AN AMERICAN STORY

ONE OF THE “MOST EXCITING DAYS” OF PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY’S LIFE WAS hearing Barry Goldwater address the Federation of Republican Women in 1963. In line with other conservatives in that decade, Schlafly insisted that the United States needed not simply to contain communism but to eliminate it. She also wanted to shrink the federal government, especially its role in providing social welfare and enforcing civil rights. In the 1970s, however, Schlafly added new social and cultural issues to the conservative docket, cultivating a grassroots movement that would redefine the Republican Party and American politics well into the twenty-first century.

Phyllis Stewart was born in St. Louis in 1924, attended Catholic schools, and worked her way through Washington University testing ammunition at a World War II defense plant. After earning a master’s degree in government from Radcliffe College, she worked at the American Enterprise Institute, where she imbibed the think tank’s conservatism. Returning to the Midwest, she married Illinois attorney Fred Schlafly and bore six children,

commenting, “I don’t think there’s anything as much fun as taking care of a baby.”

While insisting that tending a family was women’s most important career, Schlafly spent much of her time writing or on the road leading Republican women’s organizations and testifying before legislative committees. She ran twice, unsuccessfully, for Congress. In 1964, she wrote *A Choice Not an Echo*, a book promoting Barry Goldwater for president that sold more than three million copies. In 1967, she began publishing a monthly political affairs newsletter, the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*.

In the 1970s, Schlafly began to champion the concerns of Christian conservatives, who had mobilized against rapid changes in family life and gender roles. She spoke out against abortion, homosexuality, and sexual permissiveness, calling for a larger role for religion and traditional morality in public life. Schlafly’s ideas resonated with many who opposed sixties-era liberalism, traveling all the way to the White House with Ronald Reagan in 1980.

As president, Reagan addressed the priorities of the traditional right by cutting taxes, government regulations, and social programs, and by

strengthening the military. He also embraced much of the conservative cultural agenda. Although he faced resistance from feminists, civil rights groups, and environmentalists, Reagan's popularity and policies shifted the entire political spectrum rightward — evident in the campaigns of centrist "new Democrats" and in many initiatives of the Clinton administration during the 1990s.

Another priority of Schlafly's, resisting communism, took a surprising turn in the late 1980s, thanks to a changing situation in the USSR and bold moves by Reagan and his Soviet counterpart, Mikhail Gorbachev. Eastern bloc countries threw off communism with no crackdown from the Soviet leader. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union itself was dissolved, leading Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush, to proclaim the arrival of a "new world order."

Yet culture wars at home and new wars abroad marked the 1990s. United States contended with the challenges of globalization, ethnic conflict, and terrorism, while hampered by a polarized electorate and an increasingly deadlocked political system.

What conservative goals were realized during Reagan’s presidency?

Ronald Reagan’s inauguration day was marked by the release of the American hostages in Iran and by the new president’s pronouncement, after a decade of economic and global decline, that “we’re too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams.” Reagan’s election in 1980 marked the most important turning point in American politics since Franklin D. Roosevelt’s election in 1932. His victory established conservatism’s dominance in the Republican Party, while Democrats adapted by moving toward the right. The United States was not alone in this political shift. Conservatives rose to power in Britain with the election of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and in Germany, Canada, and Sweden as well. Social democratic governments elsewhere trimmed their welfare states.

The Reagan administration embraced the values of the New Christian Right but left its most important mark on the economy: controlling inflation, deregulating industry, slashing taxes, and generating a staggering federal budget deficit. A fascination with finance and large fortunes characterized popular culture in the 1980s, but poverty increased and economic inequality grew. Although the

Reagan era did not see a policy revolution comparable to that of the New Deal, it dealt a strong blow to the once-dominant liberal agenda, fostering antigovernment sentiment and sharply reversing the course of American politics.

Appealing to the New Right and Beyond

Sixty-nine-year-old Ronald Reagan was the oldest candidate ever nominated for the presidency as well as the first divorcé and former union leader (of the Screen Actors Guild). Gaining national attention first as a movie actor, Reagan was a New Deal Democrat until the 1950s, when he shed that affiliation and became a critic of the liberal state and a national spokesperson for General Electric and free enterprise.

A fervent anti-Communist and prominent supporter of Barry Goldwater in 1964, Reagan's own political career took off when he was elected governor of California in 1966 (see chapter 28). Reagan ran as a conservative, but in office he displayed flexibility, approving a major tax increase, a strong water pollution bill, and a liberal abortion law. He displayed similar agility in 1980, softening his attacks on Social Security, public school funding, and assistance to the

poor and choosing the moderate George H. W. Bush as his running mate.

Reagan campaigned in favor of states' rights and against school busing, affirmative action, and welfare fraud — a set of issues sparked by civil rights gains and that had rallied Republicans since the Nixon years. Although not particularly religious himself, Reagan's campaign revealed the growing clout of the Christian Right and its emphasis on traditional morality and family structures. Indeed, some Republicans balked at his nomination and the party platform. After Phyllis Schlafly persuaded the party to reverse its forty-year support for the Equal Rights Amendment, moderate and liberal Republicans protested outside the convention hall. Moderate John B. Anderson, congressman from Illinois, deserted his party to run as an independent.

