

## **Ronald Reagan Was a Visionary President**

Ronald Reagan, our 40<sup>th</sup> President, displayed the personal, moral, physical, and intellectual characteristics of a strong, visionary leader, and, though turning seventy just days before his inauguration in 1981, proved to our nation and to the world that his resources and instincts were more than adequate in guiding the American people through a period of remarkable change that was preceded by the disarray of the Carter Administration. Faced with economic, domestic, and foreign problems that would have intimidated many a president, Reagan proved to be decisive, knowledgeable, wise, and tenacious, while always remaining affable, good-natured, and non-confrontational. A former actor and president of the Screen Actors Guild, he exuded the charm of a celebrity, and was always comfortable in front of the camera; these attributes fashioned his aura as “The Great Communicator.” During his Hollywood celebrity days, he socialized with Jack Benny and George Burns, but he also embarked on an anti-communist campaign that would come to dominate his life and his foreign policy as President. He continued this crusade with a passion, leading the movie industry’s opposition to a communist takeover of the performers’ unions, speaking out against Castro as governor of California, and, as President, avidly believing that God had spared his life in the 1981 assassination attempt so that he could rid the world of communism. The underlying feature of Reagan’s foreign policy was rooted in his tough stance against the forces of communism, and his actions regarding the Strategic Defense Initiative, Poland, Libya, Grenada, Nicaragua, and Iran comprise his legacy in this regard. This paper is an attempt to explain the mechanics of these particular issues, and, particularly,

Ronald Wilson Reagan's strategies and motivations in his deliberative and thoughtful handling of each of these matters of foreign policy.

### **I. Reagan and National Defense**

When Reagan took office in 1981, defense comprised only 23.2% of our national budget; our military forces had not been maintained much less upgraded throughout the seventies due to an obsession with arms control during this time.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the Soviets continued to march ahead with their military buildup, and Reagan related this grim news to the American people in his SDI address in March of 1983. He noted:

The United States introduced its last new intercontinental ballistic missile, the Minuteman III, in 1967, and we are now dismantling our even older Titan missiles. The Soviet Union has built five new classes of ICBMs, and upgraded them eight times. As a result, their missiles are now much more powerful and accurate than they were several years ago, and they continue to develop more, while ours are increasingly obsolete...

Over the same period, the Soviet Union built four new classes of submarine-launched ballistic missiles and over sixty new missile submarines. We built two new types of submarine missiles and actually withdrew ten submarines from strategic missions. The Soviet Union built over two hundred new Backfire bombers, and their brand-new Blackjack bomber is now under development. We haven't built a new long-range bomber since our B-52s were deployed about a quarter of a century ago, and we've already retired several hundred of these because of old age.<sup>2</sup>

Alarming, Reagan further described the deterioration by pointing out that many of our B-52s were actually older than the pilots who flew them! In the fall of 1981 Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger outlined a five-point plan for rebuilding our strategic forces. According to Edwin Meese's account in his book With Reagan, this plan was important for three distinct reasons: (1) to protect the United States from aggression by the Soviets; (2) to tell the Soviets we were going to renew our strength to keep the

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Meese, With Reagan: The Inside Story (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1992), p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Meese, Ibid, pp. 175-176.

peace; and (3) to use the resulting leverage to obtain authentic arms reduction rather than a continuing Soviet buildup. As a result of Reagan's vision, our forces again became operational, although the actual percentage in defense spending never exceeded 28.1%.<sup>3</sup> Reagan's moral encouragement and support of the military was shown in numerous ways – visiting the bases, speaking to military gatherings, awarding medals, and generally renewing a sense of patriotism and pride in every branch of military service.

Deployment of INF forces in Europe also worried the Reagan Administration, because the Soviets' huge military buildup of SS-20's understandably made the Europeans nervous, and they argued for intermediate missiles to be positioned on their territory. There were two sides to this issue: our State Department, arms control proponents, and some Europeans, who wanted to cancel or downgrade deployments in exchange for a partial limit on the SS-20's, and the "zero option" side, favored by the President, many in the military, Casper Weinberger, and others, which advocated a choice of all or nothing. This conflict then amounted to the choice of a complete dismantling, or a full U.S. deployment. The idea, solely the brainchild of Reagan, resulted in the Soviets' walking out on negotiations in Geneva, and in the eventual signing of the INF agreement of 1987 four years later, in which both sides agreed to dismantle Euro-missiles. The President's stubbornness in dealing with the Soviets was unrelenting, and it showed his tact and talent in handling this adversary.

