so too has the debate over the Freeze campaign’s effectiveness continued in scholarship. Several scholarly works on the Freeze movement stand out that can essentially be split into two categories: works that argue for an effective Freeze movement and works that argue against its influence.³ This work is aligned with prior scholarship that views the Freeze campaign as an effective movement of social protest. However, it departs in fundamental respects from previous scholarship both for and against the influence of the Freeze. While Lawrence Wittner’s *Toward Nuclear Abolition* (the third volume of his *Struggle Against the Bomb* series) is the definitive work on this topic, Wittner’s scope is transnational in perspective, looking at antinuclear protests over a longer period and across the globe. By its very nature, this work is much more focused. Rather than looking transnationally, this paper examines the specific binary between the Reagan administration and the U.S. antinuclear movement, broadly conceived of as the “Nuclear Freeze movement,” despite various stances within the U.S. antinuclear movement over the concept of a “freeze” on nuclear weapons.

With regard to sources, the argument and analysis is sustained by extensive use of research undertaken at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, a source used in only limited respect in one prior account. This resource illuminates the government's response to the movement, showing us the threat and seriousness in which the White House viewed the Freeze movement, as well as how it sought to defeat and co-opt their momentum.

Recent scholarship on the Reagan presidency has generally ignored or dismissed the Nuclear Freeze movement and any influence it may have had on the administration or the ultimate peaceful end of the Cold War. Indeed, these historians have revised Reagan in recent years to portray him as a "rebel." The "Great communicator" has now become the great nuclear abolitionist on his "quest" to abolish nuclear weapons as Paul Lettow suggests, or "fighting a secret war" against these weapons in the account of Martin and Annelise Anderson. But in assessing Reagan the man and his ultimate hatred for nuclear weapons, these conclusions neglect the concerns over domestic politics and downplay how Reagan's escalation of the arms race created the largest peace movement in American history.⁴

Despite this powerful and growing movement, a paradox exists: if the Nuclear Freeze movement was such a powerful force and influence over society during the early 1980s, what then explains their inability to make the question pivotal to the 1984 election? I will argue that two factors played a major role in this. First, by growing rapidly, embracing a diverse base, and moving from grassroots campaigns to working inside the beltway, the Freeze campaign was undermined by politicians who used the rhetoric and popularity of the ideas to gain electoral victories, but watered down and compromised on support for a freeze resolution. Second, alongside the growth of this movement, the administration fought back and eventually

undermined the movement with the launching of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI or “Star Wars”) in 1983, which allowed the Reagan White House to steal the momentum of the Freeze campaign. In effect, by becoming a powerful force whose ideas spread across society, the Freeze campaign did not fail, but became the victim of its own successes.

The Bipartisan Nuclear Arms Buildup and the Emerging Opposition

During the 1970s, the Cold War appeared to be coming to an end, as a period of détente (or the “lessening of tensions”) guided the United States and the Soviet Union to come to agreements on arms control treaties such as the Strategic Limitation Talks (SALT) and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Richard Nixon, a strident anti-communist, visited China, opening up relations between their communist government and that of the United States that would be formally normalized by President Jimmy Carter. However, by the late 1970s, it all began to unravel, as Cold War tensions escalated.

On Christmas Eve 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, producing a rippling effect across the globe and precipitating a dramatic decline in U.S.-Soviet relations.⁵ In January 1980, the hands of the doomsday clock of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved forward two minutes to read seven minutes to midnight—the closest the hands had been to midnight (a nuclear holocaust) since 1968.⁶ Ratification of the SALT II treaty would die in the Senate as President Carter began to push for the development of the MX missile, or what Ronald Reagan would later term the “Peacekeeper,” an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) equipped with ten warheads, each capable of being launched independently at different targets.⁷

The repercussions of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were widespread, and came to affect strategic nuclear planning. Shortly after announcing the return of Selective Service,

President Carter issued a new defense strategy: Presidential Directive 59 (PD-59), enshrining the idea of “limited nuclear war” into official U.S. nuclear policy.⁸ The new shift in nuclear policy was leaked almost immediately, causing a stir in the Soviet Union, with *Pravda* reporting it as “a prescription not for preventing a major conflict with Moscow . . . but for stimulating the arms race, with all its consequences.”⁹

As relations between the two superpowers deteriorated, and the arms race escalated, members of the scientific and arms control communities raised significant concerns about the possibility of nuclear war. Most prominently among these was one Randall Forsberg, an arms control expert at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). With the arms race escalating, Forsberg sought to use her skills to reduce the threat of all out war and to scale back military spending. In 1979, Forsberg founded the Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies (IDDS) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As freeze-activist Douglas Waller notes, it was at IDDS where in April 1980 Forsberg “would turn the arms control debate on its head” with the founding document of the Freeze campaign: “A Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race—Proposal for a Mutual U.S.-Soviet Nuclear-Weapon Freeze.”¹⁰ The four-page proposal suggested in plain language that the United States and Soviet Union simply “stop the arms race,” and, instead, adopt a “mutual freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons.”¹¹

Forsberg was not the first to propose a “freeze” to the arms race, however. In 1979, during the Senate deliberations to ratify SALT II, Senator Mark Hatfield introduced an amendment calling for a “U.S.-Soviet freeze on strategic nuclear weapons deployment.” Activist organizations, such as the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the Mobilization for Survival (Mobe) had put forth freeze proposals, with AFSC calling for a unilateral “freeze”

and Mobe proposing a three year moratorium on both nuclear power and nuclear weapons. Indeed, as far back as the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson had even suggested a “freeze” in the arms race. Forsberg’s proposal, however, was bilateral, and called for a halt to production, testing, and development of nuclear weapons.¹²

With the escalation of the Cold War, a backlash had begun to emerge in the grassroots, and the idea to freeze the arms race spread throughout the Northeast, led in part by one Randall Kehler. A Quaker by religious practice, Keheler’s resume included degrees from both Harvard and Stanford, but also boasted of a twenty-two month prison sentence for non-cooperation during his tenure with the War Resisters League. Intrigued by Senator Hatfield’s freeze amendment, in January 1980 Kehler began organizing a campaign in western Massachusetts to place a referendum on the ballot in three state senate districts calling for “a mutual nuclear weapons freeze.” Over the next nine months, Kehler with the aid of activists, collected over 12,000 signatures to put the issue on the ballot. Though Ronald Reagan won the presidential election, the referendum passed in thirty of the thirty-three communities in which Reagan was victorious.¹³

Inflammatory Rhetoric and Radical Policies

Although the “emergence of the freeze concept predated the inauguration of Ronald Reagan,” as David Cortright writes, “the inflammatory rhetoric and radical policies emanating from the White House fanned the flames of antinuclear revolt.”¹⁴ With the election of Ronald Reagan, the sharp increase in tensions between the superpowers only increased. At his first press conference, Reagan suggested the Soviets “reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat”¹⁵ Not long thereafter, Secretary of State Alexander Haig condemned the Soviets for “training, funding, and equipping international terrorists,” although, as

