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International Affairs in Ronald Reagan's 1980 Presidential Campaign

In general opinion, international affairs do not play a decisive role in shaping Americans' attitudes in presidential elections. However, extensive documentation on the campaign activities of Republican candidate Ronald Reagan against Democrat Jimmy Carter allows for an examination of the validity of this claim. Considering Reagan's inclusion of key issues in his campaign platform — such as the restoration of the United States' political and military potential, criticism of Carter's policies (symbolized by the SALT II treaty, which enabled Soviet rearmament) and the irrational adherence to détente — it becomes evident that the Republican candidate addressed concerns that resonated with the electorate. Through Reagan's speeches, Americans increasingly realized that the Soviet Union had exploited détente to expand its military capabilities and pursue aggressive actions in Africa, in cooperation with Cuba, ultimately leading to the invasion of Afghanistan. These developments were increasingly perceived as a consequence of Carter's weakness as President. Such sentiments were particularly widespread following the hostage crisis in Tehran, where Islamic radicals seized the US Embassy and took 53 Americans hostage. As a result, voters' attention to international affairs increased more than in previous elections, leading to greater support for strengthening the United States' global position. Naturally, economic conditions in the US and citizens' personal hardships remained crucial factors, as many Americans faced declining living standards. However, these were not the sole determinants of electoral preferences. This election was, to some extent, different from previous ones, with the majority

of voters favoring a candidate who projected the dynamism necessary for improving their situation and reinforcing the US role in global affairs. For many, that candidate was Ronald Reagan, who further bolstered his chances of victory through his exceptional ability to communicate with the electorate, earning him the title "The Great Communicator".

Keywords: War, SALT II, détente, Carter, Reagan, arms race, Soviet Union, USSR

Electoral Struggle I – Summer 1980

The process of formulating a candidate's political program is highly complex, involving a vast group of party leadership, electoral behavior researchers and the candidate himself. They all share a common goal — victory in the presidential election, not to mention other elections taking place on the same day. A crucial part of this process is the introduction of the candidate's program to the public, primarily through his public appearances.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan emerged as the Republican Party's candidate, set to challenge the incumbent President, Jimmy Carter, who was concluding his first term (Carter, 564–569; Kaufman, 197–208; White, 196–226; Mania, *Détente…*, Part II). Reagan's stance as a conservative had already been defined at the outset of his political career when he expressed his ambitions as a local politician in California. This led some Republicans to recognize his potential for a role at the federal level (Kengor, *Ronald…*, 144–149; Musiewicz (ed.), *Ronald…*, 7–10; Edel, 1–20; Dugger, 1–24; Arquilla, 3–29; Bankowicz, 15–29). Notably, Reagan had previously been aligned with the Democratic Party, supporting the New Deal and the policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. However, his political stance shifted, and by 1966, prominent Republicans encouraged him to run for governor. In his campaign, he demonstrated himself to be a skilled orator who evoked public sympathy in his battle against the Democratic incumbent, Edmund Brown (Greenstein, 148–149; Hayward, 6–8). This was a key phase in shaping his image as the "Great Communicator" (Stuckey, 3–15). Observers frequently noted Reagan's ability to articulate his beliefs in a simple yet persuasive manner, often using symbolic slogans and a warm, engaging tone that enhanced his credibility. Even then, the idea of reducing taxes and limiting government intervention in the economy became central to his platform. Over time, this was supplemented by a commitment to military expansion as a countermeasure against Soviet aggression. He won the gubernatorial

election and served in Sacramento for eight years. However, by 1976, he openly expressed his presidential ambitions, ultimately securing the GOP nomination in 1980.

The campaign period featured significant statements from both candidates. The starting point was President Carter's *State of the Union Address* delivered to Congress on January 23, 1980.[1] Reagan promptly responded, making criticism of the incumbent administration the central theme of his campaign (FRUS, 1977–1980, Vol. I, Doc. 138). He harshly assessed Carter's handling of the Iranian and Afghan crises, calling them "the most serious threat to peace since the Second World War". In Reagan's — though not entirely accurate — opinion, Carter had accepted the Soviet presence in Afghanistan despite claiming that the US would take decisive action if the USSR made moves in the Persian Gulf region. Reagan questioned what steps Carter would take to enforce this policy given his commitment to unilateral compliance with the SALT I and SALT II agreements, the latter signed in Vienna on June 18, 1979 (Garthoff, 1005–1008).

On January 25, 1980, at a press conference during the Southern Republican Leadership Conference in New Orleans, Reagan strongly demanded that Carter declare the US would no longer adhere to SALT II and would not unilaterally extend SALT I unless the USSR withdrew from Afghanistan (FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Footnote 4 to Doc. 4). That same day, Reagan received his first electoral strategy memorandum from Patrick Caddell, a member of his campaign team, which unequivocally stated: "… the American people do not want Jimmy Carter as their President … by and large the American people do not like Jimmy Carter" (White, 379).

Reagan's campaign strategy relied on "… a simple, understandable, comprehensive and unusually consistent political philosophy presented with the help of often dazzling rhetoric to mobilize support for his priorities" (Melanson, 129). In domestic policy, he referenced Nixon's pre-Watergate ideas, emphasizing morality, heritage and national unity. Unlike Carter, who saw a moral crisis, Reagan argued that American society was vibrant and filled with good ideas. His rhetoric reflected four key themes: "… anti-government nationalism, communitarian individualism, free-market radicalism and Wilsonian internationalism" (Melanson, 132).

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[1] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Vol. I: Foundations of Foreign Policy*. Edited by Kristin L. Ahlberg, with Kathleen B. Rasmussen as general editor. U.S. Department of State, Washington: USGPO, 2022. Document 4: *Statement by Ronald Reagan, January 24, 1980, Florence, South Carolina.* Hereafter cited as *FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I*, with specific document references.

The most significant document outlining Reagan's stance at the start of the campaign was his speech on February 15, 1980, delivered at the 64th Annual Worcester County Lincoln Day Dinner (FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 5). This speech clearly delineated his worldview and policy proposals. Reagan launched a direct attack on Carter, accusing him of jeopardizing American security and lacking credibility by sending mixed signals to the USSR, which he argued posed a global threat. He asserted that the US needed to reverse this trend, restore balance in relations with the USSR and develop a grand strategy for the 1980s.

The formation of this strategy had already begun. With the support of his advisors, Reagan identified key American priorities, foremost among them the restoration of military strength and a policy built on the convictions of the American people. In military matters, he pledged to strengthen deterrence capabilities based on nuclear weapons, enhance naval power and increase the US military presence in regions threatened by Soviet expansion or critical to US security. He specifically highlighted the Persian Gulf, emphasizing the need for collaboration with allies. He also stressed the importance of leveraging scientific advancements for national defense and global peace. Reagan called for rebuilding the intelligence community, which he claimed had been dismantled by the Carter administration. He particularly emphasized repealing Carter's mandate that required the CIA to report all covert operations to congressional committees, arguing that this hindered intelligence efforts. Furthermore, he reaffirmed the US commitment to defending freedom, proposing the strengthening of Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty to counter communist propaganda. Reagan placed special emphasis on reinforcing alliances with NATO and Japan to resist Soviet actions, promising to support allies when necessary. He clarified that his program was not based on recent opinion polls but on the realities of growing Soviet pressure. Throughout this and later speeches, Reagan consistently reiterated his vision of restoring American greatness.

Another notable speech was "Peace and Security in the 1980s", delivered on March 17, 1980, at the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (dated March 13 and purportedly written by Reagan himself). The speech's core message was the restoration of US international prestige and leadership (Kengor, *Ronald Reagan…*, 82–83; Nitze, 364; Inboden, 36–37). Reagan predictably criticized Carter's policies but positioned himself as an advocate of "peace through strength". At the same time, he did not rule out negotiations with the Soviets on arms control, provided that a credible verification system was in place. The *Washington Post* described this speech as

"… conciliatory in foreign policy". Reagan's remarks were in line with the strategic narrative of his campaign, demonstrating a calculated approach to political messaging. On March 24, a reporter from *The New York Times*, Elisabeth Drew, asked Reagan if he believed that the USA could: "… regain military superiority over the Soviet Union." He responded: "Yes, I think the Soviet Union is probably at the very limit of its military output. It has already had to keep its people from having so many consumer goods. Instead they're devoting it all to this military build-up…. I think it tops what Hitler did … and this is the last thing they want from us, an arms race, because they are already running as fast as they can; we haven't started running" (Inboden, 38).