## **II. Fighting the Cold War**

Ronald Wilson Reagan had a somewhat romanticized idea of his place in history, and the essence of his foreign policy can be described as a desire to reverse it by bringing

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<sup>3</sup> Meese, *Ibid*, p. 177.

the Cold War to an end. Although he directed a buildup of military defenses, he imagined a world completely free of nuclear weapons, and refused to sign agreements that eliminated a particular weapon, only to replace it with a new and improved version. His ideas came to be known as the Reagan Doctrine, based on the President's "City on a Hill" vision--that is, our country's mission was to lead the world to democracy and freedom. His national security team was comprised of pragmatists (Robert McFarlane, Michael Deaver, James Baker, Nancy Reagan, and George Bush), and ideologues (Caspar Weinberger, William Clark, William Casey, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Richard N. Perle, and Edwin Meese), all conservative anti-communists who unequivocally supported his military buildup.<sup>4</sup> The President set forth his game plan in four timely speeches, in which he referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." At the Brandenburg Gate, Reagan espoused, "After these four decades, then, there stands before the entire world one great inescapable conclusion: Freedom leads to prosperity. Freedom replaces the ancient hatreds among nations with comity and peace. Freedom is the victor."<sup>5</sup> In a speech at Moscow State University, he stated, "It's hard for government planners, no matter how sophisticated, to ever substitute for millions of individuals working night and day to make their dreams come true... We Americans make no secret of our belief in freedom... Freedom is the right to question and change the established way of doing things. It is the continuing revolution of the marketplace... It is the right to put forth an idea, scoffed at by the experts, and watch it catch fire among the people."<sup>6</sup> As an economics major, Reagan saw the dollar as the Soviet disadvantage, and knew that, with

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<sup>4</sup> William E. Pemberton, Exit With Honor: The Life and Presidency of Ronald Reagan (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc. 1998), pp. 149-150.

<sup>5</sup> Meese, Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

our technological and economic strength, we could topple the Soviets, whose government finally succumbed to both economic and political collapse in 1989-1991. Don Regan, the Secretary of the Treasury, called Reagan's advantage over the Soviets "the winning hand," noting that our two most important weapons at the time were money and technology.<sup>7</sup> The Soviets simply could not afford to stay in the arms race with our developing SDI defense system, nor our well-planned impediment of Western technological flow, another clear Reagan victory. Ironically, Reagan's relationship with Soviet President Gorbachev grew to be an amiable one over the course of the years, and their ability to communicate cordially is a tribute to both leaders.

An early example of Reagan's anti-communist action plan was the liberation of Poland. The President met with Pope John Paul II, a native of Poland, and told him how his life had been spared for the purpose of defeating communism. He told the Pontiff, "Hope remains in Poland. We, working together, can keep it alive." At the end of their meeting, he thanked the Pope for his support of "freedom and compassion in a world that is still stalked by the forces of evil."<sup>8</sup> Reagan then tearfully listened to a group of American seminarians and priests sing "America the Beautiful," and "God Bless America." Pope John Paul II and the Vatican government worked closely with President Ronald Reagan to keep the Solidarity movement of Lech Walesa alive, providing moral and financial support to Walesa's freedom cause, and peacefully forcing down the martial law government of Wojciech Jauzelski. This served as an early example of communist regime change, and was one of President Reagan's first successes. His emotional meeting with the Pope reminds us both of his sentimental nature regarding anything that

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 168.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Schweizer, Reagan's War: The Epic Story of His Forty -Year Struggle and Final Triumph Over Communism ( New York: Doubleday, 2002), p. 180.

symbolized America, freedom, patriotism, or family, and his daunting idea of his mission as president.