Congressional Quarterly noted, “Haig offered no concrete evidence to support his assertions.”¹⁶

As George Shultz, who later succeeded Haig as Secretary of State, wrote in his memoirs,

“Relations between the two superpowers were not simply bad; they were nonexistent.”¹⁷

In the first year of the Reagan White House, the arms race would escalate, with the pursuit of the MX missile, the B-1 bomber, and the Trident II D-5 (a submarine launched ballistic missile or SLBM), on top of the largest peacetime defense budget in American history. The bi-partisan Cold War consensus of the 1980s emerged not just around the pursuit of new weapons technology, but also around the idea of limited and winnable nuclear war—an idea embraced by members of the Reagan administration and their allies.¹⁸

Clearly not everyone was happy with the new “bigger nuclear stick” the Reagan administration planned to wield. On inauguration day 1981, thousands of dissidents flocked to the capital, with one group staging political theatre with a mule-wagon hauling a mock MX missile.¹⁹ As relations with the Soviet Union further deteriorated, and as members of the Reagan administration openly suggested that fighting a nuclear war was a possibility, the idea of “freezing” the arms race gained ground. Activist campaigns began to coalesce around the idea of the freeze. The Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) were revived with the help of a dynamic Australian pediatrician, Helen Caldicott who left medicine to campaign for a freeze to the arms race.²⁰ In addition to PSR, groups such as the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) also became involved in the campaign to halt the arms race, believing other concerns to be “too small compared with nuclear war.”²¹ UCS gave full backing to the freeze initiative, declaring it “a simple, unadorned and seemingly uncomplicated notion: the United States and the Soviet Union should agree to a dead halt in all aspects of the nuclear arms race.”²² A wide array of groups

representing professionals of all stripes endorsed the freeze concept.²³

Undeterred by a small movement, however, the Reagan administration pressed on announcing plans for the production of neutron bombs in August 1981. This “neutron bomb” would make use of enhanced radiation warfare (ERW) technology previously rejected by the Carter administration. This ERW-based weapon was widely criticized by domestic opponents as a “Republican Bomb,” while the Soviets mocked it as a “Capitalist bomb.” As John Newhouse explains, the nicknames derived from the fact that the neutron bomb “was supposed to spare property, but destroy lives.”²⁴ However, there were differences between the neutron bomb and other weapons. As Fred Kaplan explained in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, the key difference between a fission bomb and a neutron bomb, lay “in the prompt radiation” which the neutron bomb enhanced by six times.²⁵ The decision to equip the Lance missile and eight-inch artillery shells with “nuclear material tritium to make complete enhanced-radiation weapons”²⁶ set off a flurry of antinuclear protests in Europe, while producing a boost to long dormant antinuclear organizations stateside.

In August 1981, just days after Reagan’s neutron bomb announcement, SANE began circulating a letter of protest addressed to Reagan and Weinberger. SANE’s letter was signed by more than twenty-four different organizations, from environmental groups, peace groups, and numerous religious denominations.²⁷ In Texas, twelve Catholic bishops adopted a statement condemning the neutron bomb, while in New York, the annual meeting of the Pugwash group urged a freeze on nuclear weapons, citing the interruption of the SALT negotiations and the Reagan administration’s belief in “a fallacy . . . that nuclear war can be won.”²⁸

The Expansion of the Freeze campaign from Grassroots to National

The Reagan administration's open talk of fighting nuclear war, alongside the pursuit of newer and deadlier weapons, fanned the flames of dissent globally. In the hearts of millions, fear of a nuclear holocaust was struck, turning a grassroots campaign into a global phenomenon. In the United States, the "Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign," too, would expand from the grassroots into the mainstream, becoming hotly debated in diverse circles and communities. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the front page in April 1982, "Over 18 months, the notion of a bilateral freeze [emerged] as the inspiration for a coast-to-coast grass roots crusade."²⁹

What accounts for this sudden bullrush of momentum garnered by the Freeze campaign? The answer it seemed, lay in the policies of Ronald Reagan. As a *New York Times* editorial suggested in March 1982, during his 1980 campaign, President Reagan had managed to evade the tag of "nuclear risk-taker." But by the end of his first year in office, more than half of those polled saw him as precisely that. Likewise, a *Newsweek* poll taken during the same week as the *New York Times* editorial found a third of those surveyed believed the Reagan administration's policies were increasing the chance of a nuclear war. Furthermore, among those surveyed, sixty percent were in favor of a freeze. Despite tremendous growth, as the *Newsweek* article indicates, a large number—forty-three percent—were still unaware of the Freeze campaign. Though the administration had announced the beginning of the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in the fall of 1981, with no progress made, and a perceived image of an administration dragging its feet on arms control, critics, such as the journalist Strobe Talbott, suggested the true acronym for Reagan's arms control proposal was "STALL."³⁰ In addition to START, the administration proposed a "zero-option." Zero-zero was a simple proposal: in turn for the Soviets eliminating all SS-20 medium range missiles, NATO would not deploy Pershing II and cruise missiles. Most

observers, writes the historian John Lewis Gaddis, viewed both the zero-zero proposal, along with START (which called for cuts to land based ICBMs in which the Soviets had a numerical advantage) as efforts to “stalemate arms control rather than as a sincere attempt to achieve the real reductions the two proposals professed to seek.”³¹ Thus, with a perception that the administration had no real interests in slowing down the arms race (let alone halting it), a movement which began in the grassroots had become a political wildfire with room to grow further still.

Between 1980 and 1982, over 100 books relating to “nuclear fear” were published. The most prominent of these was Jonathan Schell’s *The Fate of the Earth*. In the thirty-seven years since the birth of the atomic age, as a *New York Times* review suggested, *The Fate of the Earth* managed to do what no other book had been capable of: compel the nation to “confront the nuclear peril in which we all find ourselves.”³² Originally published in *The New Yorker* as three separate essays on the “Fate of the World,” in harrowing detail and riveting prose, Schell detailed the cataclysmic effects of a nuclear war.³³

Just as Schell’s work was gaining ample media attention, the nation underwent “Ground Zero Week.” Ground Zero Week was put together by Dr. Roger Molander, an expert on nuclear weapons and former employee in the National Security Council under the administrations of Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter. In 1980, Molander created the non-profit “Ground Zero Organization” which aimed to educate the public about the effects of nuclear warfare. Across the nation in the week of April 18 - 25, 1982, millions began coming to grips with the devastating consequences of a continued arms race. In 650 communities, millions listened to speeches, participated in teach-ins, held candle light vigils, viewed films or read Molander’s book, *Nuclear*

War: What's in it for You? (already in its third printing by this time). This new “nuclear consciousness” was developing across the nation among people and in places not typically associated with activist causes.