Reagan's campaign capitalized on the economic recession and the loss of U.S. prestige in the world symbolized by the Iran hostage crisis. Reagan asked voters, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" He promised to "take government off the backs of the people" and to restore Americans' morale and other nations' respect. Not only did Reagan win the election, but Republicans also took control of the Senate for the first time since the 1950s.

Reagan’s victory was a triumph for the grassroots conservative movement that emerged in the 1960s. That movement grew with the politicization of religious conservatives, predominantly Protestants who traditionally had refrained from partisan politics and who came to be known as the **New Christian Right**. During the 1970s, evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity claimed thousands of new adherents, while mainstream Protestant congregations waned. Evangelical ministers such as Pat Robertson preached to huge television audiences, attacking feminism, abortion, and homosexuality and calling for the restoration of old-fashioned “family values.” A considerable number of Catholics, such as Phyllis Schlafly, shared this goal, speaking out against court rulings and legislation that seemed to favor moral permissiveness and undermine traditional religious beliefs.

Conservative political organizations such as the Moral Majority, launched by the Reverend Jerry Falwell in 1979, fought “left-wing, social welfare bills, … pornography, homosexuality, [and] the advocacy of immorality in school textbooks.” Dr. James Dobson, a psychologist who hosted a popular Christian talk show, founded the Family Research Council in 1983 to lobby Congress for measures to curb abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and single motherhood. The monthly *Phyllis Schlafly Report* helped merge these concerns with the traditional conservative platform of

limited government at home and militant anticommunism abroad.

Reagan endorsed the positions of the Christian Right on issues such as abortion and school prayer, but he did not push hard for so-called moral policies. His major achievements instead fulfilled goals of the older right — strengthening the nation’s anti-Communist posture and reducing taxes and restraints on free enterprise while attacking “big government” through his rhetoric and his policies. “Government,” Reagan declared in his inaugural address, “is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.”

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

Ronald Reagan Addresses Religious Conservatives Reagan's victory in 1980 helped to reshape the Republican Party by attracting millions of evangelical Christians to its ranks. In his 1983 address to the National Association of Evangelicals, Reagan called the Soviet Union an "evil empire" and appealed to religious conservatives with strong words about abortion and prayer in the schools, rejoicing that "America is in the midst of a spiritual awakening and a moral renewal."

Reagan, known as "the Great Communicator," was a popular figure, appealing even to Americans who opposed his policies but warmed to his optimism, charisma, and easygoing humor. Ignoring the darker moments of the American past, he presented a version of U.S. history that its citizens could feel good about. Proclaiming that "the era

of self-doubt is over," he reassured his fellow citizens that it was "morning in America."

Unleashing Free Enterprise

Reagan faced economic problems that had challenged the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations alike: slow growth, stagflation, and a ballooning trade deficit. His proposed solution was to reduce government intervention, oversight, and spending. He hoped to stimulate the economy by cutting taxes and deregulating industry.

Reagan regarded taxation as a form of theft that prevented Americans from keeping what they had rightfully earned. His first domestic initiative, despite a large budget deficit, was a massive tax cut. To justify it, Reagan relied on a new theory called **supply-side economics**, which held that lowering taxes would actually increase revenue. In theory, businesses would expand, and individuals would work harder because they could keep more of their earnings. The resulting increase in production of goods and services — the supply — would in turn boost demand. Reagan promised that the economy would grow so much that the government would recoup the lost taxes. Instead, it incurred a galloping deficit.

In the summer of 1981, Congress passed the Economic Recovery Tax Act, the largest tax reduction in U.S. history.

Rates were cut from 14 percent to 11 percent for the lowest-income individuals and from 70 percent to 50 percent for the wealthiest, who also benefited from reduced levies on corporations, capital gains, gifts, and inheritances. A second measure, the Tax Reform Act of 1986, cut taxes still further. Although the 1986 law narrowed loopholes used primarily by the wealthy, affluent Americans saved far more on their tax bills than did average taxpayers, and the distribution of wealth tipped further in favor of the rich.

Rolling back regulations on business was another of Reagan's priorities. Carter had deregulated a number of industries, such as air transportation and banking, while increasing health, safety, and environmental regulations. The Reagan administration, by contrast, pursued across-the-board deregulation. It declined to enforce the Sherman Antitrust Act (see chapter 18), which limited monopolies, allowing an unprecedented number of business mergers and takeovers.

Reagan also loosened regulations protecting employee health and safety, and he weakened labor unions. When members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization — one of the few unions to support Reagan in 1980 — struck in 1981, the president fired them, destroying the union and intimidating organized labor.