### III. SDI

The final straw for the Soviets was indeed the Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI. “Star Wars,” as it was commonly referred to at the time, was designed to render nuclear weapons obsolete, by defending against a massive nuclear strike launched by the USSR. Gorbachev took SDI extremely seriously, because he realized that it would ensure a second-strike capability for the U.S. in the event of a nuclear attack. The arms race would enter an entirely new level, challenging the Soviets both technologically and financially. The President’s idea of SDI was a response to his complete abhorrence of the MAD doctrine, or “mutual assured destruction.” He favored a defensive system over this completely offensive system, and turned to his friend, Dr. Edward Teller, head of the Lawrence Livermore laboratory at Berkley, for guidance. His colleague had the scientific and philosophic expertise to advise Reagan on the legitimacy of SDI. On January 8, 1982, the president directed the National Security Council Staff to research this idea and develop a proposal. Support was generally positive, as those involved understood that intercepting incoming missiles was within our capability, and was advantageous both morally and militarily. Criticisms were largely political, because SDI, though it would work, would negate the MAD theory, and could hardly be reconciled with the ABM accord. Our relentless President pushed ahead, declaring in his defense budget speech of March 23, 1983, “Wouldn’t it be better to save lives than to avenge them?”<sup>9</sup> Reagan’s brilliant negotiating tactics were put to the test when he met Gorbachev at the October

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<sup>9</sup> Meese, *Ibid.*, p. 194.

1986 summit in Reykjavik, Iceland. The Soviet leader craftily tried to trap Reagan into abandoning SDI, and Reagan, in an illustrious move, quipped, “Let’s go...we’re leaving.”<sup>10</sup> The President succeeded in turning the tables, and the Soviet leader must have known that he had taken a chance, and lost.

Don Oberdorfer, of the Washington Post, quoted Gorbachev advisor Aleksandr Yakovlev as saying, “We understood that it was a new stage, a new turn in the armaments race...We would have to start our own program, which would be tremendously expensive and unnecessary. And this would be a further exhaustion of the country.”<sup>11</sup> So the collapse of the regime, certainly an “evil empire,” was even deemed by its leaders to be a direct result of their failed economic system. Of course, Reagan’s critics, especially the liberal media, gave him little credit for this historic turn of events, and Time magazine named Mikhail Gorbachev its “Man of the Decade.” However, Margaret Thatcher hit the proverbial nail on the head when she bragged of Reagan’s accomplishments, observing, “He won the Cold War without firing a shot.”<sup>12</sup>

#### **IV. Grenada**

Grenada, a small country located in the southern Caribbean, had fallen under the control in 1979 of the New Jewel Movement, a Marxist group under the helm of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. The country clearly displayed links to Cuba, and hence, to the Soviet Union and the entire Eastern bloc. In 1983, Bishop was the victim of a coup sponsored by an even more radical group of extremists, and in early October of that year, he and his entire band were murdered. As civil war overtook the island, leaders of the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 173

small neighboring island nations, calling themselves the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, or OECS, besieged the U.S. for immediate assistance. Of utmost concern to President Reagan--approximately one thousand U.S. citizens were living on the island, and eight hundred of them were students at St. George's Medical College, a branch of an institution based in New York. A secondary concern was the obvious ongoing construction of a ten thousand foot runway by the Cubans, with the help of Soviet resources. This tiny country did not even have an air force!

The press and the public widely viewed our invasion of Grenada as a diversionary tactic; that is, to divert public attention from the disaster in Beirut, Lebanon, where 241 Marines were killed in an attack on our embassy that very weekend. The grim effects of these two incidents were indeed a serious blow to Americans and to the President, who encountered both domestic opposition, and opposition from Margaret Thatcher, his closest international ally. Grenada was actually a part of the British Commonwealth, but the geographic location of the British prevented any immediate military response from them. John Vessey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, explained the apprehensions of the public at a meeting the following Monday, saying, "Mr. President, we think we ought to bring up, even though it is not a military matter, the fact there is a potential public opinion downside to this because of what happened to the marines."<sup>13</sup> However, because no military reason could be found not to proceed, the President courageously signed the official authorization at 6:55 p.m. that evening. Consequently, Reagan faced the wrath of Jesse Jackson, George McGovern, Senator Alan Cranston, Representative John Conyers, the ACLU, the National Lawyers Guild, Senator Daniel Moynihan, and Tip O'Neill. Of course, the liberal voice of the media resounded loud and clear, but especially distressing

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

was the response of the United Nations, which voted to deplore the “armed intervention” of the U.S. The Security Council vote was 11 to 1 against the intervention. In retrospect, if world opinion had won, the citizens of Grenada and the American students would have been the losers, and probably the victims of a terrorist regime. Within six days the government was replaced in the first use of American military force since the Vietnam War, restoring confidence in our defense system for the first time in over a decade.