During Ground Zero Week, President Reagan declared his “heart and soul” were in “sympathy with the people that are talking about the horrors of nuclear war,” but objected to a freeze on weapons since only he had “all the facts necessary” to lessen the threat of nuclear war.³⁴ While Reagan made public pronouncements to play down the posturing of the administration, staff had begun collecting campaign information on the Freeze and were following events such as Ground Zero Week closely—a fact National Security Adviser William Clark wanted to keep secret from activists. Indeed, in an April 1982 memo, Clark advised that the freeze issue “may be the most important national security opportunity and challenge of [the Reagan] administration.”³⁵ Another briefing memo prepared for Elizabeth Dole, then director of the White House Office of Public Liaison, gave detailed background information on Roger Molander and the Ground Zero organization which shows us how seriously the administration took antinuclear activists. Lozano concluded that the Ground Zero group was “a force to be reckoned with,” with the “momentum of the antinuclear movement . . . clearly working to their advantage.”³⁶

Several other memos further demonstrate the close attention the Reagan administration paid to the movement, seeking to defeat and co-opt it as it grew in 1982. Likewise, the internal record reveals how White House allies, such as Phyllis Schlafly, who viewed the Freeze as “anti-American,”³⁷ approached the administration seeking to form an alliance to “lobby against the nuclear freeze propaganda.”³⁸ In a memo to White House Chief of Staff James Baker dated May 28, 1982, David Gergen reported on the creation of a “Public Affairs Group on Nuclear Issues”

chaired by himself and Bud McFarlane that would act as an “anti-freeze” group.³⁹ Baker’s assistant James Cicconi argued that if the administration did not adopt the “freeze language” they would “not succeed in co-opting any significant part of the freeze movement.” By adopting the “freeze” rhetoric, Cicconi concluded, the administration would “win the propaganda battle.”⁴⁰

A longer memo dated April 16, 1982 from Red Cavaney to White House Chief of Staff Michael Deaver warned of the possibilities of summer demonstrations, propelled by “the grassroots strength of the nuclear freeze issue.” In order to defeat the Freeze campaign, Cavaney proposed solutions that would minimize their influence since any efforts to “totally neutralize” the movement would prove “exceedingly difficult.” “In the final analysis,” noted Cavaney, “it may be best not to deride those who hold the freeze idea so closely, since their beliefs may be strongly rooted in the morals of the argument.”

Cavaney’s proposed strategy avoided a direct confrontation with the Freeze movement and, instead, sought to work within the media to “counter the public momentum.” This would be accomplished through the creation of a “Preparedness Working Group” which would allow the administration to “speak to the complex issues involved in the [nuclear freeze] debate.” By working through the media with allies in think tanks, the administration sought to counter a movement which Cavaney warned was “rapidly gaining momentum” and “likely to capture the public debate at the expense of virtually everything other than jobs.” With the success of works such as *The Fate of the Earth*, and what was projected to be a very successful Ground Zero Week, “the freeze issue,” Cavaney continued, would be propelled “into the forefront of conventional folklore,” thus, making it “the catalyst for a number of summertime demonstrations.” The issue was “further exacerbated by the moral implications involving the

potential destruction of mankind”—an issue that would help mobilize activist clergy and church attendees, lending to “the thoughtful moral weight . . . critical to the success of the grassroots effort.”⁴¹ Cavaney’s memo shows us the deep-seated fear of the growing antinuclear movement. The suggestions formed the strategic basis for the Reagan administration’s response to the challenge of the Freeze movement. They would not reject the idea that nuclear war was harmful or that the continued arms race was dangerous. Instead, they sought to convince the public that by accepting “peace through strength,” the danger of nuclear war would be lessened.

Cavaney’s memo to Deaver warning of summer protests proved prophetic as on June 12, 1982, nearly one million people amassed in New York City’s Central Park in favor of a freeze, culminating in a rally outside the United Nations second special session on disarmament: the largest protest rally in the nation’s history. Taking to the microphone to address the attendees, Randall Forsberg looked out at a massive crowd and announced, “We’ve done it. The nuclear freeze campaign has mobilized the biggest peacetime peace movement in United States history.” “Until the arms race stops,” Forsberg told the audience, “we will not go home and be quiet. We will go home and organize.”⁴² Organize the Freeze campaign did, particularly in the religious communities that Red Cavaney thought so crucial to the grassroots effort.

The Freeze movement and the Debate within Religious Communities

The momentum of the Freeze campaign and the antinuclear movement more broadly was clearly visible in religious communities during 1982. Within the various Christian churches, a tenacious debate erupted over the morality of the arms race and whether to endorse a “freeze,” fueling discussions throughout the early 1980s, rivaling that of the abortion issue. Religious service advertisements in the *New York Times* reflected this, with the Cathedral of Saint John the

Divine hosting speakers to discuss the question of “Disarmament—or Nuclear Holocaust?” and the Universalist advertising for a Sunday service entitled, “The Nuclear Freeze and You.”⁴³

As the political importance of Christian Evangelism grew in the early 1980s, so too did the issue of freezing the arms race. On one side of the split stood Jerry Falwell and the recently created “Moral Majority,” a group Reagan embraced during his 1980 campaign. Falwell’s Moral Majority focused on issues of morality (such as abortion and prayer in school), while espousing conservative political views. On the other side of the split, the Reverend Billy Graham and more liberal and moderate evangelicals disassociated themselves with the politics of Falwell and the Moral Majority, with Graham going so far as to accuse Falwell of “political sermonizing on ‘non-moral issues.’”⁴⁴ On the nuclear freeze issue, the two took diametrically opposing stands.

By the late 1970s, Reverend Graham had become a forceful opponent of the escalating arms race. Within a week of Reagan’s swearing-in ceremony, Reverend Graham was inducted to the National Religious Broadcasters’ Hall of Fame where he spoke to the audience about the dangers of the arms race. Despite his friendship and past spiritual influence over President Reagan, Graham stood on opposite sides with Reagan over the freeze debate. Graham spoke frequently on behalf of the Freeze campaign and, in June 1982, visited Moscow for a conference on disarmament—a trip that became highly controversial within the evangelical community.

During his visit to Moscow, Graham spoke to Soviet audiences about the need for disarmament, but also called for obedience to authority based on scripture. Due to the “determinedly anti-U.S. tone of the conference and the lauding of Soviet virtues,” many in the evangelical community came to believe Reverend Graham had been “duped.”⁴⁵ Several prominent evangelicals condemned Reverend Graham’s actions. As *The Wall Street Journal*

reported, “Reverend Edmund W. Robb, president of the largest evangelical group in the United Methodist Church,” thought it was a “mistake of Reverend Graham to go there and talk about obedience to civil authority.” The founding editor of *Christianity Today*, Reverend Carl Henry, suggested Graham had “made himself vulnerable to being manipulated” by speaking about obedience to authority in “precisely the place where there is a threat to religious liberty.”