Reagan targeted environmental laws, blaming them for the nation’s sluggish economic growth. His first secretary of the interior, James Watt, announced, “We will mine more, drill more, cut more timber,” as he released federal lands to private exploitation. Meanwhile, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency relaxed enforcement of air and water pollution standards. Of environmentalists, Reagan wisecracked, “I don’t think they’ll be happy until the White House looks like a bird’s nest.” Their numbers grew in opposition to his policies, with popular support for environmental protection forcing several officials to resign and blocking full realization of Reagan’s deregulatory goals.

Deregulation of the banking industry, begun under Carter with bipartisan support, created a crisis in the savings and loan (S&L) industry. Some of the newly deregulated S&L institutions extended enormous loans to real estate developers and invested in other high-yield but risky ventures. The lenders reaped lavish profits, and their depositors enjoyed high interest rates. But when real estate values plunged, hundreds of S&Ls went bankrupt, resulting in the largest financial scandal in U.S. history. The government bailout of the industry in 1989 cost American taxpayers more than $100 billion, deepening the federal deficit.

Reagan entered the White House with a pledge to reverse what he billed as the failed and expensive initiatives of the Great Society. Although his proposals to overhaul Social Security were overwhelmingly rejected by Congress, his administration made good on its promise to roll back other social welfare programs. Reagan cut funds for food stamps, job training, and student aid, which critics condemned as a “war on the poor,” and which led to hundreds of thousands of people losing benefits. Increases in defense spending, however, far exceeded the budget savings and, along with the tax cuts, caused the deficit to soar. The nation’s debt tripled to $2.3 trillion, with interest payments on the debt consuming one-seventh of all federal expenditures. Despite Reagan’s antigovernment rhetoric, both the federal budget and the number of federal employees increased during his presidency.

It took the severest recession since the 1930s to reduce inflation in the U.S. economy. Unemployment approached 11 percent late in 1982, and record numbers of banks and businesses closed. The threat of joblessness further undermined organized labor, forcing unions to make concessions that management insisted were necessary for industry’s survival.

In 1983, the economy recovered and entered a period of unprecedented growth. That economic upswing and

Reagan’s own popularity posed a formidable challenge to the Democrats in the 1984 election. They nominated Carter’s vice president, Walter F. Mondale, to head the ticket, but even his precedent-breaking choice of a woman as his running mate — New York representative Geraldine A. Ferraro — did not save the Democrats from a humiliating defeat. Reagan charged his opponents with a fixation on America’s failures. Democrats, he claimed, “see an America where every day is April 15th,” the deadline for income tax returns, whereas “we see an America where every day is the Fourth of July.” Reagan was reelected in a landslide victory, winning 59 percent of the popular vote and every state but Mondale’s Minnesota.

Winners and Losers in a Flourishing Economy

After the economy recovered in 1983, some Americans won great fortunes. Money making and lavish displays of wealth were splashed across popular culture. Books by business gurus topped best-seller lists, and a new television show, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, drew large audiences. College students ranked making money as a primary ambition.

Many of the newly wealthy got rich not from producing goods but from moving assets around by manipulating debt

and restructuring corporations through mergers and takeovers. Notable exceptions included Steve Jobs, who invented the Apple computer in his garage, and Bill Gates, who transformed the software industry with his company Microsoft. Most financial wizards operated within the law, but the 1980s also witnessed a series of criminal convictions for fraud and insider trading.

Older industries faced global pressures. German and Japanese corporations overtook U.S. manufacturing in steel, automobiles, and electronics. International competition forced the collapse of some companies, while others moved factories and jobs abroad to be closer to foreign markets or to benefit from low-wage labor in Mexico or Korea. Service industries expanded, creating new jobs at home, but with substantially lower paychecks. The number of full-time workers earning wages below the poverty level ($12,195 for a family of four in 1990) rose from 12 percent to 18 percent of all workers in the 1980s.

The weakening of organized labor combined with the decline in manufacturing to erode the position of blue-collar workers. Chicago steelworker Ike Mazo, who contemplated the $6-an-hour jobs available to him, fumed, “It’s an attack on the living standards of workers.” Increasingly, a second income was needed to stave off economic decline. By 1990, nearly 60 percent of married women with young children

worked outside the home. Yet even with two incomes, families struggled. The gap between men's and women's annual earnings — an average of $10,000 — made things even harder for female-headed families, which made up nearly 20 percent of all households in the 1980s.

In keeping with conservative philosophy, Reagan adhered to "trickle-down" economics, insisting that the benefits of a booming economy would be passed along from the wealthiest to everyone else. Average personal income rose during his tenure, but the trend toward greater economic inequality that had begun in the 1970s intensified in the 1980s, in part because of Reagan's tax policies. During his presidency, the percentage of Americans living in poverty increased from 11.7 to 13.5, the highest poverty rate in the industrialized world, and homelessness climbed dramatically. Social Security and Medicare helped to stave off destitution among the elderly. Less fortunate were other groups that the economic boom bypassed: racial minorities, female-headed families, and children, one in five of whom lived in poverty.

REVIEW

What factors led to increased economic inequality during the 1980s?