Several events pointed towards Reagan’s correct and decisive handling of the situation. First of all, Eugenia Charles, the prime minister of Dominica and Chairman of the Organization of Caribbean States, appeared with Reagan at a press conference, explaining to the public the threat to her nation. Secondly, upon the arrival of the students back in our country, the first student to step off the plane kissed the soil of the United States, a symbolic gesture of support for our freedom, our country, and our President. Further fodder to support the armed intervention was provided by the discovery in the aftermath of the conflict of over 35,000 documents explicitly detailing the despotic plans of the Grenada Marxists. Invading Grenada was an incredibly tough decision for the president to make in the wake of the senseless slaughter of our marines, but it turned the tide of world opinion, setting a precedent and signaling to the international community that we were indeed a major power. President Reagan, always a somewhat fatherly figure, remained genuinely concerned for the fate of Americans abroad throughout his entire two terms of office, and this affected his actions during the Iran-Contra affair three years later.

## V. Terrorism

How to handle and control the unceasing problem of terrorism was a top priority for the Reagan administration. This problem had already become a plague when Reagan took office, as we had just overcome the crisis of fifty-two Americans' captivity at the American Embassy in Tehran. They were released as soon as Reagan was inaugurated, and, for a time, terrorism remained below the surface. However, it was revived in 1985 with the seizure of TWA flight 847, the hijacking of the Achille Lauro, and various kidnappings. Our CIA, headed by Director Bill Casey, determined that these various incidents were the products of state-sponsored terrorism, and that the Soviets were behind the training and financing of the assorted acts of violence. Of special concern to the CIA and the President was Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, the mastermind of most of the state-sponsored terrorism during this period. Well-known for his braggadocio, it wasn't difficult for our intelligence to track his activities, most of which occurred in and around the Gulf of Sidra, an area off the North African coast in the Mediterranean, where the U.S. maintained a naval fleet. While Carter had timidly relocated our naval maneuvers outside of the prohibited area, Reagan boldly scheduled our exercises as planned, and when the Libyans fired on American planes, we promptly returned fire, ending Qaddafi's overtures for the time being. Immediately Qaddafi began engaging in phone conversations, intercepted by our CIA, in which he discussed assassination plans. Reagan, of course, was undeterred. In 1986 we saw a reprise of the earlier incident in the Gulf of Sidra, and again, Qaddafi engaged the terrorist response, calling on all Arabs to attack Americans, anytime, anyplace, anywhere! There was no doubt in our minds that he was responsible for the bombing of a West Berlin discotheque that resulted in the

death of one serviceman, and the injury of fifty other military personnel and some German civilians. Despite the usual complaints from dissenters at home, and the refusal of the French to use their air space to reach Libya, Reagan launched a retaliatory strike, and, surprisingly, Qaddafi disappeared from view for the remaining years of Reagan's presidency.

Reagan's actions concerning Libyan terrorism were influential for two major reasons. First of all, he exhibited the strength of our military forces in acting against a notorious troublemaker, breaking the "Vietnam syndrome."<sup>14</sup> Secondly, he displayed exemplary leadership qualities throughout the entire ordeal, insisting on precision bombing to avoid any possibility of hurting Libyan civilians.

The circumstances in Lebanon proved far more difficult to address. The country was rife with the conflict between Christians and Muslims, complicated by the presence of Shiite extremists, who looked to the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran for their guidance and inspiration. The chaos was exacerbated by the hostility of the Palestinians, the Shiite and Muslim militias, and the Syrians, against Israel. Terrorist acts abounded, and the thousands of Americans residing there were obviously in serious danger. Israel laid siege to Beirut in order to ultimately force the PLO out, and we responded by sending a multinational peacekeeping force, which included U.S. Marines and French and Italian troops, to stop the fighting and maintain the truce. Despite the warnings of Casper Weinberger, our peacekeeping force, at the urging of the State Department, remained in Lebanon to preserve peace and stability in the region for over a year. On October 23, 1983, a suicide bomber steered his truck through the U.S. installation, exploding a bomb that killed 241 marines. In three months, the remaining marines returned home, but other