As the *Journal* article points out, both Reverend Robb and Reverend Henry were active members of a newly founded organization, the Institute on Religion and Democracy.⁴⁶ The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) was founded in 1981 shortly after the inauguration of Ronald Reagan. The IRD opposed churches it suggested used funds to advance causes that were “anti-capitalist, pro-Marxist,” and those it believed “smacked of revolution.” To no surprise, then, the IRD was concerned and firmly against evangelicals involved in the Freeze movement. Thus, Graham’s positions on the arms race and his support for the Freeze campaign garnered him much criticism from more conservative elements within the evangelical community. But with other evangelicals following Graham’s lead, it was “certain,” the *Wall Street Journal* concluded, “that soon you will see evangelism fixed atop the banner of the nuclear freeze.”⁴⁷

Though Reverend Graham supported the Freeze campaign, as Lawrence Wittner writes, Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority “worked zealously to foster pro-nuclear sentiment.”⁴⁸ Throughout the 1980s, Falwell was a firm backer of the Reagan administration. In a full-page ad that ran across several American newspapers in March 1982, Falwell taunted supporters of the Freeze campaign as “freezeniks,” “ultra libs,” and, “unilateral disarmers” who were after a “President who wants to build up our military strength.” At the bottom of Falwell’s advertisement ran a three question “Peace Through Strength Ballot” which asked readers to cast a

vote on three leading questions regarding the arms race and trusting the Soviets.⁴⁹ In subsequent interviews, Falwell went so far as to suggest that the defeat of the Freeze campaign was a bigger issue than both abortion and prayer in school.⁵⁰

Despite his prominence in society and on television, within the evangelical community, Falwell was on the fringe of the freeze issue during the 1980s. As a Gallop Poll showed, Evangelical Christians favored a nuclear freeze “by better than 3 to 1.”⁵¹ With Falwell’s church losing nearly \$7million in contributions in 1982, his antifreeze message appeared to lack a resonance even within his own community.⁵² Outside of evangelicals, average readers saw right through his deceptive advertisement. A slew of readers in the *Los Angeles Times* wrote letters to the editor, with one letter denouncing Falwell as “one of the most dishonest plebiscites I have [ever] seen, slanting each question into a ‘no win’ position.”⁵³

While prominent evangelicals such as Graham and Falwell disagreed publically over the freeze, ordinary evangelical practitioners tried to make sense of their place in the arms race. In May 1983, over 2,000 evangelicals attended the “Conference on the Church & Peacemaking in the Nuclear Age,” in Pasadena, California, sponsored in part by President Reagan’s own home parish, the Bel Air Presbyterian Church. Designed as “educational in nature,” the conference featured a broad array of speakers, from military personnel, to professors of history, philosophy, and theology, as well as journalists and pastors from a variety of churches.⁵⁴ Like many other parishes across the nation, members of the Bel Air Presbyterian were divided over the freeze.

To counter evangelical support for the Freeze, Reagan addressed the issue head-on at the Annual National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in Orlando, Florida on March 8, 1983. In what is widely know as the “evil empire speech,” Reagan assaulted the Freeze campaign,

attempting to link support for it with Soviet ambitions. “I would agree to a freeze,” Reagan told the evangelicals, “if only we could freeze the Soviets' global desires.” However, freezing the arms race at current levels “would remove any incentive for the Soviets to negotiate seriously in Geneva” on arms control proposals. By linking support for the Freeze to the atheistic Soviet Union, and by enlisting evangelicals in their campaign against the Freeze, the “evil empire” speech to the NAE was just one of the ways in which the Reagan administration sought to counter the movement.⁵⁵

But evangelicals were not the only religious community to become strained over the arms race and the freeze initiative. Indeed, perhaps the most prominent aspect of the freeze debate in religious circles took place within the Catholic Church. During the 1980 election, Reagan edged out the traditionally Democratic Catholic vote from Carter forty-seven to forty-six percent—an eleven percent decline from President Carter’s electoral victory just four years earlier. Furthermore, in what the administration described as “ECBCs” (ethnic Catholic Blue Collars), Reagan picked up seventeen percent more than Gerald Ford did in 1976. As Jim Castelli concluded, “the normally democratic voters who voted for Reagan [were] more important to his administration’s success and any plans for re-election than [were] most other groups.” Thus, Catholic opposition to the arms build-up placed quite the conundrum on an administration led by a devout Christian and featuring several cabinet members who were devout Roman Catholics. If they could not secure the moral high ground on the issue of the arms race, they could lose the Catholic vote and with it, potentially re-election in 1984.

Recognizing the dilemma, the administration attempted to head off the issue early on. In an April 1982 memo to White House Chief of Staff James Baker, Thomas Patrick Melady, a

prominent Catholic academic serving in the Education Department, suggested the Reagan administration should “seize the peace initiative in Catholic Circles.” The “President’s opponents in the Catholic community,” Melady suggested, were “orchestrating a campaign” which would pit the Reagan administration against “the Pope, the Vatican, and the Catholic Church on the issue of nuclear force.” Melady called on the administration to “begin now not only to defuse this sensitive issue, but to seize the initiative to prove that our position is the moral one for a responsible major power in an imperfect world, where aggressive communist-atheistic forces are out to destroy Judeo Christian values.”⁵⁶

Just as he did with the National Association of Evangelicals, President Reagan spoke in front of Catholics to dissuade them from accepting the idea of a “freeze.” In August 1982, in an address to Roman Catholics in Hartford, Connecticut, Reagan attempted to “seize the peace initiative,” telling his Catholic audience that they took “second place to none in the quest for peace through arms control and agreements,” whereas the ideas put forward by the Freeze movement were “obsolete” and “sterile.” While Reagan received wide applause for his remarks about anti-abortion legislation, tax exemption for parents with children in private schools, a constitutional amendment for prayer in school, and a tightening of obscenity laws, the *New York Times* reported that the president received only “mild applause” for support for “the morality of maintaining our strategic nuclear deterrence.” While outside the Hartford Civic Center antinuclear voices resonated, inside, President Reagan fared no better when a protester shouted in the middle of his speech, “No more nuclear weapons! Jobs for the poor!”

Inside the Catholic Church, a “revolution” was underway with the potential to create “an explosion between church and state” making issues such as abortion, school aid, and the tax-

exempt status of churches look like “a child’s sparkler on the Fourth of July.”⁵⁷ Hot-button issues such as abortion were blending with those of poverty and disarmament to form a broad meaning of pro-life from “womb to tomb” as Archbishop Joseph Bernardin would call it. The idea was not without controversy. Prominent Catholic magazines, such as the *National Catholic Register* objected to placing the freeze question above the abortion debate. With the Senate narrowly defeating an anti-abortion measure in 1982, the *National Catholic Register* lamented the temptation for many to give up on the abortion question, writing hopelessly, ““We gave it a good try, but we failed.””⁵⁸

The *National Catholic Register’s* editorial came as a response to the controversial decision of the Catholic Bishops to endorse a “nuclear freeze.” In November of 1982, at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C., 276 Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church debated the second draft of a pastoral letter on the arms race, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*. Though addressed to American Catholics, the letter was intended to contribute to the “wider public debate . . . on the dangers and dilemmas of the nuclear age.” The letter forthrightly denounced the arms race as the “greatest curse on the human race . . . a danger, an act of aggression against the poor, and a folly which does not provide the security it promises.” The letter went on to make many challenges against the Reagan administration, calling for “a clear public resistance to the rhetoric of ‘winnable’ nuclear wars,” and repudiating “unrealistic expectations of ‘surviving nuclear exchanges,’” as well as the “strategies of ‘protracted nuclear war.’” The bishops questioned the premises of mutual assured destruction as not adequate for “a long-term basis for peace,” explaining that nuclear deterrence “should be used as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament.”

