



A Personal Reflection: I Remember Ronald Reagan

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June 6, 2004

*[Published in **Executive Intelligence Review**, Volume 31, Number 24, June 18, 2004. [View PDF of original](#) at the LaRouche Library.]*

This morning's press brought me stunning news: the death of U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Although we actually met on but one occasion, at Concord, New Hampshire, for a candidates' night, in January 1980, that meeting between us changed world history in ironical ways which are reverberating still today.

The continuing significance of that encounter is that it led to meetings with the incoming Reagan Presidential team, in Washington, D.C., later that year, and new meetings with key representatives of the new Presidency over the interval into 1984. The most important product of those meetings was my 1982–83 role in conducting back-channel talks with the Soviet government, on behalf of that Presidency. The leading topic of those talks, coordinated through the National Security Council, was my proposal for what President Reagan was to name his "Strategic Defense Initiative" (SDI). That proposal changed the world.

In reflection on that and related experience, over the following years, I was often bemused in reflecting on the paradoxical features of that relationship to the President during that period. In part, the affirmative aspects of the relationship were rooted in our sharing the experience of our generation, despite the decade's difference in our age: the common experience of President Franklin Roosevelt's leadership of the U.S. economic recovery and the defeat of fascism. In all my dealings with the Reagan Administration during that time, this area of agreement was clearly, repeatedly demonstrated, whereas, on economic policy otherwise, such as the subject of Professor Milton Friedman, we were almost at opposite poles.

His Stunning Intervention in History

One point about those matters needs to be cleared up; and it is my special, personal obligation to do so. While it is true that Soviet General Secretaries Andropov's and Gorbachev's repeatedly hysterical rejection of President Reagan's offer of March 23, 1983, and not military threats from the U.S.A. and its allies, led to the fall of the Soviet system six

years later, it was the folly of the Soviet government, not threats by the administration of President Reagan, which led to the end of the Soviet system in the way that occurred. On March 23, 1983, the President had made a public offer, which he renewed later, to find a way to escape the system of “revenge weapons.” It was the Soviet rejection of the President’s offer which brought down the Soviet economy and the break-up of the Soviet Union. Had the President’s offer been accepted then, during the years which followed, the history of the world would have made a better turn than it did then, better for both the U.S.A. and Russia, a better way toward a better world today.

Had we reacted to the break-up of the Comecon/Warsaw Pact bloc as I proposed publicly in October 1988, the worst of the miseries experienced during the 1989–2004 interval to date, on all sides, would have been avoided. Those 1989–2004 failures of U.S. and European policies on this latter account, do not detract from the indelible achievement of President Reagan’s most stunning intervention in history, as first announced on March 23, 1983. Such is his enduring personal landmark in all truthful future accounts of U.S.A. and world history. Ironically, the U.S. Democratic Party’s leadership never understood any of this, to the present day; that makes it all the more important that President Reagan’s achievement on this account be commonly acknowledged by his survivors, Republican, Democratic, and others, today.

Such is the nature of the institution of the U.S. Presidency. That is not past history. It is a lesson in statecraft which the new generations of this world must still learn today.