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

tragic incidents continued. In June of 1985, Shiite terrorists hijacked flight 847 from Athens to Rome, holding thirty-nine Americans captive for seventeen days, and brutally murdering the navy diver Robert Stetham as a gruesome example for all the world to see. On October 7, 1985, the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro was hijacked by terrorists under Abul Abbas, a lieutenant of Yassar Arafat of the PLO. They demanded that the Israelis release fifty of their fellow Palestinians who had been jailed for terrorist activities. With the aid of Israeli intelligence, Oliver North and an anti-terrorism team were able to intercept and capture four of the terrorists, using F-14 Tomcats from the USS Saratoga to force their Egyptian flight to land in Sicily.

Despite these concerted attempts by the Reagan administration to avert attacks against our citizens abroad, the hostage/terrorism problem continued to worsen, ultimately leading to the Iran-Contra controversy, a very serious crisis that gradually unfolded and haunted the Reagan administration as a result of the constant torment and demanding of concessions from these rogue groups.

## **VI. The Iran-Contra Affair**

In my opinion, President Reagan's zeal to defeat communism, and his unmitigated concern for American citizens, were the factors that scripted his handling of the situations that evolved into what some viewed as a constitutional crisis known as the Iran-Contra affair. I will attempt an explanation of the mechanics of this affair, and follow this with my response to the underlying reasons for Reagan's particular actions regarding the contras and the country of Iran during this eventful time in history.

Reagan suspended U.S. aid to Nicaragua, which was under the control of the Marxist-led Sandinista regime, immediately after taking office, and he declared his support for the contra rebels. The White House desired to counter Soviet and Cuban influence in Central America, but most of the members of Congress were opposed to this idea, and passed the Boland Amendments to outlaw further U.S. military assistance to the contras. This was essentially a power struggle – the legislative branch obviously did not want the executive branch to have the final say, and the executive branch was still trying to overcome the constraints placed upon it as a result of the Vietnam War, namely, by the 1973 War Powers Act. On March 1, 1985, Reagan said that the contras were the “moral equal of our Founding Fathers,” and on April 29, 1985 he observed that the opposing congressmen “really are voting to have a totalitarian Marxist-Leninist government here in America.”<sup>15</sup> By Reagan’s standards, the Boland Amendments were politically motivated, and his National Security Advisors Robert McFarlane and John Poindexter agreed. They declared that their support of the contras was structured in such a way to encourage the Nicaraguan government to establish peace, and not to overthrow the Sandinistas, which was forbidden by these new laws. The NSC staff then engaged in covert military operations, directed by Colonel Oliver North, a well-decorated Vietnam War veteran. North became somewhat of a problematic figure, often bragging of his close relationship to the President, although office logs from the time show that Reagan never saw North alone, and spoke to him only once on the telephone. However, Reagan’s reasons for forging ahead in this situation, despite congressional opposition, can best be explained by his remarks in the “red tide” television speech given on March 16, 1986. “Using Nicaragua as a base, the Soviets and Cubans can become the dominant

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<sup>15</sup> Pemberton, *Ibid.*, p. 173.

power in the crucial corridor between North and South America.”<sup>16</sup> As a result of his continued pressure, the House did finally approve \$100 million in military and humanitarian aid for the contras. However, a series of events led to the exposure of our secret aid prior to this approval, and Reagan made many public misstatements concerning the operation in the following months, while North shredded numerous documents to hinder any type of investigation.

While the deaths of the 241 Marines were still fresh on the President’s mind, several U.S. citizens were kidnapped and tortured by Muslim extremists in Lebanon. It was believed that the country of Iran had some influence over the hostage-takers, and both Robert McFarlane and the President feared that we needed to re-establish relations with that country, in the event of the succession of a Soviet-backed ruler after the supposedly imminent death of the aged Khomeini. Consequently, Oliver North, members of the National Security Council and the CIA sold weapons to Iran, who promised to release the hostages. After overcharging the Iranians for the arms, the proceeds were diverted to the contras in support of their anti-Sandinista activities. Much to the President’s dismay, trading weapons to gain the release of victims actually resulted in the kidnapping of more hostages; there were eight in captivity instead of the original five by the final days of this affair. Reagan was obsessed by the treatment of these hostages, perhaps because, as a former actor, he could play that role and picture himself in their circumstances. He was particularly shaken after a meeting with the family of Father Lawrence Jenco, who openly questioned his motives.