However, perhaps in anticipation of critics, the letter went on to specifically condemn abortion and challenge peace activists who did not stand with the church on the issue to reconsider it.⁵⁹

The Reagan administration did not sit idly by as the bishops made headlines, but attempted to appeal directly to the Vatican. Ambassador at large Vernon Walters—a devout Catholic himself—entered the Holy City unannounced seeking an audience with the pope. While the exact nature of Walters visit is disputed, it was suggested at the time by conservative columnists Robert Novak and Rowland Evans that the “real purpose” of Walters visit with the pope was to stem the bishops “nuclear heresy.” Novak and Evans reported that many American Catholic laymen were concerned that the antinuclear activism of the bishops had gone too far for even the pope to stamp out. However, Novak and Evans countered, the Reagan administration was more optimistic on this, thus, explaining Walters’ mission.

While it was one thing for liberal bishops such as Joseph Bernardin to be openly against the Reagan administration’s Cold War policies, the concern in the Reagan administration was that the antinuclear message the U.S. Catholic hierarchy voiced would resonate with the lay Catholics. But rather than attack the bishops directly, the administration remained cordial at all times. Furthermore, they claimed the Bishops letter said nothing they did not agree with—a tactic they used repeatedly to fend off criticism from the Catholic Church. As David Cortright notes, “If the administration could not persuade the bishops to change their views, White House officials hoped they could at least obfuscate the issue by claiming that the letter endorsed administration policy.”⁶⁰

Outside of the Reagan White House, in the Catholic community at large, not everyone was accepting of the bishops stance. James Hitchcock, a contributing editor of *The National*

Catholic Register, reminded the bishops, “nobody has been killed in nuclear war since 1945; abortions are taking place every minute.”⁶¹ Prominent Catholic journalist and philosopher Michael Novak scathingly critiqued what he deemed “war bishops.” In addition to editorials, Novak had also become a board member for the American Catholic Committee—a group formed to oppose the bishops on issues related to economics, social and foreign policy questions. Also on the board included a number of other prominent conservative Catholics with ties to the Reagan administration such as Philip Lawler, a member of the American Enterprise Institute, who did not have a formal role in the Reagan White House, but was a reliable ally. The group held a counter conference in October 1982 in Washington, D.C., taking aim at the nuclear freeze issue and the bishops’ role. The organizers insisted America needed a strong nuclear arsenal to deter aggression and deplored the “anti-Americanism of the Catholic left.”⁶²

An anonymous but politically savvy letter floated about the administration that best captured the dilemmas the bishops were causing the Reagan administration. Dated December 12, 1982, the memo expressed extreme concern over the bishops dragging out the debate over the pastoral in order to “keep the nuclear freeze issue and their opposition to President Reagan on page one and thereby influence the Catholic community on the freeze.” In order to counter the “public relations goldmine” the memo suggested one solution: [sic] “THE ABORTION ISSUE.” The bishops had a “house divided” over the “nuclear freeze versus the pro-life issue,” and, thus, by pushing the abortion issue, the administration could take the offensive away from the bishops. The memo painted a stark choice for the Reagan administration: “use the president’s strong pro-life stand to counter [the bishops on the freeze issue], or face deeper and deeper loses [sic] in the Catholic vote in ‘84.” During the 1982 midterm elections, the Republican party had already lost

seven percent of the Catholic vote, and with a final draft of the pastoral slated for 1983, the issue could continue to plague Reagan and ignite Catholic opposition to him based on the freeze issue.⁶³

The Freeze movement in Popular Culture

As the Freeze campaign expanded in religious communities, so too did it expand to the cultural realms, fusing both the political and popular culture of the United States, with the effects of the movement lingering throughout the decade. From music, to movies, to the musicians and actors themselves, the ideas spurred on by the Freeze movement were everywhere in the popular culture of the early 1980s. Indeed, even viewers of *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood* could not escape the nuclear question in 1983, when a week long episode entitled "Conflict" featured one character suspected of making bomb parts, causing another to also build up his stock pile of bomb parts.⁶⁴

Throughout the 1980s in the anti-authority underground punk rock scene, denouncing Reagan as a crazed cowboy leading the world toward nuclear war was a common lyrical theme. Bands such as the Dead Kennedys, Reagan Youth, and TSOL frequently denounced Reagan and nuclear war in their lyrics. Outside of the glitz and glam of 1980s hair metal, nuclear war was a common subject in the lyrics of bands such as Metallica, Nuclear Assault, and Anthrax. Likewise, album covers also reflected a world destroyed by nuclear war. Megadeth's 1986 *Peace Sells . . . But Who's Buying?* album cover featured jets racing by in a clouded crimson red sky, as Vic Rattlehead (the band's skeleton mascot) stood beside a "For Sale" sign outside the remains of a bombed-out United Nations.

While underground punk and metal acts found Reagan and nuclear war to be apt lyrical themes, so too did more mainstream acts. The ska band Fishbone had their first hit in 1985 with “Party at Ground Zero,” a song about having a party while the world succumbs to a nuclear war. The video was later spoofed by Weird Al Yankovic whose “Christmas at Ground Zero” mixed Christmas images with footage of nuclear tests and duck and cover drills. A popular song by the band Nena, “99 Red Balloons,” described balloons mistaken as an incoming attack, leading to all out nuclear war. One of the most memorable music videos of the 1980s, Genesis’s “Land of Confusion” began with puppets of Ronald and Nancy Reagan going to bed at 5:30 in the afternoon. By the end of the video, Reagan has awoken from his nightmare in a pool of sweat, and mistakenly hits the button marked “nuke” rather than “nurse.” From Sting’s “The Russians” to reggae artist Peter Tosh’s “No Nuclear War,” a diverse array of artists wrote songs evoking the fear of nuclear war and the dangers of the continued arms race.⁶⁵

The Freeze movement and the Cold War were reflected not just in popular music but in the movie industry as well, with several films during the 1980s evoking images and fear of a nuclear holocaust. In *WarGames*, Matthew Broderick played a young computer whiz who taps into a military computer to play a game of “Thermonuclear Warfare.” In the fourth installment of the *Superman* franchise, the United States and the Soviet Union are on the brink of nuclear war, as Superman, speaking to the United Nations, promises to rid the world of nuclear weapons. While Cold War themes ran throughout popular films in the 1980s, the movie that evoked the most response and internal discussion from the Reagan White House was not a box office hit (or bust), but the made-for-TV film, *The Day After*, which depicted the grim results of a nuclear war in Lawrence, Kansas—the American heartland. Premiering November 20, 1983 on ABC, it

received nearly 100 million viewers, and was one of the top rated television shows in the nation's history. While the film made a lasting impression on audiences, the behind-the-scenes battle shows us how the administration and its allies sought to control the film's message. The project was controversial from the start, costing over \$7,000,000 to produce and leaving cast members with "nukemares." As Lawrence Wittner notes, "enraged American hawks demonstrated outside ABC affiliates," while commercial advertisers dropped out. Pentagon officials who had originally planned to cooperate with ABC, reneged after reading the script. In the final editing phase, bowing to external pressure, ABC cut the film short, leaving out a scene in which a Pershing II missile heading to Europe becomes the catalyst for the nuclear attack.⁶⁶