It is worth mentioning the speech by Reagan delivered on April 23, 1980, at the Albert Thomas Convention Center in Houston. It was a time of rivalry between Reagan and George H.W. Bush in the battle for the Republican nomination.[2] While primarily focused on economic issues, he firmly stated that the US should provide military assistance to any people seeking to free themselves from Soviet and Cuban domination.

On May 1, 1980, Reagan gave an interview to *Wall Street Journal* journalists Albert Hunt and Thomas Bray, in which he also addressed international issues (*Editorial Note* — FRUS 1981-1988, Vol. I, Doc. 6). This interview took place shortly after the failed operation to rescue hostages in Iran on April 25 of that year. The journalists' questions focused on Iran's role as an emerging major threat to the United States. In his response, Reagan emphasized the significance of this issue for both the US and the broader regional situation. He also asserted that the Soviet Union had been a key instigator of the Iranian Revolution by conducting extensive propaganda efforts in the country. Additionally, he raised concerns about Cuban activities, and from these observations, he reiterated the well-established argument for strengthening the US military budget and enhancing cooperation with allies.

The campaign also featured numerous other minor events and speeches that, in practice, shaped and publicized Reagan's electoral program. Some of these, to varying degrees, addressed international affairs. A recurring theme was hostility toward the Soviet Union, which was consistently depicted as an untrustworthy state that engaged in deception to achieve its strategic goals. This criticism, particularly from a Republican politician,

[2] "Major Speeches 1964–1989." *The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum*, *Archives*. Hereafter cited as *RRPL, Archives, Speeches*, 1980 Presidential Forum.

was also driven by strong religious and ideological motivations. Within the thinking and actions of GOP representatives, the idea of combating communism was deeply embedded. However, as history shows, this did not preclude Republican presidents from finding ways to engage in diplomatic communication with the USSR on critical international issues (Hook and Spanier, 168–169).

There were also statements emphasizing that the governments of Eastern European countries had been installed through Soviet military force and, thus, lacked legitimacy. Reagan asserted that the United States would never accept the permanent subjugation of these nations to Soviet domination.

Party Nomination and the Formation and Presentation of the Election Program

Ronald Reagan had long been seen as a potential presidential candidate, having participated to varying degrees in the 1968 and 1976 campaigns. When he clearly announced in 1979 that he would run for office, reporters began referring to him as "The Oldest and Wisest" (the O and W). His age — 69 at the time — was not a troublesome burden for him; in fact, he managed to turn it into an advantage in his campaign (Cannon, 241–268). He was formally nominated as the Republican Party candidate in July 1980, when party delegates gathered in Detroit (Motor City) for the Republican National Convention.

At that time, Reagan was identified as a conservative, though not as an ideologue or theorist, but rather as a politician aligned with the ideas of that movement. He confirmed his political potential by defeating several competitors in the primaries, including George H. W. Bush, Bob Dole, Howard Baker, John Connally and John B. Anderson (The Routledge Historical, 158–161). He won 24 out of 34 primaries, and his last remaining opponent, G. H. W. Bush, withdrew and was offered the vice-presidency (Reinsch, 247; Boller, Jr., 357; Kaufman, 181). There were even serious discussions about Gerald Ford as a potential running mate, but Ford ultimately declined, stating in an interview with Walter Cronkite that he did not want to be "a figurehead Vice-President".

On July 17, 1980, Ronald Reagan accepted the Republican nomination for president and delivered his *acceptance speech* to the gathered delegates at the Republican National Convention in Joe Louis Arena in Detroit ("Editorial Note" - FRUS 1981–1988 Vol. I, Doc. 7; RRPL, Republican National

Convention Acceptance Speech, 1980; White, 312–314 and 316–328; Cannon, 264–268; Inboden, 42–45).

Beyond economic mechanisms — where tax cuts stood out as a major issue, later known as *Reaganomics* — he pledged in his speech to work for peace and ensure the security of American citizens. He pointed to Soviet expansion, particularly in Afghanistan, and threats from the USSR in the Middle East. He sharply criticized the Carter administration's handling of these matters. He added that even many of Carter's former supporters were beginning to question whether the country could survive under such a defense policy.

Reagan explained that he was running because he wanted to work for peace and bring an end to the Cold War. He reminded his audience that the United States wanted to live in peace but could not afford to be naïve about international realities, especially in a nuclear era. He noted that in his lifetime, the US had fought in four wars — and such history could not be ignored. He asserted that wars break out when the forces of freedom are weak. He added that in striving for lasting peace, the United States was ready to negotiate in good faith to achieve this essential goal. He assured the public that the US had commitments to many people and would not allow their freedom to be destroyed.

As was customary, on July 15, 1980, the Republican Party Platform was adopted at the convention. It included elements previously identified as the Grand Strategy of the GOP candidate. The text, prepared by Reagan's ideological advisors, contained his well-known pledge to "achieve overall military and technological superiority over the Soviet Union" and to use "nonmilitary means to roll back the growth of communism". Such a clearly stated goal — achieving superiority and rolling back communism — had not been explicitly expressed since 1956 (Brown, 391). This stance reflected the views of the *Committee on the Present Danger*, of which Ronald Reagan was a member.

The Republican Party Platform was a highly detailed document outlining the party's program, structured into specific chapters covering various policy areas. The sections relevant to international affairs included: 1) National Security (covering defense security, nuclear forces, conventional forces and terrorism); 2) Foreign Policy (covering US-Soviet relations, NATO and Western Europe and the Middle East/Persian Gulf) (Republican Party Platform of 1980, adopted by Republican National Convention on July 15, 1980, *The American Presidency Project*, UC Santa Barbara).

A review of these sections reveals their alignment with Reagan's speeches and the statements of his campaign team, which is not surprising.

Naturally, months before his official nomination, a campaign team was formed around Reagan, primarily composed of close allies: Richard B. Wirthlin — chief data analyst; Michael Deaver and Franklin C. ("Lyn") Nofziger; Nancy Reagan, the candidate's wife, who played a significant role (White, 241–253). The intellectual backbone of the campaign was provided by Martin Anderson, while the chief foreign policy advisor was Richard V. Allen, who, after Reagan's victory, became National Security Advisor (1981–January 1982). In ideological matters, conservative *National Review* editor William F. Buckley Jr. had significant influence.

Reagan's foreign policy advisors played four key roles: 1) advising the candidate on fundamental issues and refining his positions; 2) representing and defending Reagan's policies in the media; 3) building Reagan's credibility by organizing endorsements from prominent figures; 4) preparing the structure of a future administration, assuming that some advisors would take on key roles in government (Inboden, 40).

During both the campaign and his presidency, Reagan's approach to international affairs was shaped by Jeane Kirkpatrick, a Georgetown University professor and staunch anti-communist, who initially identified as a Democrat but later aligned with the neoconservatives, and William J. Casey, who managed Reagan's campaign. A veteran of the OSS, Casey became CIA Director after Reagan's victory. Kirkpatrick's article *Dictatorships and Double Standards* (*Commentary*, November 1979) was well received in conservative circles (Hayward, 127–128; Brown, 404–405; Mania *Détente…*, 152, 159). She criticized Carter's foreign policy for being harsher on US allies than on its adversaries, arguing that the administration failed to distinguish between right-wing authoritarian regimes and leftist ones. Recognizing her influence, Reagan appointed her as US Ambassador to the United Nations from 1981 to 1985.

Let us add that the composition of this team changed due to internal rivalries as well as the evolving position and needs of the candidate. Other international affairs specialists also joined, some of whom had previously been associated with the Democrats, such as Elliott Abrams, Norman Podhoretz and Richard Perle from Johnson's staff, as well as Eugene Rostow and Paul Wolfowitz from Carter's Pentagon, and Paul Nitze — an icon of the Cold War era. A significant role was also played by the Swiss emigrant, Republican and Cold War-era scholar Fred Iklé (Iklé, 419–444). Among the 41 foreign policy advisors in the spring of 1980, 33 held doctorates and were primarily affiliated with Stanford, Yale, Harvard, Georgetown and Johns Hopkins universities. The organization of the campaign was overseen by two rival figures: Edwin Meese III from California and

John Sears from Washington. Sears initially served as the campaign manager but lost his position during the primaries.