What strategies did liberals use to fight the conservative turn?

Liberal social movements were on the defensive in the 1980s as the government retreated from a commitment to equal opportunity, a shift reflected in Reagan’s federal court appointments. Feminists and minority groups fought to retain protections they had recently won, while the gay and lesbian rights movement made some gains.

Battles in the Courts and Congress

Ronald Reagan agreed with conservatives that the nation had moved too far in guaranteeing rights to minority groups. Crying “reverse discrimination,” conservatives maintained that affirmative action harmed whites, ignoring evidence that minorities and white women still lagged far behind white men in both opportunities and income. Black labor leader Cleveland Robinson pointed to the difficulty of achieving equal opportunity in a faltering economy, calling full employment “the basic ingredient of successful affirmative action.” Without it, “you will have both blacks and whites fighting for the same job.”

Intense mobilization by civil rights groups, educational leaders, labor, and even corporate America prevented the administration from abandoning affirmative action, and the Supreme Court upheld important antidiscrimination policies. Against Reagan’s wishes, Congress extended the Voting Rights Act with veto-proof majorities. The administration, however, limited civil rights enforcement by appointing conservatives to the Justice Department, the Civil Rights Commission, and other agencies, as well as by slashing their budgets.

Congress stepped in to defend antidiscrimination programs after the Justice Department persuaded the Supreme Court to severely weaken Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, a key law promoting equal opportunity in education. In 1988, Congress passed the Civil Rights Restoration Act over Reagan’s veto, banning government funding for any organization that practiced discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age.

Liberals had once counted upon the federal judiciary as a powerful ally, but the courts were trending toward the right in the 1980s. With the opportunity to appoint half of the 761 federal court judges and three new Supreme Court justices, President Reagan remade the courts with carefully selected candidates who were both younger and more conservative

than the federal judiciary as a whole. The full impact of these appointments became clear after Reagan left office, as the Court allowed states to impose restrictions that weakened access to abortion for poor and rural women, reduced protections against employment discrimination, and whittled down legal safeguards against the death penalty.

AP Photo/Ron Edmonds.

The Abortion Debate Starting in the late 1970s, the religious right pressured states to enact restrictions on abortion. In 1989, the Supreme Court upheld a Missouri law prohibiting public employees from performing abortions except to save a woman’s life. The law also banned abortions in public buildings and required physicians to perform viability tests on the fetus after twenty weeks. In this photograph, activists on both sides rally before the Supreme Court.

Feminism on the Defensive

A signal achievement of the New Right was capturing the Republican Party's position on women's rights. For the first time in its history, the party took an explicitly antifeminist tone, opposing the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)** and abortion rights, key goals of the women's movement (see chapter 28). When the time limit for ratification of the ERA ran out in 1982, Phyllis Schlafly and her followers celebrated the defeat of this central feminist objective.

Regrouping, feminists in the 1980s focused more on women's economic and family issues. They found some common ground with the Reagan administration, securing legislation that helped single and divorced mothers collect court-ordered child support payments from absent fathers. Other legislation strengthened women's claims to their husbands' pensions and made it easier for them to qualify for private retirement pensions.

By 1980, American women comprised more than 40 percent of the U.S. workforce, and activists debated how best to remedy persistent gender inequality. With new career paths open to them, women were told that they could "have it all": satisfying work and family lives both. Yet typically paid less than their male counterparts — and responsible for the

majority of housework and child rearing, with little in the way of parental leave or subsidized day care — professional women began to point to an unrealistic “superwoman” image in American society. Working-class women and divorced or single mothers faced different problems, finding themselves more vulnerable financially as the government safety net was trimmed. Given their higher poverty rates than men, women suffered most from Reagan’s cuts in social programs.

Reagan’s advisers had their own concerns about women, specifically about the gender gap in voting: women’s tendency to support liberal and Democratic candidates in larger numbers than did men. Reagan appointed three women to cabinet posts. In 1981, he selected the first woman, Sandra Day O’Connor, a moderate conservative, for the Supreme Court, despite the Christian Right’s objection to her support of abortion. But overall, the number of women and minorities in high-level government positions declined.

Although the Reagan administration threw its weight behind abortion restrictions, feminists fought successfully to retain the basic principles of *Roe v. Wade*, supported by narrow majorities on the Supreme Court. They won a key victory from the Court in *Meritor v. Vinson* (1986), which ruled that sexual harassment severe or pervasive enough to create a

“hostile work environment” constituted sex discrimination. Feminists also made some gains at the state level on such issues as pay equity, rape, and domestic violence.

The Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement

In contrast to other social movements, gay and lesbian rights activism expanded during the 1980s. Activists were galvanized in part by the discovery in 1981 of a devastating disease, **acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)**, which initially affected gay men disproportionately. Wary of provoking religious conservatives, Reagan refused to prioritize the epidemic or to devote public health resources to combat it. Outraged activists took to the streets to demand AIDS education, prevention, and treatment. Groups like the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), which formed in 1987, successfully pressured Congress to allocate funding to fight the disease.