Investigations did reveal what has been referred to as a “shadow government” operated by the White House, and Reagan, unfortunately, would never admit that his

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 176.

administration had traded arms for hostages, or that he had played a part in diverting the funds to the contras.<sup>17</sup> His detractors believed that he was forgetful, asleep, or just an “amiable dunce.”<sup>18</sup> I believe that our 40<sup>th</sup> President probably imagined that our Founding Fathers intended to place the conduct of foreign policy squarely in the hands of the executive branch of government. However, unauthorized steps were certainly taken, albeit by public officials with exemplary records, who seemingly had noble and moral causes at heart. The Iran-Contra affair taught lessons that were later turned into policy by Reagan when he implemented the Tower Commission’s recommendations. In short, these suggestions stated that no covert operations be conducted out of the White House, that secret operations involving great risk be reviewed frequently by the President and the National Security Council, and that good faith be used in order to serve the national interest when differences existed between the executive and legislative branches of government.

Concerning the original Iran-Contra actions, there was never a definitive finding of illegality, despite the five-year investigation of Independent Council Lawrence Walsh and his team of prosecutors. Nicaragua regained democracy, and Iran began negotiating with the U.S. government on a friendlier basis.

## **VII. Summary**

Ronald Wilson Reagan was the first American president since Dwight David Eisenhower to serve two full terms of office. This, in itself, showed that he commanded the respect and confidence of the majority of the American people. By the time he

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/nf/featured/Reagan/Reaganfp.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

visited Moscow, late in 1988, the Cold War was coming to an end, and history would be forever changed thanks to the forceful leadership of this wise man. His principled vision was a guiding factor in his approach to foreign policy during his presidency, and we all benefited from his remarkable and significant accomplishments. Jeane Kirkpatrick wrote in 1983, “The elections of 1980 marked the end of a national identity crisis through which the United States had been passing for some ten or fifteen years. This was a period of great national self-doubt and self-denigration for Americans. Now there is a new national consensus in both our domestic and our foreign affairs, and that new consensus reflects a return of the nation’s self-confidence – a returned confidence in the basic decency of Americans; a returned confidence in the legitimacy of American institutions; a returned confidence concerning the fundamental success of the American experience; and a returned confidence concerning the relevance of our nation’s basic principles to the contemporary world.”<sup>19</sup>

In foreign affairs, Reagan’s strides were outstanding. He dealt powerfully with both Libya and Grenada, provided anti-communist resistance in Nicaragua and Poland, and used the Strategic Defense Initiative to ultimately topple the communist regime. His key to successful foreign policy remained a strong national defense, and this theme proliferated during his eight years in office. Despite the Iran-Contra affair, he remained a popular president, retaining a 70% approval rating even as he was leaving office. At the end of his second term, his own vice president, George Bush, Sr., was elected, and this was a sure sign of his Republican Administration’s success in the eyes of the American people. As “the great communicator,” he subtly reminded us of all that is important to Americans by the way in which he conducted his policies, using a creative but common

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<sup>19</sup> Meese, *Ibid.*, p. 329.

sense approach that resonated with the American people. As his second term drew to a close, we completed two hundred years of government under our Constitution. I believe that Ronald Reagan, with his superb visionary leadership style, restored our faith in that document, and helped us to approach a new millennium with pride and confidence in our government.

As an aside, it is important to note that Reagan displayed even greater courage after leaving office. He spent several years publishing his memoirs, organizing his library, and traveling to the obligatory speaking engagements, until in November, 1994, he shocked the world by releasing a handwritten letter describing his battle with Alzheimer's disease. It was an incredibly moving revelation from an unbelievable strong-spirited and courageous leader. He closed the heartfelt letter by saying, "I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life. I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead. Thank you my friends. May God always bless you."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pemberton, Ibid., p. 200.

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