After the convention, Reagan gained a new nickname, "The Great Deflector", which, according to its author — staunch Democrat Bob Moretti — referred to Reagan's skill in "…turning aside the hard question and in making his opponent the issue". It is worth noting that Les Francis, Executive Director of the Democratic National Committee and someone well-acquainted with Reagan from his time in California, warned Carter's campaign staff in a memorandum dated July 21, 1980, not to underestimate Reagan and his ability to connect with people. After observing various stages of the primaries, Francis wrote: "Most of the people around Reagan are competent and tough. He may not be an intellectual, but he is no dummy; and the people around him are smart." The competence of Reagan's campaign staff was also reflected in a statement by Richard B. Wirthlin, a Reagan strategist, who noted: "We can expect Ronald Reagan to be pictured as a simplistic and untried lightweight (dumb), a person who consciously misuses facts to overblow his own record (deceptive), and, if President, one who would be too anxious to engage our country in a nuclear holocaust (dangerous)." This was an accurate analysis of how the entire campaign unfolded (Cannon, 281–282).

While many viewed Reagan solely as a showman with an instinct for selecting topics that resonated with audiences, his personal strategy for winning the presidency went beyond mere rhetoric. He took steps to broaden his understanding of global affairs and, in 1978, visited several countries in Asia and Europe (Inboden, 24–30). He first traveled to Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Iran, followed by a subsequent visit to the United Kingdom, France and Germany. These trips provided opportunities for serious discussions on issues such as the Soviet threat (including SS-20 missiles and MIRV technology) and for building friendships, such as with Margaret Thatcher. A significant part of his global awareness was also shaped by the election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope in the fall of 1978 and Pope John Paul II's visit to Poland in 1979.

It is important to remember that the election was taking place in a country where, according to the census data from April 1, 1980, the US population stood at 226,504,825, marking an 11.4% increase from 1970, when it was 203,235,298. Of this number in 1980, there were 188 million white Americans, 26 million Black Americans, 1.4 million Native Americans and 7 million classified as "other" (White, 347). At the time, concerns — partly politically motivated — were already being raised about a "catastrophic wave" of both legal and illegal immigration. The election was, thus, occurring in

an increasingly diverse society, requiring campaign teams to identify voter groups and understand their expectations.

For a full picture of the presidential race, it should be noted that within the Democratic Party, there was a fierce battle for the nomination between Jimmy Carter and Edward M. Kennedy. Kennedy had the support of Democratic "hawks" such as Senator Henry Jackson and Eugene Rostow, who later shifted their support to Reagan. This rivalry between Carter and Kennedy significantly weakened the President's popularity, particularly due to criticism of his foreign policy (Mason, 258).

Ultimately, at the Democratic National Convention in New York on August 12, Carter secured 2,123 delegate votes, compared to Kennedy's 1,180 (Reinsch, 247–248; White, 21–28). Despite moments of optimism at the convention — where the phrase "Not Ronald Reagan" was frequently chanted — Carter and his team were wary of the challenge Reagan posed. In his speech, Carter framed the election as a clash of two visions for the future. He defined his vision as one of "security, justice and peace", while portraying Reagan's as one of "despair and surrender". He further asserted that while he aimed to pursue peace in his next term, Reagan would lead the country toward confrontation and "the risk of an uncontrollable, unaffordable and unwinnable nuclear war" (Kaufman, 194). To contrast himself with Reagan, Carter outlined his vision of balanced policy in a speech in Philadelphia on May 9, 1980. He stated that his foreign policy "…will be based primarily on fundamental moral principles — the principles of respect for human rights — and on maintaining American military strength, which is second to none in the world. This combination of strength and principle is the only way to ensure global stability and peace…" (Brzeziński, *Cztery…*, 438).

Carter placed his hopes partly on his foreign policy successes, symbolized by the Camp David Accords and the Panama Canal Treaties. However, due to a series of dramatic events, more people viewed his actions critically (Boller, Jr., 354–355; Mania, "Department…", 468–470). Everything became more complicated on November 4, 1979, when, following the Iranian Revolution and the overthrow of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, young Iranian radicals seized the US embassy and took 53 hostages. As Carter's diaries reveal, from that moment, his attention was primarily focused on the hostage crisis, while his rivalry with Reagan only occasionally occupied his thoughts and actions (Carter, 554–561; Kaufman, chapters 11-15). Another dramatic event — the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 — further complicated Carter's position and effectively ended his attempts to salvage the policy of détente. This also provided

Reagan with opportunities to intensify his criticism of Carter's foreign policy in his campaign speeches. Scholars argue that one of the key reasons for Carter's defeat was the failure of détente (Garthoff, 1006–1007). However, it is important to note that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led Carter to shift his stance on military policy. In July 1980, he issued Presidential Directive (PD-59), which called for the expansion of US nuclear forces. Nevertheless, despite this shift toward military strengthening, public perception still painted him as weak on defense (Wattenberg, 111).

As the campaign progressed, the candidates' speeches became crucial moments for shaping their platforms. Reagan's campaign increasingly focused on Carter's foreign policy failures from late 1979. However, Reagan also faced challenges due to his own missteps. His off-the-cuff remarks sometimes caused trouble — for example, his premature promise to fully restore relations with Taiwan, his suggestion to reintroduce creationism in education, and even his claim that trees, rather than cars, were responsible for smog. When criticized for confusing the terms "recession" and "depression", he responded with a humorous but non-specific remark: "I'm told I can't use the word depression. Well, I'll tell you the definition: A recession is when your neighbour loses his job; a depression is when you lose your job. Recovery is when Jimmy Carter loses his." (Cannon, 272–273; Drew, 262, 268)

Although this text primarily focuses on foreign policy issues, it is important to emphasize that the campaign was equally, if not more, influenced by economic conditions. Inflation, high interest rates and unemployment served as key indicators of Carter's re-election chances. As in any election, an incumbent running for another term essentially faces a referendum on their leadership, which adds a significant challenge to their campaign.

A particularly noteworthy and open-to-interpretation moment was Reagan's speech titled "Address by Ronald Reagan", delivered in Chicago on August 18, 1980, at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention (FRUS 1981–1988 Vol. I, Doc. 8; RRPL, "Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety", August 18, 1980). Reagan focused on themes he had repeatedly emphasized before — peace and criticism of Carter's policies. He declared: "America has been sleeping far too long…," urging the nation to wake up. Speaking to veterans, he showed them respect, criticized the Carter administration for its poor treatment of them and promised to address their concerns. Reagan also engaged in a debate with the newly appointed Secretary of State, Edmund Muskie. He challenged Muskie's statement on the West Coast, in which he condemned Republican plans to strengthen national security, arguing that such measures would lead to an arms race. Reagan countered:

"We're already in an arms race, but only the Soviets are racing." He pointed out that in some areas, the Soviet Union's military budget was significantly larger than that of the US. He also accused Muskie of consistently opposing strong national defense during his time as a senator. Reagan rhetorically questioned why Carter did not recognize the threat posed by the Soviet Union and its allies, such as Cuban and East German forces in Africa, where strategically important resources were located. However, he stressed that the US must pursue peace, adding, "…it must not be a peace of humiliation and gradual surrender," referencing past events such as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia 12 years earlier. He also pointed to the "Vietnam syndrome", which had shaped American foreign policy in recent years. "We dishonor the memory of 50,000 young Americans who died in that cause when we give way to feelings of guilt as if we were doing something shameful, and we have been shabby in our treatment of those who returned." Reagan emphasized that in recent years, the Soviet Union had significantly strengthened its military capabilities, built a strong political and military presence in Africa and ultimately invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. He criticized Carter for admitting that the US lacked sufficient resources to defend the Middle East, arguing that the President lacked a coherent strategy. Reagan asked, "Is it only Jimmy Carter's lack of coherent policy that is the source of our difficulty? Is it his vacillation and indecision?" Or was it the continued reliance on a failed strategy that assumed the Soviet Union posed no real threat to the US and should not be provoked? Reagan asserted that weakness itself is provocative, as it creates opportunities for those with aggressive intentions. Therefore, the US must adopt a strategy of "preserving peace through strength". The United States, he argued, must cooperate with its allies while maintaining its leadership role, which those allies also needed. They expected the US to pursue a coherent foreign policy based on clear principles.