The Reagan administration took particular interest in the film. In an advanced screening, President Reagan described it in his diary as "powerfully done" and "very effective" leaving him "greatly depressed."⁶⁷ Elsewhere in the administration, a staff memo circulated "ideas for public affairs strategy" concerning *The Day After*, listing twenty-six ways in which the administration could respond to the film. While the administration's ideas to counter the film were wide and varied, they did not seek to counter the violent depiction of nuclear war the film entailed or to dismiss fears, but, once again, emphasized their arms control initiatives as the best way of preventing such a tragedy. In a memo from David Gergen to Ronald Reagan, Gergen suggested the question be framed as "How do we prevent a nuclear holocaust?" to which there could only be one correct answer: "Support [Reagan's] policies of deterrence and arms reduction." The Reagan administration blanketed the radio and TV media, and provided six op-ed pieces in various papers. After the film aired, the administration used twenty volunteer telephone operators to take calls and answer questions from the public, while a special rotary hot-line was set up

specifically for “Mid-level specialists at the Department of Defense to answer requests from local radio and TV talk shows.”⁶⁸ The discussion following the film would feature Secretary of State George Shultz in a one-on-one interview where Shultz would, as President Reagan wrote in his diary, “take it over and say it shows why we must keep on doing what we’re doing.”⁶⁹

The Reagan administration worked closely with conservative allies in the media to frame the discussion surrounding *The Day After*, including notables such as Pat Buchanan and William Safire among others. “Outside groups” held numerous activities in relation to the film in the days following *The Day After*. Gergen’s memo described how “Citizens for America,” a defense lobbyist organization, “sent out packets of talking points and position papers in support of the Administration’s arms control efforts and deterrence strategy to their chairman in each congressional district where 110 press conferences were held” the morning after the film aired. Other lobbyist groups, such as High Frontier and the American Security Council (ASC), sought to fight back against the film, with High Frontier offering a counter film that would appear on “at least 40 TV stations” and ASC members appearing on talk shows throughout the country to support the administration’s policies. David Gergen praised the “first rate job” of the administration and its allies in fighting back during the “renewed debate over nuclear arms.”⁷⁰

The Nuclear Freeze on the Political Stage

Both on the national level and state level, from 1982 through 1984, the Freeze movement gained political currency—a fact not lost on the Reagan administration. In a memo to Chief of Staff James Baker, Elizabeth Dole noted that the Freeze campaign was “rapidly growing among the American public” and had become “of particular interest to some of our major constituent groups.” “[B]ecause of the domestic political implications of the issue,” Dole wrote to Baker, “it

seems to me that the various White House liaison and appropriate policy offices should be involved.”⁷¹ The fight over how to best prevent a nuclear holocaust blended into the political culture from 1982 to 1984. It was in this brief stretch of time where the Freeze campaign had both its greatest successes and its most harrowing defeats.

In the fall of 1982, nine states held referendums for a nuclear freeze. The most prominent battle, mixing both political and popular culture, was in California over proposition 12 (a California state initiative that called on the United States and Soviet Union to bilaterally freeze production and deployment of nuclear weapons). As journalist Paul Loeb explains, “Because [California] was the nation’s largest state, Reagan’s home and known—for good or for ill—as a bellwether of shifts in national sentiment, Freeze supporters believed the outcome would echo across the country.”⁷² The campaign for California Proposition 12 was diverse and can be used as a prism to view the Freeze movement’s successes and failures.

The campaign for a statewide nuclear freeze initiative began at the grassroots level. In December 1980, inspired by an article in *The Nation* describing the Massachusetts freeze referendums, Jo and Nick Seidita began organizing within the Unitarian Universalist Society, and set out on campaign which included mailings, phone banking, and visits to organizations and churches seeking endorsements. By August 1981, Paul Loeb recounts, eighty-four groups were involved in what became “Californians for a Nuclear Weapons Freeze.”⁷³ Across the state, to gain the required signatures to put the freeze question on the ballot supporters held “petition parties,” sold the “Freeze Bar” popsicle for a dollar on state beaches, and, used more traditional methods such as gathering signatures outside of public venues. With over 750,000 names collected, the question of a freeze would be put to voters in California, November 1982.⁷⁴

As diverse as the national Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign was, so too was California's coalition. As *Nuclear Times*, a monthly news magazine dedicated to the antinuclear movement, noted, supporters of the initiative ranged from feminists to Roman Catholic bishops, joining "black ministers with corporate lawyers, and Berkeley radicals with both of Ronald Reagan's daughters." Hollywood, too played a part. In "First Steps," a commercial blending the political and popular culture, actors Jack Lemmon and Paul Newman played a game of poker. As Paul Loeb describes the commercial, the two argue over their poker hands and begin "splitting off matches from stockpiles in their hands, holding them out to test and threaten," paying no attention to the gasoline on the floor. With obvious analogies to nuclear stockpiles, Paul Newman shouted "I got forty-four, how many you got?" "Thirty-six," Lemmon answered. The two struck matches simultaneously filling the screen with flames. Outside of Hollywood, a variety of luminaries from the scientific community expressed support, as well as politicians such as California Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.⁷⁵

Despite a wide coalition in support, a strong coalition campaigned against it. Labor organizations, such as the AFL-CIO, declined to endorse the campaign, arguing that SALT II needed to be ratified before a freeze could be instituted. Whereas Governor Brown supported a freeze, his Republican opponents, Congressman Barry Goldwater, Jr. and San Diego Mayor Pete Wilson, both stood against the measure.⁷⁶ Charlton Heston chided fellow actor Paul Newman, calling him a "good man and a good actor," but someone who needed to "check the facts first," regarding the freeze.⁷⁷ Heston also appeared in a "No on 12" TV advertisement "charging that 'a freeze wouldn't be honored by the Soviet Union, couldn't be verified, (would) hurt our deterrent ability and would encourage Soviet aggression.'"⁷⁸

The California Campaign for a Nuclear Freeze shows the dilemmas the movement faced as it sought to expand its message. While the power of Hollywood may have helped the movement reach a wider audience, it left the grassroots activists resentful. While the actors, writers, and designers donated their services to the commercials, the California Nuclear Freeze campaign still spent approximately \$2,000,000 on advertisements in favor of Proposition 12. As one activist explained to Paul Loeb, by spending such amounts of money on advertisements, the campaign failed to nurture “the kind of grass-roots networks that can generate 100 letters at a moment’s notice, or generate twenty people to sit in at a congressman’s office.”⁷⁹

Further problems were encountered by the top down nature imposed on the campaign by financier Harold Willens who used his money and influence to bankroll the California Freeze campaign. As *Nuclear Times* noted in 1982, “Willens mode politics often clashed with the ideas and style of local activists.” Willens feared the California Nuclear Freeze campaign would be captive to “a stupid, silly fringe group whose efforts could be contained in a telephone booth.” Seeking to operate the campaign like a business, Willens made decisions for the campaign in Los Angeles, then expected everyone else to fall in line—a concept that caused much consternation among Northern Californian activists.