Since the 1970s, the gay and lesbian rights movement had encouraged closeted homosexuals to “come out,” and their visibility increased awareness, if not always acceptance, of homosexuality. Several openly gay politicians won offices, and Democrats began to include gay rights in their party platforms. Activists organized gay rights marches

throughout the country, turning out half a million people in New York City in 1987.

Popular attitudes about homosexuality moved toward greater tolerance but remained complex, leading to uneven changes in policies. Dozens of cities banned job discrimination against homosexuals, and beginning with Wisconsin in 1982, some states made sexual orientation a protected category under civil rights laws. Local governments and large corporations began to offer health insurance and other benefits to same-sex domestic partners.

Yet a strong countermovement challenged the drive for gay rights. The Christian Right targeted gays and lesbians as symbols of national immorality, with some fundamentalists even describing the AIDS epidemic as “the wrath of God upon homosexuals.” Conservatives succeeded in overturning some homosexual rights measures, which already lagged far behind protections for women and minorities. Many states removed anti-sodomy laws from the books, but in 1986, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of such laws, ruling that the right to privacy did not extend to homosexuals because their sexual behavior had “no connection” to “family, marriage, or procreation.” Until the Court reversed that opinion in 2003, more than a dozen states retained statutes that left

homosexuals vulnerable to criminal charges for private consensual behavior.

REVIEW

How did the prospects for progressive reform change during the Reagan years?

Why did the Cold War intensify, and how did it end?

Reagan accelerated Carter’s arms buildup and harshly censured the Soviet Union, calling it “an evil empire.” On the periphery of the Cold War, Reagan also practiced militant anticommunism, assisting anti-leftist movements in Asia, Africa, and Central America and dispatching troops to the Middle East and the Caribbean. Despite this new aggressiveness — or, some argued, because of it — Reagan presided over the most impressive thaw in superpower conflict since the Cold War had begun.

Militarization and Interventions Abroad

A fierce critic of containment, détente, and arms reduction talks, Reagan insisted on an unyielding stance against communism. He expanded the military with new bombers and missiles, an enhanced nuclear force in Europe, a larger navy, and a rapid-deployment force. Casting aside the established principle of “mutually assured destruction” as well as scientists’ skepticism, Reagan proposed developing a space-based shield that would protect the United States from missile attacks. During his presidency, defense

spending averaged $216 billion a year, up from $158 billion in the Carter years and higher even than in the Vietnam era.

Reagan justified the military buildup as a means to negotiate with the Soviets. But his policy of “peace through strength” provoked an outburst of pleas to halt the arms race. In 1982, 700,000 people marched in New York City to demand a “**nuclear freeze**,” making it the largest political demonstration in U.S. history. That same year the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a call for nuclear disarmament. Hundreds of thousands protested across Europe, stimulated by fears of new U.S. missiles scheduled for deployment there in 1983. People marched even in the Soviet Union, where they passed the U.S. Embassy to make sure that news of their demonstration could not be censored. A new wave of domestic anxiety about the nuclear threat was evident in the blockbuster television film *The Day After*, which aired on ABC in 1983. More than one hundred million tuned in to watch a harrowing fictional portrayal of the aftermath of a nuclear attack on American soil, including graphic portrayals of radiation sickness.

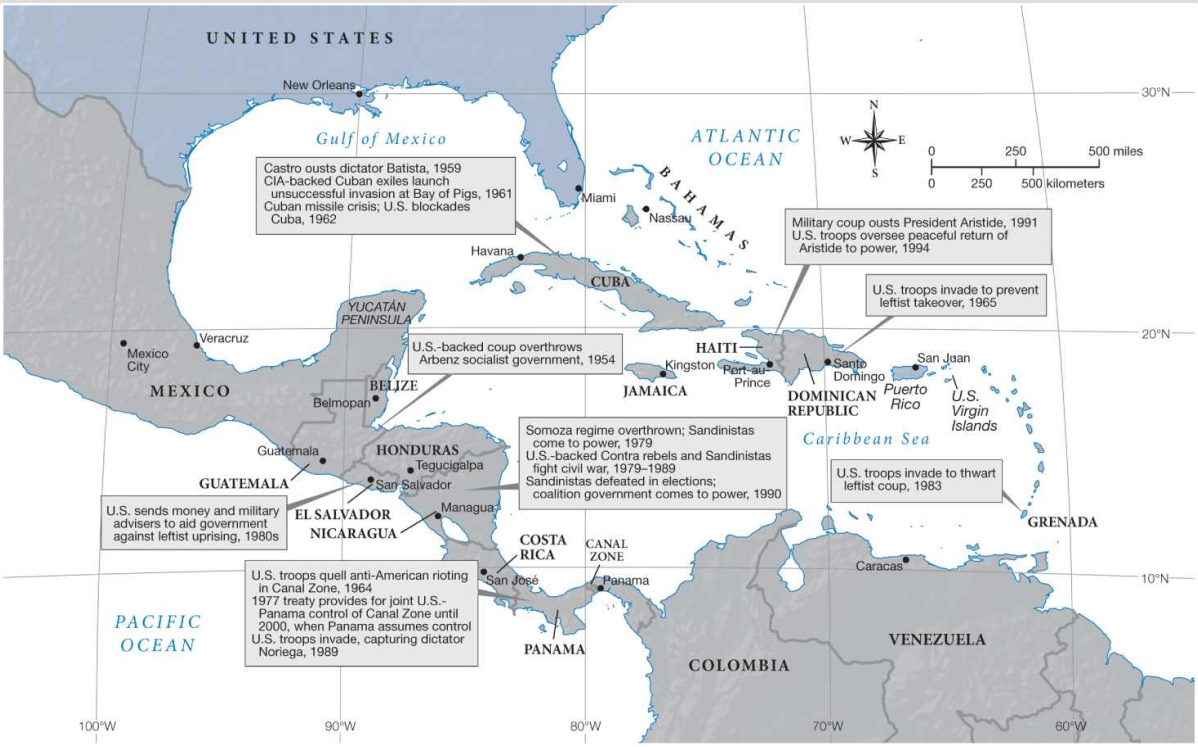
The revived arms race was only one of Americans’ concerns on the world stage. Another was the growing threat of terrorism by nonstate organizations that sought to achieve political objectives by attacking civilian populations. Terrorism had a long history, but in the 1970s and 1980s,