Reagan also addressed the policy of détente, which the US had followed for years. However, he stated: "Détente has meaning only if both sides take positive actions to relax the tension." He acknowledged the necessity of negotiations with the Soviet Union on arms control, particularly in achieving a verifiable reduction of nuclear weapons on both sides to ensure mutual security. However, he deemed the SALT II treaty unacceptable, as it allowed for unilateral Soviet military expansion. Reagan argued that history had shown the US was capable of successful negotiations, citing the case of Austria as an example (Garthoff, 445–469). He further stressed the importance of educating the American public about the Soviet Union's strategic objectives. The Soviets, he warned, threatened global peace, sought to divide

NATO, dominate the Arabian Gulf and South Asia and extend their influence in the Caribbean. He quoted Paul Nitze, who had stated: "The Kremlin leaders do not want war; they want the world." Reagan argued that the Soviet Union aimed for military dominance. By adopting a firm policy to strengthen security, the US would demonstrate its resilience and achieve real peace. Finally, Reagan suggested that the US should actively promote its values to the Soviet people. "But let's do a better job of exporting Americanism. Let's meet our responsibility to keep the peace at the same time we maintain without compromise our principles and ideals. Let's help the world eliminate the conditions which cause citizens to become refugees." He made this point in the context of increasing numbers of refugees fleeing on boats from Southeast Asia and Cuba, which he saw as a challenge.

Another speech by Ronald Reagan addressing international affairs took place on August 25, 1980, during a conference in Los Angeles at the Airport Marriott Hotel, where he made an important statement (FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 9; Dugger, 350–392). This speech is particularly significant as it addresses US policy towards the Far East. Reagan referred to the results of discussions held by George Bush, who, at Reagan's request, visited Japan and China to exchange views on bilateral relations and international affairs. Reagan expressed satisfaction with the outcome of these discussions with Prime Minister Suzuki and other key politicians in the context of addressing bilateral relations. The Republican Party platform stated that Japan would be a "pillar" of American policy in Asia, and Reagan's administration was determined to implement this stance. Both countries were major trade partners, linked by the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security of January 19, 1960. The visit to China was similarly successful, fostering an atmosphere conducive to the establishment of favorable relations with the future Reagan-Bush administration. During this visit, Bush and Richard Allen met with Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping and Foreign Minister Huang Hua. Reagan expressed interest in developing the recently established diplomatic relations. He noted that there were compelling reasons to expand trade exchanges, as China required US support to achieve its modernization plans. Both Asian nations emphasized that the United States should play the role of peacekeeper, which was significant given China's concerns over the scale of Soviet armament and its interest in cooperating with the United States.

In this speech, the "Guiding Principles for the Far East" were defined. Reagan declared that he would work towards peace and economic growth in the Western Pacific in cooperation with Japan, the People's Republic of China, Korea and Taiwan. He recalled the differing interpretations of

Taiwan-related issues by China and the United States while announcing that relations with Taiwan would be based on the Taiwan Relations Act of April 10, 1979. This act guaranteed the establishment of the American Institute in Taiwan to maintain US-Taiwan relations. He further pledged to supply Taiwan with defensive weapons, provided that Congress approved. Simultaneously, he criticized Carter's policy in this area, arguing that Carter ignored Taiwanese officials, limited their representation, reduced the scale of Taiwanese military exercises in the US and contributed to a decline in imports from Taiwan.

Carter had also imposed a one-year moratorium on arms supplies, a policy from which Reagan's administration intended to deviate. Furthermore, due to pressure from China, Carter had severed air agreements with Taiwan. These Republican policy proposals were developed with full awareness that China was dissatisfied with the Taiwan Relations Act (p. 34); nonetheless, US policy would proceed with its implementation. Reagan also announced that the United States would cooperate with other countries in the region to counter aggression.

Another significant speech by Ronald Reagan took place on September 1, 1980, in which he focused on economic issues, taxation and labour conditions, emphasising the need to restore the "American Dream" on a global scale. This vision was to be based on economic growth as well as moral values promoted by the United States. Reagan, as he often did, took advantage of the growing crisis in Poland, addressing Eastern European voters in particular while standing alongside the father of Lech Wałęsa (Mania, Détente…., 177). He declared that American values were "inspiring those brave workers in Poland. The values that have inspired other dissidents under Communist domination… Today the workers in Poland are showing a new generation not how high is the price of freedom but how much that price is worth" (RRPL, Archives, Speeches. "Labor Day Speech at Liberty State Park City, New Jersey", Sept. 1, 1980). He also announced a policy that, though focused on foreign affairs, included strengthening the activities of Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and other media that sustained the light of "Miss Liberty".

Reagan's statements on international matters were further supplemented by George Bush in his speech on September 11, 1980, at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco (FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 10; Inboden, 46–47). He asserted that a key objective of their administration would be achieving a balanced budget. In response to a speech by Vice President Walter Mondale, Bush critically assessed the administration's achievements in promoting peace. He argued that the Democrats had either ignored or

outright denied the troubling realities of America's weakening global position. He further contended that their re-election strategy relied on portraying Ronald Reagan as a candidate who might lead the United States into war — an erroneous interpretation that disregarded Reagan's commitment to peace. Bush maintained that the Democrats presented a misleading and dismissive account of Reagan's public service achievements. He stated that Reagan's policy was grounded in the belief that Americans desired peace with freedom not only for themselves, but also for people in other nations. Additionally, while acknowledging the current administration's advocacy for human rights, Bush asserted: "Jimmy Carter did not invent morality in foreign policy." No party or candidate held a monopoly on demonstrating sensitivity to human suffering. Bush further stated that Reagan was ready for a public debate with Carter and Congressman Anderson on issues of paramount importance to citizens, including the safeguarding of freedom in a world filled with conflicts. According to Bush, the differences between Reagan and his opponents stemmed from the Republican view that the United States should pursue a treaty on strategic arms limitation with the Soviet Union, albeit with the stipulation that the US would never accept a treaty based on inequality that granted the Soviets an advantage or lacked a credible verification system. He declared: "Under a Reagan administration, we are not going to risk American security on the word of a nation that has time and again broken its international commitments." He further argued that genuine, rather than illusory, reductions in tensions with the Soviet Union could only be achieved through mutual respect between the two superpowers and a realistic US assessment of Soviet intentions based on their past actions. He assured that under Reagan, Americans would have a president who understood and recognized the nature of Soviet intentions. As President, Reagan would negotiate with the Soviets not only from a position of strength, but also with an awareness of their political objectives. Finally, Bush asserted that, as Commander-in-Chief, Reagan would recognize that rhetoric, while effective in domestic affairs, was inadequate in international relations, as real strength was the foundation of US security and its global interests. He contended that the deterrent power of the US Army, Navy, Air Force and strategic weapons had failed to keep pace with the expansion of Soviet power during Carter's administration. Thus, Mondale's optimism was unfounded, as this attitude would not mislead the Soviets or alter their policies. Bush also criticized the administration's public disclosure of a new bomber, stating that it was not a groundbreaking revelation but rather a reference to the well-known Stealth B-1 bomber from the Ford administration.

Bush added that US foreign policy would be competent and consistent, free from abrupt changes that confused both Americans and allies, as had occurred in the case of the neutron bomb in relations with Chancellor Schmidt. Under Reagan, the State Department and the US ambassador to the United Nations would be consulted regarding potential vetoes critical to US security. Bush also announced the intention to strengthen America's global position by stabilizing its currency and reducing inflation. Lastly, he stated that the United States aimed to maintain peace by reinforcing its foreign policy through military and economic strength. Under Reagan, American representatives abroad would be secure and protected in embassies. "Never again Tehran!" Under Reagan, the United States would be respected worldwide. "That is the ultimate meaning of a Reagan presidency — an America both compassionate and strong; an America that cares for its citizens, for its heritage and for the future, not only of our own society, but of societies everywhere made up of men and women who cherish the cause of freedom and human dignity in a world at peace."

Once again, the vice-presidential candidate, George H. W. Bush, delivered a statement before the World Affairs Council in Philadelphia on September 25, 1980 ("Editorial Note" - FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 11). In this speech, he provided a review of US policy toward the Persian Gulf region after World War II. He criticised Carter's policy for its inefficiency, which undermined the bipartisan cooperation pursued by his predecessors. Bush argued that while Carter appealed to international morality, he himself had violated the principles of ethical foreign policy by failing to uphold commitments and obligations. Reagan, by contrast, guaranteed a policy of respect for one's own words and clarity of action, in which declarations of acceptability or unacceptability would have concrete meaning — an approach he deemed the only effective way to restore respect for the United States. He emphasized that US policy would be grounded in moral standards in relations with other nations. Carter's practice of condemning human rights violations in non-communist countries while remaining silent about abuses in communist-dominated nations such as Cambodia, Cuba and, most recently, Nicaragua was hypocritical and would never be adopted by a Reagan administration. Carter had attempted to deter the Soviet Union through empty rhetoric, but this had led to no tangible results. Bush explained Reagan's approach to strengthening US deterrence, clarifying that the objective was not to engage the Soviet Union in an arms race but rather to discourage them from actions that threatened peace — actions they undertook under the mistaken belief that the United States was too morally and materially weak to defend its interests. Once the Soviets

recognized the flaws in their calculations and Reagan's resolve, conditions would emerge to ensure peace and freedom in the world.