The battle for a freeze referendum was not just limited to California. Across the nation, the administration was deeply involved in trying to prevent nine state referendums in support of the Freeze from passing. In Wisconsin, the Reagan administration sought to pressure the governor and the other major candidates on the issue with Elizabeth Dole creating a “Wisconsin Anti Freeze Effort.” The administration sought to counter the campaign by placing phone calls and writing letters to the governor, sending high level speakers to campaign against the idea, and

working within the media by placing op-eds and appearing on radio and television programs. In every state, the administration worked closely with an “anti Freeze coalition” to undermine the Freeze momentum.⁸⁰

Despite the problems the Freeze campaign encountered, both internally and from the Reagan administration, the movement succeeded in passing Proposition 12 in California, securing an endorsement from the *Los Angeles Times*.⁸¹ Nationally, with more than one-third of the nation’s electorate voting on the freeze question, the state referendums became “the closet this nation [had] ever come to a national referendum on the nuclear arms race.”⁸² The referendums passed in eight of nine states, with Arizona the lone dissenter. While an issue like handgun control (Proposition 15) in California was soundly defeated, and Republican Pete Wilson would win the Senate seat, Proposition 12 won by a four percent margin, fifty-two to forty-eight percent, showing how the issue could cross party lines.

At the national level, too, the Freeze campaign forged alliances with unlikely supporters, particularly in the Congress. But the fight in the Congress for a “nuclear freeze” shows one of the major flaws in the success of the movement. While Congressmen such as Edward J. Markey and Mark Hatfield were probably sincere in their support for the Freeze movement, when it came to the actual legislation, many of their colleagues shared the idea of the freeze, but not the commitment. This was apparent in the legislation from the outset which, David Cortright notes, “fell far short” of grassroots activists expectations. The final legislation voted on was non-binding, calling “not for an immediate halt to the arms race,” but for the United States and Soviet Union to decide for themselves “‘when and how’ to call for an immediate freeze.”⁸³ While this resolution passed in the House May 5, 1983, it was rejected by Senate in November 1983. The

week following the House's passage of the Freeze resolution, Congress authorized funding for the MX missile, proving their allegiance to the freeze concept more rhetorical than meaningful.⁸⁴

While the Freeze suffered politically from a Congress that offered only tepid support for their cause, during the debate in the House over the Freeze resolution in March 1983, President Reagan announced a new initiative that took even Secretary of State George Shultz by surprise. The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), theoretically, would act as a shield over the United States, stopping an incoming nuclear assault. Though the idea of shield stopping an incoming attack would resonate with Reagan's own antinuclear beliefs, many of the administration's allies viewed this as a way of stopping the momentum of the Freeze. Edward Teller wrote to President Reagan in July 1982 about using the technology not just to stop nuclear weapons, but also as "a uniquely effective reply to those advocating the dangerous inferiority implied by a 'nuclear freeze.'"⁸⁵ In *Conservative Digest*, Gregory Fossedal of the Heritage Foundation wrote of a "secret weapon" under development that would "undercut the freeze crusade," and make arms control negotiations "irrelevant" since "it wouldn't matter what the Soviet Union did with its arms." This "High Frontier" program was a satellite-based anti-missile system, which, Fossedal boasted, "would turn the grass-roots nuclear freeze movement inside out."⁸⁶ Thus, the administration and its allies envisioned SDI as more than just another tool in the Cold War military arsenal—it was, as Freeze activist Pam Solo suggested, the administration's way of "[co-opting] the movement's moral and political ground."⁸⁷

Concluding Thoughts (or why the Freeze movement was not a failure)

E.P. Thompson once remarked that "most social movements [only] have a life span of about six years. If they do not make an impact within this 'window of opportunity,' they will

have little effect on the larger political structures they hope to transform.”⁸⁸ The Freeze movement rose to national prominence in such a short time due to the Reagan administration’s escalation of the arms race. As the movement moved away from the grassroots and into the political realm, it began to collapse in on itself. Despite critiques of SDI as “Star Wars,” the creation of a program which, rhetorically at least, insisted it would eliminate nuclear weapons, undermined the cause of the Freeze movement. During the 1984 election, “Freeze Voter ‘84,” the political lobbying arm of the Freeze campaign, failed to defeat Ronald Reagan. In part, this failure was linked to the Freeze’s alignment with a Democratic Party that was only lukewarm about the proposal. While activists supported Jessie Jackson during the primaries, pragmatists took the middle of the road with Walter Mondale who failed to make arms control a defining issue of the 1984 election.⁸⁹ In trying to appeal to everyone and in linking their future with politicians who could just as easily say they supported the freeze idea, while voting for the MX missile the following week, the Freeze movement lost its message.

While the Freeze movement may not have defeated Reagan in 1984, their ideas did not die. In his 1985 inauguration speech, President Reagan proclaimed that the United States did not just seek to “reduce” the numbers of nuclear weapons in the world, but aimed for “the total elimination . . . of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth.” This was a stunning reversal from a man who once saw “no useful purpose” in renouncing the first use of nuclear weapons and believed the difference between an ICBM nuclear warhead and an SLBM was that the latter could be recalled.⁹⁰ Indeed, the man who headed an administration that openly talked about fighting and winning nuclear war was now closer to the ideas of Roger Molander and Helen Caldicott than T.K. Jones or Richard Perle. What caused this so-called, “Reagan reversal”?

While recent historiography has neglected the Freeze campaign, favoring Reagan's own antinuclear views as the basis for policy decisions, this neglects Reagan's actual role in nuclear policy and the broader effect of the Freeze movement. As Lou Cannon remarks, "On . . . nuclear diplomacy, Reagan was content to be a performer rather than a policymaker," relying on neo-conservatives who detested arms control as much as Communism.⁹¹ The antinuclear momentum forced an administration that dragged its feet on arms control agreements to rethink their positions or face a continued domestic backlash with possible electoral repercussions.