Americans saw it escalate among groups hostile to Israel and Western policies. In 1972, after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Palestinian terrorists murdered eleven Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. The terrorist organization Hezbollah, composed of Shiite Muslims and backed by Iran and Syria, arose in Lebanon in 1982, after Israeli forces invaded to stop the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from using sanctuaries in Lebanon to launch attacks on Israel.

Reagan's effort to stabilize Lebanon by sending two thousand Marines to join an international peacekeeping mission failed. In 1983, a suicide attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut killed sixty-three people; later that year, a Hezbollah fighter drove an explosives-filled truck into a U.S. barracks there, killing 241 Marines. The attack prompted the withdrawal of U.S. troops, signaling that political violence could affect U.S. policy. Lebanon remained in chaos, while incidents of murder, kidnapping, and hijacking by various Middle Eastern extremist groups continued.

Following a familiar Cold War script, the Reagan administration sought to contain leftist movements across the globe. In October 1983, five thousand U.S. troops invaded Grenada (**Map 30.1**), a small Caribbean nation where Marxists had staged a successful coup. In Asia, the United States covertly aided the Afghan rebels' war against

Afghanistan’s Soviet-backed government. In the African nation of Angola, where the government had ties to the Soviet Union and Cuba, the United States armed rebel forces. Reagan also stood with the South African government, despite its brutal suppression of black protest against apartheid, forcing Congress to override his veto to impose economic sanctions.



Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 8e, Value Edition © 2020 Bedford/St. Martin’s

MAP 30.1 U.S. Involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1954–1994

During the Cold War, the United States frequently intervened — directly or indirectly — in Central American and Caribbean countries to suppress Communist or leftist movements.

Description

“The map shows the following data:

Havana in Cuba: Castro ousts dictator Batista, 1959; C I A-backed Cuban exiles launch unsuccessful invasion at Bay of Pigs, 1961 Cuban missile crisis; U.S. blockades Cuba, 1962.

Haiti: Military coup ousts President Aristide, 1991.

U. S. troops oversee peaceful return of Aristide to power, 1994.

Santo Domingo in Dominican Republic: U. S. troops invade to prevent leftist takeover, 1965.

Grenada: U. S. troops invade to thwart leftist coup, 1983.

Panama: U. S. troops quell anti-American rioting in Canal Zone, 1964; 1977 treaty provides for joint U. S.- Panama control of Canal Zone until 2000, when Panama assumes control U.S. troops invade, capturing dictator Noriega, 1989.

Managua in Nicaragua: Somoza regime overthrown; Sandinistas come to power, 1979; U. S. backed Contra rebels and Sandinistas fight civil war, 1979 to 1989; Sandinistas defeated in elections; coalition government comes to power, 1990.

San Salvador in El Salvador: U. S. sends money and military advisers to aid government against leftist uprising, 1980s.

Guatemala: U. S. backed coup overthrows Arbenz socialist government, 1954.”

The Iran-Contra Scandal

Administration officials were most fearful of left-wing movements in Central America, which Reagan claimed could “destabilize the entire region from the Panama Canal to

Mexico.” When a leftist uprising occurred in El Salvador in 1981, the United States sent money and military advisers to prop up the authoritarian government. In neighboring Nicaragua (see Map 30.1), the administration funneled aid to the Contras, an armed coalition seeking to unseat the left-wing Sandinistas, who had toppled a long-standing dictatorship.