Another statement addressing international affairs occurred on September 30, 1980, during Reagan's interview with the Associated Press in New York ("Editorial Note" - FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 12). A significant portion of the discussion was dedicated to issues related to the SALT II Treaty (Nycz, 218–220). This prompted an obvious question for Carter — whether, as President, he would withdraw the treaty from the Senate, where discussions on its ratification were scheduled to take place. Reagan stated that he intended to do so but would subsequently engage in negotiations with the Soviets on arms reduction. He clarified that his objections to the treaty did not stem from opposition to arms control per se but rather from the fact that the treaty effectively legitimized the arms race by allowing the construction of new warheads, whereas the true goal should be disarmament. He further noted that the United States had, in practice, reduced its armaments, thereby undermining the treaty's logic. While both sides were aware of each other's military capabilities, the Soviets continued efforts to strengthen their arsenal. Reagan emphasized that it was essential for the United States to achieve a level of capability that would eliminate the possibility of a Soviet pre-emptive strike.

Ideally, Soviet military capabilities should be reduced to match those of the United States, although he acknowledged that this would be difficult for the Soviets to accept. The esteemed American strategist Paul H. Nitze wrote at the time: "The United States no longer enjoys the unquestioned primacy in the non-Moscow-controlled world which it once enjoyed … the principal hope for the success of a US strategy for the 1980s lies in its being consistent with the long-range interests of our allies and potential allies and being so perceived by them" (Nitze, 101).

In subsequent speeches, Reagan further defined his stance by focusing on selected themes. On October 17, 1980, he issued a statement addressing human rights, calling for a genuine revival of fundamental principles ("… political and economic freedom, justice, equal protection and fairness…") ("Editorial Note" — FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 13). He asserted that the review meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Madrid should reaffirm US commitment to promoting freedom and human rights. Reagan criticized Carter for failing to uphold these principles, accusing his policy of hypocrisy — proclaiming these values domestically while acquiescing to human rights violations abroad. Even when the Soviets breached the terms of the Helsinki Accords, Carter continued to engage with them in a conciliatory manner. Reagan stressed that

the United States must act consistently in defense of freedom and justice, in accordance with its historical traditions.

The most significant document outlining Reagan's policy vision before the election was his televised address, "A Strategy of Peace for the '80s", delivered on October 19, 1980 (Text — RRPL, Archives, Speeches; FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 14; Inboden, 48; Brown, 391). The document began with a reminder that the primary goal of a Republican administration would be to establish lasting peace. Reagan had repeatedly addressed this issue in meetings with voters, while Carter's apprehensions had distanced America from the peace that could be ensured by the strength of the American nation. Carter had promised this in 1976 but failed to deliver.

Reagan declared that the core elements of his vision for peace were hope, confidence and facts. He observed that the oft-repeated phrase "peace through strength" loses meaning if not supported by real foundations, stating: "Peace is made by the fact of strength — economic, military and strategic." Only if the United States remained strong could peace endure. Peace, he argued, was achieved through hard work, trust and patience. Carter, in contrast, had turned away from the tradition of bipartisan cooperation on critical national security issues, a tradition upheld by leaders such as Harry Truman and John Kennedy. Reagan pledged to work toward eliminating divisions between the two parties and to develop a bipartisan national security and foreign policy framework. He then outlined nine steps necessary to restore America's rightful place on the international stage, detailing the actions required to achieve this goal.

1. **Reorganizing the Policy-Making Structure**. Criticizing the practices of the Carter administration, Reagan announced that he would make the Secretary of State the primary advisor to the President. The National Security Council (NSC) would serve as the coordinating body for the policymaking process, while the National Security Advisor would be involved in this process and work in collaboration with the Secretary of State.
2. **Relations with Friends and Adversaries**. Reagan pledged to cooperate with allies in a leadership role and to develop a common policy to address the challenges of the 1980s. His approach to the Soviet Union was to be realistic and balanced. The United States did not seek conflict or confrontation. Regarding the People's Republic of China, he announced an intention to develop trade relations based on the friendship between the two nations.
3. **A Realistic Policy for the Western Hemisphere**. This was arguably the most critical issue. According to Reagan, Carter had distanced the

United States from its allies, thereby allowing the Soviet Union and Cuba to increase their influence and carry out coups in various countries. US relations with the West should be based on a shared interest in economic and security concerns. Reagan pledged to increase US engagement in the Caribbean. He also expressed his belief in the necessity of establishing a North American Accord encompassing the three neighboring nations — the United States, Canada and Mexico.

4. **A Policy to Assist Third World Development**. Reagan promised full support for private investment in developing regions.
5. **Sending the American Message**. He announced plans to strengthen the United States International Communication Agency as well as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. These institutions had been neglected despite their effectiveness and relatively low cost.
6. **A Realistic Strategic Arms Reduction Policy**. Reagan stated that negotiations with the Soviet Union would continue as long as they aimed for a balanced and fair agreement on arms limitation to ensure peace. Given the opposition even within the Senate Armed Services Committee, which was dominated by Democrats, Carter had no realistic chance of securing support for the ratification of SALT II, a situation that had already been evident even before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Even Senate Democrats recognized flaws in the negotiations and the final agreement. As a result, it must be acknowledged that it was not Reagan who blocked ratification, but rather the US Senate itself. Nevertheless, Reagan declared his intention to negotiate SALT III in an effort to achieve reductions in particularly destructive nuclear weaponry. He argued that it was necessary to make the Soviet leadership understand the need for disarmament; otherwise, the United States would be forced to engage in an arms race.
7. **Restoring the Quality of Our Armed Forces**. Reagan emphasized that military improvement should not be limited to technological advancements, which were undoubtedly significant, but should also include improving service conditions for military personnel, following the model of the G.I. Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, enacted on June 22, 1944).
8. **Combating International Terrorism**. Reagan highlighted the issue of state-sponsored terrorism, particularly support for terrorist activities by certain nations, including the Soviet Union. He stressed the need to strengthen the CIA and other intelligence agencies. He also advocated international cooperation in counterterrorism, with a key principle being the non-payment of ransoms to terrorists.

9. **Restoring Our Margin of Safety for Peace**. Reagan argued that maintaining peace required ensuring an adequate level of national security. President Gerald Ford had left behind a strong military program in response to the Soviet Union's increasing power. Carter, however, had taken a different approach, favoring reductions in defense spending. Reagan announced his intention to strengthen US defense capabilities, which would be achieved by bolstering the American economy, creating jobs and reducing inflation. He recalled that within his lifetime, the United States had been involved in four wars and he was determined to prevent a fifth.

The scholar of US politics Richard A. Melanson summarized Reagan's positions, as expressed in numerous statements at the time, as follows: 1) While the United States had unilaterally disarmed during the 1970s, the Soviet Union had undertaken massive military buildup programs; 2) The Soviets had used arms control negotiations to threaten the US with intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) systems; 3) Carter had irresponsibly signed the deeply flawed SALT II agreement; 4) The Carter administration, partly due to its highly publicized human rights campaign, had abandoned many of the United States' traditional allies while, at the same time, excusing the misconduct of adversarial nations; 5) The United States placed excessive faith in international organizations such as the United Nations; 6) The global influence of the United States, which had once been decisive and respected, was now in decline; 7) Domestic economic weakness had diminished America's capacity to serve as an international leader (Melanson, 136).

As was customary in American presidential elections, a televised debate between the candidates was being planned. It is worth noting that by 1980, televisions were present in 80 million American households (White, 165–195). The image of the campaign was constantly broadcast on television, with both political parties funding advertisements. They placed promotional materials on the two major networks, CBS and NBC, while ABC played a smaller role. Thus, a televised debate was a natural and highly anticipated event in the election campaign.

