

The Legacy of Reykjavik: Outline of Remarks

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1. THE MEETING IN REYKJAVIK was the psychological turning point in the U.S.-Soviet negotiations that subsequently ended the Cold War.

a. Mikhail Gorbachev, by early 1987, came to several important conclusions: that the Soviet Union had to end the arms race if it was to deal with its growing economic and social problems; that the reforms encouraged by the administration of Ronald Reagan were needed by the Soviet Union and in any case were necessary to end the arms race, and that he could deal with Reagan to achieve these ends.

b. Reagan was impressed by Gorbachev's apparent desire to eliminate nuclear weapons and his acceptance of the most important U.S. proposals regarding strategic and intermediate-range nuclear weapons.

c. The Reykjavik summit was the first that included extensive discussions on all four parts of the U.S. agenda: arms reduction, use of force in third countries, human rights, and building a better working relationship (euphemism for eliminating the Iron Curtain). Subsequently, this became routine and brought progress in all four areas.

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d. The meeting demonstrated (eventually) both the importance and the necessity of personal communication.

2. Where we stand today.

a. Regarding nuclear weapons and nonproliferation: The momentum of destruction of nuclear weapons slowed following the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations. Currently reductions are without verification and do not involve destruction of the weapons.

India, Pakistan, and (by most accounts) North Korea have become nuclear weapons states, and Iran apparently has an ongoing program. Iraq was forced to abandon its program after the Gulf War, South Africa abandoned its program voluntarily, and Libya has been induced, or forced, to abandon its program. Nevertheless, it is clear that current trends will encourage more countries to try to join the nuclear club. *The mechanisms of the NPT are no longer effective and new approaches must be found.*

b. Regarding human rights: The protection of human rights improved markedly in the Soviet Union during Gorbachev's last years in office; unfortunately, these gains have not been consolidated or retained in all of the Soviet Union's successor states. Elsewhere, one can detect no overall improvement in the human rights situation. Success stories (South Africa, Cambodia) are outweighed by the tragic conditions in Sudan, Somalia, Congo, and Burma and the limitations on freedom in most Arab countries and China—to mention only a few. *We still have not found effective means to encourage the protection of human rights.*

c. Violence and terrorism: At Reykjavik, we faced a Soviet Union that still supported some forms of terrorism. That support ended, but during the 1990s, the terrorist threat to the United States increased. The United States, it turned out, was

ill prepared to prevent attacks on its facilities abroad and even on its own soil. The reasons are complex, but not least was *a failure to reorient intelligence collection from traditional Cold War tasks to the infiltration and monitoring of terrorist groups.*

3. Lessons.

a. The experience of summit meetings and much more frequent meetings of foreign ministers and lower-level officials should have taught us the importance of communication and personal contact with adversaries. That importance has not always been recognized subsequently. Refusal to talk to adversary regimes has limited our ability to protect our national interest without the costly (and at times counterproductive) use of military force.

b. Reagan prepared for his summit meetings, including the one at Reykjavik, by concentrating on the psychology of the Soviet leaders—an attempt to understand their mode of thinking and to find both actions and arguments that would induce them to change their behavior. He did not assume that because Communism was bad, he could not deal effectively with the Soviet leaders. In formulating his policy, he relied primarily on those who had direct experience dealing with the Soviets rather than those who approached the Soviet Union from a distant, theoretical standpoint.

c. The three principles of “realism, strength, and dialogue,” announced by Secretary of State George Shultz more than three years before Reykjavik, were the underlying principles of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union through the Reagan and first Bush administrations. Although the United States has done pretty well in maintaining its strength since then, it has at crucial times strayed from realism and avoided dialogue. We need to put these three principles back into our diplomatic arsenal if we are to insure American security and prosperity in the future.