Fearing being drawn into another Vietnam, many Americans opposed U.S. involvement with reactionary forces not supported by the majority of Nicaraguans. Congress repeatedly instructed the president to halt aid to the Contras. But the administration, describing the Contras as “freedom fighters,” quietly continued to supply them with weapons and training. Eventually, it also helped to wreck Nicaragua’s economy and unseat its president.

Secret aid to the Contras was part of a larger project that came to be known as the **Iran-Contra scandal**. It began in 1985, when officials of the National Security Council and the CIA covertly arranged to sell arms to Iran, then in the midst of an eight-year war with neighboring Iraq, even while the United States openly supplied Iraq with funds and weapons. The purpose was to get Iran to pressure Hezbollah to release American hostages being held in Lebanon.

Profits from the arms sales were then channeled through Swiss bank accounts to aid the Nicaraguan Contras. Over the objections of his secretaries of state and defense, Reagan approved the arms sales to Iran, but all three subsequently denied knowing that the proceeds were diverted to the Contras. When news of the affair surfaced in November 1986, the Reagan administration faced serious charges. The president’s aides had defied Congress’s express ban on military aid to the Contras.

Investigations by an independent prosecutor led to a trial in which seven individuals pleaded guilty or were convicted of lying to Congress and destroying evidence. (One conviction was later overturned on a technicality; President George H. W. Bush pardoned the other six officials.) The independent prosecutor’s final report found no evidence that Reagan had broken the law, but it concluded that he had known about the diversion of funds to the Contras and had “knowingly participated or at least acquiesced” in covering up the scandal.

Soviet-American Relations Transformed

The Iran-Contra scandal was soon overshadowed by a momentous reduction in Cold War tensions. The surprising new Soviet-American accord depended both on Reagan’s

flexibility and profound desire to end the possibility of nuclear war and on an innovative Soviet head of state who recognized that his country's domestic problems demanded an easing of Cold War antagonism.

When Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in the Soviet Union in 1985, he was determined to reform a collapsing economy incapable of satisfying basic consumer needs. The new Soviet leader lifted some economic regulations and also proclaimed an era of *glasnost* (greater freedom of expression), eventually allowing contested elections and challenges to Communist rule. In time, these steps would dramatically alter the Soviet Union's government and economy.

Concerns about skyrocketing defense budgets brought both Reagan and Gorbachev to the negotiating table. Enormous military spending stood in the way of Gorbachev's goal of economic revival. Heeding growing calls for arms reductions, Reagan made disarmament a major goal in his last years in office and readily responded when Gorbachev took the initiative. The two developed a rapport, agreeing to meet four times between 1985 and 1988. Reagan had to fend off criticism from the anti-Communist right, but by December 1987, the superpowers had completed an **intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) agreement**, a major turning point in U.S.-Soviet relations. The treaty

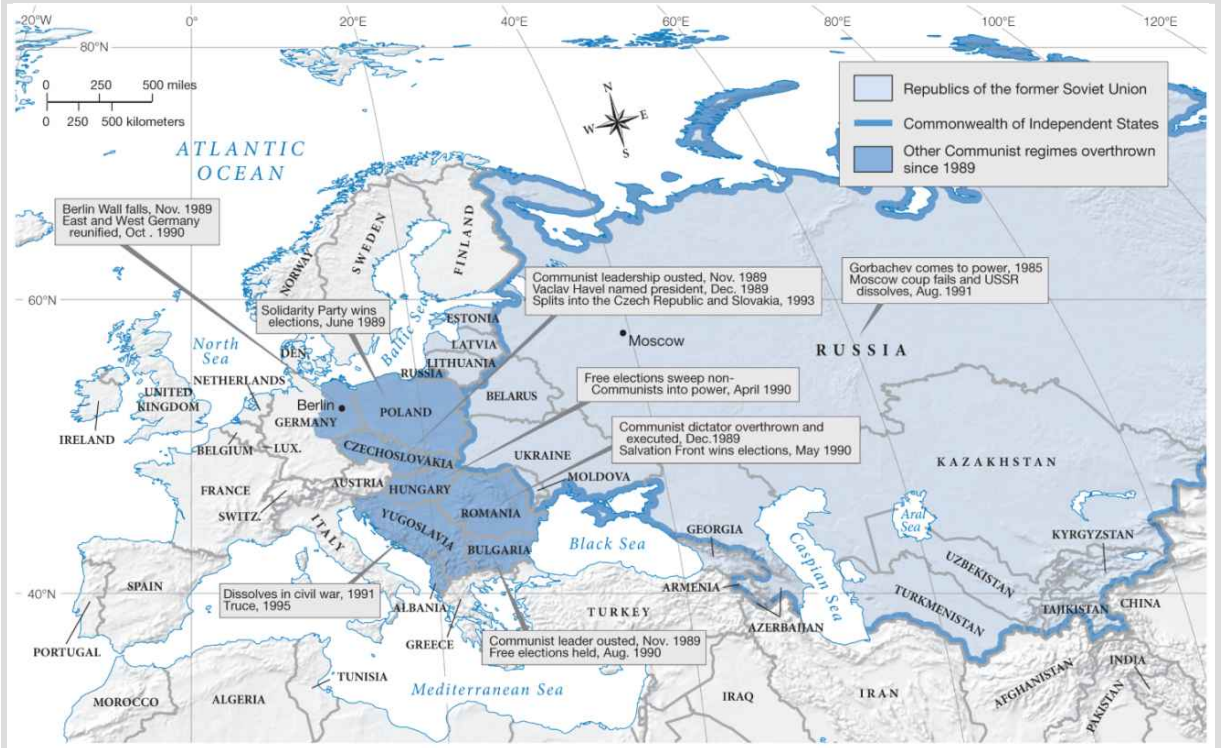
eliminated all short- and medium-range missiles from Europe and provided for on-site inspection for the first time. It was also the first time that either nation had agreed to eliminate weapons already in place.