While SDI may have been the shot from which the Freeze campaign could not recover, globally, the Soviet Union did the Freeze no favors when in September 1983 they shot down Korean Airliner 007 after it veered off course, leading to further distrust of the Soviets. With the KAL 007 incident and the administration's drumbeat that a freeze would maintain a "balance of terror," popular sentiment for a freeze began to wane. With SDI, the Reagan administration adopted the rhetoric of preventing nuclear war, leaving behind the ideas of fighting and winning limited nuclear conflicts. By 1984, the tone of Reagan's speeches had notably changed. Gone was the language of leaving the "evil empire" in the "ash heap of history," replaced instead with language of "compromise" and a poignant tale of Ivan and Anya sharing a room with Jim and Sally. With no language barrier between them, Reagan questioned whether the two couples would "debate the differences between their governments? Or would they find themselves comparing notes about their children and what they did for a living?" Bewildered by the new Reagan, one staff member wondered, "Who wrote this shit?"⁹² As Reagan and Gorbachev later leisurely strolled together and engaged the issue of arms control seriously, the Freeze would

“melt away,”⁹³ as Francis FitzGerald remarks, merging with SANE and expanding their advocacy to include a wide array of issues, not just limited to arms control or a “freeze.”

Though the Freeze campaign lost politically in 1984, when measured by its sway across society and by the lengths the administration sought to contain the idea and the movement, the Freeze campaign appears as far from a mirage, and more than just another social movement. It was, as Roger Molander remarked, a “revolution,”⁹⁴ a political phenomenon that affected all aspects of society. It was, indeed, “a force to be reckoned with.”

Notes

1. See Federation of American Scientists, *One World or None: A Report to the Public on the Full Meaning of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: The Free Press, [1945] 2007). For additional background on the earliest antinuclear activists, see Lawrence S. Wittner, *Struggle Against the Bomb: Volume 1, One World or None, A History of the Nuclear Disarmament Movement Through 1953* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); and Lawrence S. Wittner, *Struggle Against the Bomb: Volume 2: Resisting the Bomb, A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

2. Thomas Alan Schwartz, “‘Henry, . . . Winning an Election Is Terribly Important’: Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 33, Number 2, April 2009, 173.

3. Works that support an effective Freeze movement include David Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent: The Nuclear Freeze in American Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990); David Cortright, *Peace Works: The Citizen’s Role in Ending the Cold War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); and Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle Against The Bomb, Vol. 3: Towards Nuclear Abolition: A History of the Nuclear Disarmament Movement 1971 - Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Works arguing against the effectiveness of the Freeze movement include J. Michael Hogan, *The Nuclear Freeze Campaign: Rhetoric and Foreign Policy in the Telepolitical Age* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994) and Christian Peterson, *Ronald Reagan and Antinuclear Movements in the United States and Western Europe, 1981 - 1987* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellin Press, 2003). This work fits into the former category.

4. Beth Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1997); Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005); Martin Anderson and Annelise Anderson, *Reagan's Secret War: The Untold Story of His Fight to Save the World from Nuclear Disaster*

(New York: Crown Publishers, 2009); Steven F. Haywood, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution, 1980 - 1989* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009).

5. Robert M. Gates, *From The Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 147.

6. On the doomsday clock moving forward in 1980, see Bernard T. Feld, "The hands move close to midnight," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January 1980, 1 - 3. The hands moved in 1968 in "sad recognition" of the state international affairs had taken since 1962: France and China becoming nuclear powers, tensions between India and Pakistan, and the United States escalation of the war in Vietnam. See, Eugene Rabinowitch, "New Year's Thoughts, 1968," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Volume XXIV, Number 1, January 1968, 2 - 4.

7. John Stoessinger, *Nations at Dawn: China, Russia and America*, Sixth Edition (New York: McGraw Hill, [1971] 1994), 252 - 253.

8. Presidential Directive 59, "Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy." <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pd/pd59.pdf> accessed April 16, 2009.

9. Anthony Austin, "Soviet Calls the U.S. Strategy Shift On Nuclear War an 'Ominous' Sign," *New York Times*, August 8, 1980.

10. Frances McCrea and Gerald Markle, *Minutes to Midnight: Nuclear Weapons Protest in America* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1989), 99 - 100. Douglas C. Waller, *Congress and the Nuclear Freeze: An Inside Look at the Politics of a Mass Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 21 - 23.

11. Randall Forsberg, "Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race—Proposal for a Mutual U.S.-Soviet Nuclear-Weapon Freeze," reprinted in Donna Gregory, ed., *The Nuclear Predicament: A Sourcebook* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 259 - 265.

12. McCrea/Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 100.

13. Ibid., 101 - 102.

14. Cortright, *Peace Works*, 248.

15. "The President's News Conference, January 29, 1981," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12981b.htm> (Accessed 29, May 2009)

16. Alexander Haig quoted in Congressional Quarterly Inc., *U.S. Foreign Policy: The Reagan Imprint* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1986), 7.

17. George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 4 - 5.

18. See, for example, Philip Lawler of the Heritage Foundation who suggested that a nuclear war could remain limited to only one or two strikes. Philip Lawler, *The Bishops and the Bomb: The Morality of Nuclear Deterrence* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1982), 12 - 15. The key work on the Reagan administration's rhetoric of fighting and winning nuclear wars, however, remains Robert Scheer, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush, and Nuclear War* (New York: Random House, 1982).
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21. McCrea/Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 95.
22. Union of Concerned Scientists, *Beyond the Freeze: The Road to Nuclear Sanity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), viii - ix.
23. "Thinking About the Unthinkable," *Time*, March 29, 1982.
24. John Newhouse, *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 310.
25. Fred Kaplan, "The Neutron Bomb: What it is, the way it works," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, October 1981, Volume 37, Number 8, 6 - 7. Emphasis in original.
26. Leslie H. Gelb, "Reagan Orders Production of 2 Types of Neutron Arms for Stockpiling in the U.S.," *New York Times*, August 9, 1981.
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31. John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 121 - 122.

32. Kai Erickson, "A Horror Beyond Comprehension [Review of Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*]," *New York Times*, April 11, 1982, BR3.
33. Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982), 22 - 23.
34. "Reagan Sympathetic to Nuclear Demonstrators," *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1982, B11.
35. Memo William Clark to Edwin Meese III, James A. Baker III, Michael Deaver, "Nuclear [Freeze] (1 of 8)," Box 4 oa1529, David Gergen Files, RRPL.
36. Memo, Diana Lozano to Elizabeth H. Dole, "Nuclear Freeze (January - June) (1982) [2 of 3]," Series I Subject Files 1981-1983 Box 26 oa6390, Elizabeth H. Dole Files, RRPL.
37. Phyllis Schlafly, "Six Fatal Fallacies of the Nuclear Freezers," *Human Events*, June 25, 1983, 17.
38. Memo to Red Cavaney, "Nuclear Freeze (January - June) (1982) [2 of 3]," Series I Subject Files 1981-1983 Box 26 oa6390, Elizabeth H. Dole Files, RRPL. It is not clear on this memo who sent this to Red Cavaney; however, Cavaney's handwriting on the bottom reveals that the administration wanted to take advantage of this relationship "asap" concluding, "we should do something here."
39. Memo Bill Triplett to Red Cavaney, "Nuclear Freeze (1)," Series I Box 1 oa7438, William K. Triplett Files, RRPL.
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