However, an issue arose when, in addition to the two main party candidates, a third-party candidate sought participation in the debate. This was Republican congressman John Anderson from Illinois (whose running mate was former Wisconsin Governor Patrick J. Lucey). After failing to secure the Republican nomination, Anderson decided to run under the banner of the National Unity Party and successfully registered his candidacy in all 50 states, giving him the legal right to demand participation

in the debate (Boller, Jr., 360). President Carter refused to participate in a three-way debate (Reinsch, 248; Cannon, 291). However, Reagan agreed to a one-on-one debate with Anderson, which took place on September 21 in Baltimore (RRPL Archives, Speeches, "Ronald Reagan and John Anderson Presidential Debate", September 21, 1980). The discussion focused primarily on economic issues, including prices, taxes and living conditions in the United States, as well as the strengthening of the US military. Reagan performed well in the debate and his position in the polls improved, particularly in light of Carter's refusal to participate in a three-way debate, which created a negative public impression.

Throughout the campaign, both parties conducted public opinion research, identified key issues, developed strategic messaging and crafted rhetoric designed to resonate with voters. Reagan's campaign team appears to have been more effective than Carter's, despite the latter's professional staff. Reagan's team was aided by the advantage of being able to critique Carter's record as an incumbent President during the final phase of his term (Shapiro, Kumar, Jacobs, 394–399). The televised debate was set to be a crucial test for both candidates and their campaign teams.

The Carter-Reagan Television Debate

The Carter-Reagan television debate took place on October 28, 1980, in Cleveland, Ohio, at the Center Music Hall, officially organized at the invitation of the League of Women Voters (RRPL, Archives, Speeches, "1980 Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter Presidential Debate"). NBC estimated that the debate would attract an audience of approximately 105 to 110 million viewers, which proved to be accurate. Despite apprehensions on both sides and initial reservations about the debate, each campaign team believed in the victory of its respective candidate (Drew, 311). The Carter campaign team, particularly Patrick Caddell, the chief data analyst for public opinion research, and Hamilton Jordan, expressed concerns regarding the debate, being acutely aware of Reagan's rhetorical skills as the "Great Communicator". However, after careful analysis, they assumed that Carter could prevail in the debate by leveraging his intellectual acumen and extensive knowledge on various issues. They believed this could give Carter an advantage over Reagan's showman-like style. At the time, public opinion polls indicated that Reagan held 48.17% support, compared to 41.55% for Carter and 10.28% for Anderson, which bolstered the confidence of Reagan's analysts. In contrast, a Gallup poll suggested that Carter

had a lead of 45% to 42% (Mason, 250). The selected panel of journalists focused on pre-agreed general issues. One of the key topics was the state of the US Armed Forces, in which Reagan reaffirmed his intention to strengthen the military, highlighting what he perceived as Carter's neglect in this area while also expressing his commitment to maintaining peace. Other critical discussion points included the nation's economy and international terrorism, addressing issues such as the Iran hostage crisis, airplane hijackings and conflicts in the Middle East. Another major topic was the Strategic Arms Limitation, where significant differences in opinion emerged, particularly regarding the SALT II treaty, which Reagan strongly criticized. He asserted: "I believe that we must have a consistent foreign policy, a strong America and a strong economy. Then, as we build up our national security to restore our margin of safety, we at the same time try to restrain the Soviet buildup, which has been going forward at a rapid pace and for quite some time." Regarding SALT II, he added: "The Soviet Union sat at the table knowing that we had gone forward with unilateral concessions without any reciprocation from them whatsoever." Consequently, he justified his efforts to block the treaty. When asked about these issues, Carter made a statement that became one of his most criticized remarks, as it was perceived as dismissive of national security concerns. He stated: "I had a discussion with my daughter, Amy, the other day before I came here, to ask her what the most important issue was. She said she thought nuclear weaponry and control of nuclear arms." This response was widely ridiculed in post-debate commentary. Further topics included energy policy, where nuclear power plants were discussed, and social security. Another segment, labeled in the debate report as the "Assessment of Opponent", focused on the candidates' leadership abilities. These statements provided critical insight into how each candidate perceived their opponent's leadership qualities. The debate concluded with closing statements, which further underscored the substantial differences between the two candidates. Reagan masterfully asked the American people: "Are you better off than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago?" He continued: "If you don't accept what is happening, if you don't think this course that we've been on for the last four years is what you would like to see us follow for the next four, then I could suggest another choice that you have" (Th. White, 403–404; Carter, 564; Inboden, 48–49). At the time, the economic situation of American citizens was dire, with family incomes having declined by 5%, eight million unemployed individuals and clear signs of stagflation (Pomper, 65-96, particularly 76). Some analysts suggested that Carter could secure 53% of the

vote as the candidate capable of keeping the US out of war (Ladd, 1–25, specifically 23). This perspective is particularly striking given that Reagan's campaign rhetoric emphasized that Carter's policies risked leading the nation into war, while Reagan promised to secure peace through military strength ("peace through strength").

Commentators analyzing the debate noted that Reagan skilfully caught Carter off guard by approaching him and offering a handshake before and after the debate. Reagan projected an image of a confident and composed politician. As usual, observers were on the lookout for gaffes. Carter's reference to his daughter Amy was widely noted. Analysts observed that Reagan, through succinct responses, deftly avoided engaging in challenging discussions, earning him the nickname "The Great Deflector". Many viewers assessed that both candidates had prepared well. Carter sought to focus on issues of war and peace, whereas Reagan aimed to attack Carter's ineffective battle against inflation (Boller, Jr., 360–361). This dynamic played out as expected. Reagan emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and argued that military strength ensured stability. Carter advocated for social programs, while Reagan championed tax cuts and reductions in government spending. Throughout the debate, as well as in his earlier debate with Anderson, Reagan appeared calm, rational, confident and capable of assuming great responsibility. When Carter pressed him too aggressively, Reagan would shake his head with an almost sorrowful expression and remark: "There you go again." Carter appeared less at ease, maintaining a more solemn and didactic demeanor. Nevertheless, Carter's final remarks were intelligent, reasonable and eloquent. However, as previously mentioned, Reagan demonstrated rhetorical mastery, particularly in his ability to engage directly with the audience. His question — "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" — likely resonated with undecided voters. On specific issues, Carter presented convincing arguments, yet overall, "Reagan was the clear winner. Appearing relaxed, reasonable, informed and avoiding obvious mistakes, he effectively undermined the single concern that had propelled Carter into a virtual tie with him in the polls — that he was not up to the job of chief executive" (Kaufman, 205; Bunch, 43–45; Cannon, 290–303). According to *Newsweek*, Reagan won the debate by a margin of 34% to 26%, while ABC reported a 44% to 26% victory in Reagan's favor.[3]

[3] In October 1980, I began my first extended academic stay in the United States and followed the debate with great interest. As someone engaged in international affairs and having observed Carter's actions in this field for several

During this period, despite Reagan's victory in the debate, his strategists feared that Carter might secure the release of hostages before the election (Carter, 565–567). This scenario was referred to as the so-called "October surprise".

It should be noted that Carter had significant achievements in international politics, such as the Panama Canal treaties of 1977 and the Camp David Accords of 1979. A crucial accomplishment of his administration was its commitment to international human rights advocacy (Mania, Détente…, 142–161; Carter, 564–565). He was actively engaged in international affairs (Hook and Spanier, 151–154; Brown, 311–377). However, there were also notable failures, including in African policy concerning the Horn of Africa and southern Africa, the fall of Somoza in Nicaragua and the victory of the Sandinista movement there, as well as the crisis in El Salvador. The most significant failure occurred in Iran, where in February 1979, Khomeini returned to Iran while the Shah left, having received Carter's approval to travel to the United States for medical treatment. On November 4 of that year, a group of Iranians seized the US embassy and took 53 hostages. The question of how to respond to these events became a source of crisis within the administration. In April 1980, Carter instructed Zbigniew Brzeziński to execute a military operation ("Operation Eagle Claw"), which led to the resignation of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who opposed military intervention as a negotiation strategy (Brzeziński, Power…, 388–395; Vance, 340–341). The complete failure of the military operation on April 24, 1980, and the American losses incurred were detrimental to Carter's prestige. Khomeini ultimately released the hostages only on January 20, 1981, and the delay was not unrelated to the course of the electoral battle (LaFeber, 687–698).

Carter's foreign policy suffered an additional blow when, just weeks after the embassy takeover, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan from December 25 to 27, 1979. This development undermined the credibility and viability of the SALT II treaty signed in Vienna (Ulam, 236–241). The treaty was based on the principle of continuing the policy of détente, which faced growing criticism in the United States, particularly from the Committee on the Present Danger and figures such as Paul Nitze, who argued that the treaty failed to ensure balance and, in fact, enabled the Soviet Union

years, I believed that he had won the debate. However, the majority of media commentators held a different view. This analytical misjudgement enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations of American voters in subsequent elections.

to maintain and expand its military advantage. Following arguments from its opponents, the Senate stalled the ratification process. When the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan occurred, the fate of the treaty was sealed. Although Carter formally decided to suspend efforts for its ratification and, in his January 1980 address to Congress, announced the implementation of the Carter Doctrine aimed at strengthening the US position in the Persian Gulf, his policies continued to face negative public perception. These two foreign policy failures in late 1979, in Iran and Afghanistan, as well as the setbacks concerning SALT II, significantly weakened the President's standing and cast a shadow over his image as a leader during the presidential campaign. Carter's announcements of increased military spending, the deployment of new MX intercontinental missiles and the signing of PD-59 in July — which directed Brzeziński and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to enhance military capabilities, as well as his administration's inclusion of these measures in the budget, the grain embargo and the boycott of the Moscow Olympics, did little to improve his public image (Smith, 81–84; The Routledge Historical Atlas, 158–161, p. 159; Kaufman, 192–193; Nycz, 213). One analyst remarked: "Carter was a President of some intelligence but little wisdom. The Carter Administration was one of many intelligences but no coherence. President Reagan had, in his campaign, promised to restore leadership to US foreign policy by organising it in a more coherent way" (Knight, 514).

It is also important to note that this period saw an escalating crisis in Poland, which by the autumn of 1980 had reached a level that suggested a potential Soviet invasion to suppress the Solidarity movement (Mania, Détente …, 173–192; Mania, "Department…", 487–495; Brzeziński, Power…, 466–467; Carter, 584–585; Brzeziński, "Cztery…", 543–560). Carter, with considerable involvement from his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzeziński, took decisive action to defend Poland. On October 23, 1980, the administration even prepared a document titled "Contingency Actions Before an Intervention Takes Place", which demonstrated a clear intention to deter the Soviet Union from repeating the events of 1956 or 1968 (Mania, Détente…, 181).

On November 3, 1980, the day before the election, Reagan delivered a televised address titled "Election Eve Address — A Vision for America", in which he presented his vision for governance in a reflective tone while addressing international affairs (RRPL, Archives, Speeches; "Editorial Note"; FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 15). Once again, he emphasized that the pursuit of peace would be a central element of his agenda. He referenced the tragedy of the Vietnam War and the internal struggles associated

with it, asserting the need to break free from its lingering effects. He stated that the election posed fundamental questions for Americans about the nation's role in the world. By making the restoration of America's global standing a cornerstone of his program, Reagan appealed to values such as heroism, religion and patriotism, which he regarded as vital to the nation's future. "Together, tonight, let us say what so many long to hear: that America is still united, still strong, still compassionate, still clinging fast to the dream of peace and freedom, still willing to stand by those who are persecuted or alone." He affirmed the US commitment to supporting those who resist discrimination and persecution, stressing that in matters of principle concerning peace, the United States remained closely linked with many nations in Europe, South America, the Philippines, Taiwan and Korea, while also seeking good relations with Africa and friendly ties with China. He concluded his speech with an appeal to voters, urging them to consider the future of America regardless of religious affiliation, skin colour, party allegiance or age and to always envision the lights shining on the Potomac. In their personal reflections, he encouraged them to contemplate the kind of America they desired, once again employing the rhetorical device from the debate by asking whether they were satisfied with their current situation.

Reagan's Electoral Victory and the First Steps Toward Implementing His Program

The election took place on November 4, 1980, and Ronald Reagan emerged victorious. He secured 50.75% of the vote (43,899,248 votes), while Carter received 41.02% (35,481,435 votes) and Anderson garnered 6.61% (5,719,437 votes). In terms of electoral votes, the GOP candidate won 489 (Inboden, 48). Carter's victories were limited to Georgia, Minnesota, Maryland, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Hawaii and the District of Columbia, giving him a total of 49 electoral votes. This marked the most significant defeat of a presidential candidate since Hoover's loss to FDR (Busch, 127-128). However, this result was not entirely surprising, as a Gallup poll conducted in the summer of 1980 indicated that only 21% of Americans had a favorable view of President Carter. The Republicans won control of the Senate for the first time since 1952, gaining 11 new senators. Although the Democrats retained control of the House of Representatives, the Republicans gained 33 seats. Reagan's support base included urban dwellers, white voters and members of the working class, while Carter retained the backing of 85% of African American voters.

At the time, *The New York Times* observed: "Voters scored him especially for incompetent economic stewardship. Since prices had risen dramatically during the past two years, most voters cited inflation as their primary concern. Yet Carter could do little to stop inflation, adding to the perception of a weak leader. The 1980 election represented a departure from customary voter predilections, as most Americans had traditionally trusted the Democrats to deal more effectively with domestic economic issues while entrusting foreign policy stewardship more to the Republicans. The new conservative movement placed a deliberate emphasis on pocketbook issues, and Reagan had consistently shown himself more attuned to these concerns. Voters had no more confidence in Carter's foreign policy than in his economic leadership. America's international prestige had suffered as the country endured a series of humiliating reversals around the world, most notably in Iran. Americans overwhelmingly disapproved of Carter's handling of the hostage crisis, and his administration was unable to pull off an "October surprise" to secure the release of hostages in time for the election. As it was, the doleful first anniversary of the embassy takeover fell on Election Day. The overwhelming Reagan victory resulted from pent-up frustrations that Americans felt over Carter's leadership in both domestic and foreign policy" (*The Routledge Historical Atlas*, 158–161). For many analysts of the time, the prevailing belief was that national security issues played the most decisive role in Reagan's victory. As R. Mason wrote: "This was an election in which foreign policy played a complex role, wrapped in perceptions of American decline. First, the background to the contest was a significant shift in public opinion on foreign policy, which became more supportive of interventionism. Second, the Carter years witnessed a conservative revitalization that was partly grounded in a critique of apparent decline. Third, as the White House incumbent at a time of economic challenges, Carter saw foreign policy as presenting his most promising case for re-election. All these factors boosted the significance of foreign policy in the presidential contest even if the domestic dimension of decline — such as high unemployment and high inflation — probably retained more influence on the outcome. This did not amount to an electoral realignment, but it did signal a desire for a new direction both at home and overseas" (Mason, 251). In his other works, Mason also highlighted the resurgence of conservatism across various social groups. Others, such as Busch (Busch, 128), emphasized generational change, pointing out that younger voters were seeking a shift, which also manifested in increased interest in foreign policy. Notably, 56% of young men voted for Reagan.

The 1980 election attracted numerous political observations. On September 2, 1980, President Carter made a significant statement during a meeting in Independence, Missouri: "Reagan is different from me in almost every basic element of commitment and experience and promise to the American people, and the Republican Party now is sharply different from what the Democratic Party is. I might add parenthetically that the Republican Party is sharply different under Reagan from what it was under Gerald Ford and Presidents all the way back to Eisenhower" (Carter, 554). The awareness of these differences between the candidates and their parties shaped the electoral programs, fostering both hope and apprehension regarding the election outcome.

Many perceived the outcome of the election as a potential threat to the United States, arguing that Reagan had limited knowledge of foreign policy and appeared to be both indolent and disoriented in such matters. As noted by *The Washington Post* journalist and Reagan biographer Lou Cannon, Reagan frequently committed gaffes and was not particularly well-read. However, Cannon also acknowledged Reagan's remarkable ability to communicate his convictions to the American public, fostering belief in his vision. Despite concerns about his expertise, Reagan strongly supported increasing military and intelligence budgets, including that of the CIA, demonstrating an awareness of international affairs (Rosenfeld, 701–705). Andrew Knight wrote: "Mr Reagan was elected, in part, to meet the growing military strength and regional expansionism of the Soviet Union. His frequently declared intent to respond firmly to any Soviet move — as Carter had not done — had one healthy effect: it helped to shock Russian policy, during Leonid Brezhnev's last two years, into immobility" (Knight, 512). Similarly, the prominent Sovietologist Seweryn Bialer argued that: "President Reagan won his office in part because he conceived the electorate that the Soviets had hoodwinked all Administrations of the last decade. He proposed to reverse the unfavorable trend of US-Soviet power relations and, quite simply, to "stand up to the Russians" (Bialer and Afferica, 605–644, esp. 643). Other analysts pointed out that the United States was losing control over global affairs, yet the American public was increasingly willing to take action to break free from the lingering trauma of the Vietnam War (Yankelovich and Kaagan, 696–713, esp. 696). As I previously argued in another study, Reagan's victory was largely driven by public dissatisfaction with economic problems and widespread disapproval of Carter's foreign policy. Furthermore, there was hope that a new administration would improve conditions in the United States. During the campaign, Reagan launched sharp attacks against Carter, characterizing his administration's approach as one of

"weakness, inconsistency, vacillation and bluff", particularly in its response to Islamist movements and Soviet aggression (Mania, *Department…*, 519).

Although Reagan had won the election, there remained approximately three months before his formal inauguration on January 20, 1981 — a period marked by the complex process of transitioning power to the President-elect (Laidler, 155–156). This time was dedicated to integrating Reagan's campaign promises into the policy agenda of the incoming administration, supported by a team of loyal advisors.

In accordance with tradition, the Republican Party undertook preparations for governance by establishing a Transition Team (Ludwikowski and Ludwikowska, 144–154). Even prior to the election, on October 25, 1980, Reagan had formed the *Interim Foreign Policy Advisory Committee* to "monitor and assess international developments through the inauguration on January 20". This committee included R. Allen, Howard Baker, W. Casey, Clements, G. Ford, A. Haig, J. Kirkpatrick, McCloy, E. Rostow, Donald Rumsfeld, George Shultz, John Tower and Caspar Weinberger. The committee produced a key document entitled *The Philosophy and Basic Principles of President Reagan's Foreign Policy* (FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 16).

On November 6, the President-elect, accompanied by George Bush, triumphantly referenced his electoral victory during an interview at the Country Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. In this address, he announced that he would not interfere in the ongoing negotiations concerning the hostages in Iran. Simultaneously, he delivered a sharp critique of Soviet policy, accusing the USSR of being willing to commit any crime and relying primarily on deception (FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 16, Note 3; *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, November 7, 1980; LaFeber, 704).

The aforementioned *Transition Team* document emphasized that, during his campaign, Reagan had clearly articulated his philosophy and principles of foreign policy. The President-elect believed it was necessary to inform the public about the perceived military weakness of the United States. He was strongly opposed to the notion of dividing the world into categories such as the "Third World" or the North-South divide. He pledged that the United States would pursue a foreign policy based on bilateral relations while simultaneously rejecting the concept of a "New International Economic Order". Following the views of Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan distinguished between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, explicitly expressing support for states governed by authoritarian regimes.

An expanded version of the initial *Transition Team* analysis was released on December 22, 1980, as the *Report Prepared by the Department of State Transition Team — Team Director's Overview and Summary* (FRUS 1981–1988,

Vol. I, Doc. 17). This document outlined policy plans concerning nearly every global region, assigning particular importance to East-West relations, stating that: "The Soviet Union represents our largest and most dangerous adversary worldwide." A close reading of this document, rich in detail, declarations and strategic intentions, reveals a significant alignment between its general principles and the statements made by candidate Reagan during his campaign. Foreign affairs received substantial attention. Even before the inauguration, as part of the general administrative transition process, Robert Neumann was tasked with overseeing the Department of State. Within the department, the procedural framework for conducting foreign policy under the President, in coordination with the Secretary of State and Congress, was formalized — resulting in a slight reduction of the influence of the National Security Advisor and the National Security Council (Moore, 179–197, esp. 194; Inboden, 50–51). It was declared that the professional *Foreign Service* would serve as the principal instrument for implementing US foreign policy. The first Secretary of State in the Reagan administration was Alexander M. Haig Jr., who had held various political and military positions under Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter (Haig, 12–14; Mania, *Department…*, 587–595).

On January 20, in front of the western façade of the Capitol — the first inauguration to take place at this location — Ronald Reagan was sworn in as President of the United States. In his inaugural address, he immediately addressed economic issues, highlighting the ongoing crisis, inflation and the decline of the US economy (Reagan, *My Turn…*, 95–101). He invoked the Founding Fathers and other historically significant American figures, referencing Dr. Joseph Warren as well as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. Drawing from their legacy, he emphasized the necessity of defending the nation against emerging threats. Reagan expressed his confidence that Americans were prepared to act in a manner that would secure prosperity and freedom for themselves and future generations. He affirmed that peace was the highest aspiration of the American people. Nonetheless, he announced plans to strengthen the US military, arguing that such reinforcement would serve as the best deterrent, ensuring that armed forces would not need to be deployed. The new face of America, he asserted, would be defined by a foreign policy that prioritized military strength. He also pledged to strengthen relations with neighboring and allied nations, assuring them of US support whenever necessary. Reagan proclaimed that Americans were ready to advance the cause of liberty, serving as an example of freedom and acting as a *beacon of hope* for those who did not yet possess it.

According to National Security Advisor Richard Allen, on January 21, the President held five-minute phone conversations with six key world leaders: Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, Italian Prime Minister Arnaldo Forlani, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Japanese Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki (FRUS 1981–1988, Vol. I, Doc. 21). This marked the beginning of the process of implementing the policies and promises made during the election campaign.

Conclusions

The 1980 presidential campaign demonstrated the exceptional preparation of Reagan's campaign team. It was conducted with competence, carefully tailored to both the domestic and international context, and aligned with the skills and strengths of the Republican candidate. The campaign effectively capitalized on growing criticism of Carter's administration, public dissatisfaction with the country's economic difficulties and the resulting pessimism and the rising conservative sentiment within American society, along with the negative assessment of Carter's foreign policy — particularly his détente-based approach to relations with the Soviet Union, as exemplified by the SALT II agreement. Additionally, Carter's failure to respond effectively to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and his weak handling of the Iranian crisis, including the hostage-taking of 53 Americans at the US embassy in Tehran, further fueled discontent. The Republicans skilfully leveraged Reagan's ability to connect with the public. The campaign's policy proposals were meticulously crafted to fit both Reagan's and Bush's personal and political profiles, a synergy that was particularly evident during their public appearances. As a result, Reagan secured victory in the election, though some questioned whether it was truly his triumph or rather Carter's defeat. While this question may seem rhetorical, it carries significance, as such dynamics inevitably intertwine in elections of this magnitude. Ultimately, the interpretation of the outcome depends on one's political perspective, but perhaps it is best to accept this duality as self-evident. In this case, beyond the electorate's usual focus on economic issues, foreign affairs played an unusually prominent role in voters' motivations. The Soviet Union's aggression — its deceptive attempts to lure the US into an illusion of cooperation based on mutual respect and, most significantly, the attack on the US embassy in Tehran and the hostage crisis — collectively awakened American voters to the threats facing the nation. The

growing consensus was that such threats needed to be confronted and neutralized — an outlook increasingly shared by the American public. A new and different approach was necessary, and its implementation required a decisive leader. For many, that leader was Ronald Reagan.

As is often the case, the defeat of an incumbent politician tends to obscure an objective assessment of their achievements. This was true for Jimmy Carter's presidency as well. Despite his electoral loss, his accomplishments deserve recognition — particularly his role in brokering the Camp David Accords, negotiating the Panama Canal Treaties, establishing diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and steering US foreign policy toward a global commitment to human rights. From the perspective of Poland's national interests, Carter's various efforts to deter Soviet aggression against Poland were of particular significance. A key example was the preparation of the *Contingency Plan* on October 23, 1980, which outlined US policy responses in the event of a Soviet invasion. These efforts merit respect, as Carter remained engaged in such critical matters — including the Iranian crisis — even when electoral considerations might have dictated a singular focus on his re-election campaign. These conclusions are drawn after several weeks of archival and documentary research conducted at the *Jimmy Carter Library* in Atlanta, Georgia and the *National Archives of the United States* in Washington, D.C., as part of the preparation for my monograph (*Mania, Détente…, Part II, 123–200*).[4]

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[4] At the time of finalizing this article, the sad news arrived of the passing of Jimmy Carter on December 29, 2024, at the age of over 100. As President from 1977 to 1981, he had both achievements and shortcomings but became a remarkable example of post-presidential dedication to peace and humanitarian efforts in support of those in need, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002. Ronald Reagan's election victory and his consequential globally significant presidency should not overshadow the accomplishments of his predecessor.

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