Beginning his presidency with a harsh posture toward the Soviet Union and a huge military buildup, Reagan left office having moved the two superpowers to the highest level of cooperation since the Cold War began. Reagan's national security adviser, Colin L. Powell, reflected in 1988, "Up until now, as a soldier, my mission had been to confront, contain, and, if necessary, combat communism. Now I had to think about a world without a Cold War."

Powell's sense that Gorbachev's policies would transform the Cold War became a reality more quickly than anyone anticipated. In 1988, Gorbachev further reduced tensions by announcing a gradual withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Soviet equivalent of America's Vietnam. In addition, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Cuba agreed on a political settlement of the civil war in Angola. In the Middle East, both superpowers supported a cease-fire and peace talks in the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq.

Within three years, the Cold War that had defined the world for nearly half a century would be history. In 1989, the progressive forces that Gorbachev had encouraged in the

Communist world swept through Eastern Europe, where popular uprisings demanded an end to authoritarian states and inefficient economic bureaucracies. Communist governments toppled like dominoes (**Map 30.2**), virtually without bloodshed, Gorbachev refusing to prop them up with Soviet armies. East Germany opened its border with West Germany, and in November 1989, ecstatic Germans danced on the Berlin Wall.



Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 8e, Value Edition © 2020 Bedford/St. Martin's

MAP 30.2 Events in Eastern Europe, 1985–1995

The overthrow of Communist governments throughout Eastern Europe and the splintering of the Soviet Union into more than a dozen separate nations were among the most momentous developments in world history in the twentieth century.

Description
“The map shows the following data:

Republics of the former Soviet Union: Russia (Gorbachev comes to power, 1985; Moscow coup fails and USSR dissolves, August 1991); Kazakhstan; Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan; Tajikistan; Kyrgyzstan; Latvia; Estonia; Lithuania; Belarus; Moldova; Georgia; Armenia; and Azerbaijan.

Commonwealth of Independent States: The borders of Russia and further south along Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. It also included Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

Other Communist regimes overthrown since 1989: Poland (Solidarity Party wins elections, June 1989); East Germany (Berlin Wall falls, November 1989; East and West Germany reunited, October 1990); Czechoslovakia (Communist leadership ousted, November 1989; Vaclav Havel named president, December 1989; Splits into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, 1993); Hungary (Free elections sweep non- Communists into power, April 1990); Romania (Communist dictator overthrown and executed, December1989; Salvation Front wins elections, May 1990); Bulgaria (Communist leader ousted, November 1989; Free elections held, August 1990); Yugoslavia (Dissolves in civil war, 1991; Truce, 1995).”

Unification of East and West Germany was accomplished in 1990. Soon Poland, Hungary, and other former iron curtain countries lined up to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Eight former Soviet satellites joined the European Union and the common economic market. Inspired by the liberation of Eastern Europe, republics within the Soviet Union soon established their own independence.

With nothing left to govern, Gorbachev resigned. The Soviet Union itself dissolved in 1991, and with it, the Cold War conflict that had governed U.S. foreign policy for decades.

A “New World Order”

President George H. W. Bush, elected in 1988 after serving eight years as Reagan’s vice president, cheered the dramatic events that ended the Cold War as a victory for the United States. The contest between the free and Communist worlds, it appeared, was finally settled. Bush declared the dawn of a “new world order,” while Democrats called for a “peace dividend,” arguing that the nation could now cut back on its defense spending. But ongoing turmoil in Latin America and the Middle East, along with a new war in the Persian Gulf, dashed hopes that an era of democracy and world peace was at hand.

The United States emerged from the Cold War as the sole superpower at a moment when liberalizing tides seemed to be sweeping the globe. In the early 1990s, democracy came not just to Eastern Europe but also to South Africa, where apartheid was finally defeated. In 1994, voters elected the country’s first black president, Nelson Mandela.

Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, joked that he was “running out of villains. I’m down to Castro and Kim

Il-sung," referring to the leaders of Cuba and North Korea. Both were still Communist dictatorships, with the latter committed to developing nuclear weapons. China too remained a Communist regime, and in 1989, when thousands of pro-democracy students demonstrated in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, the government responded with a brutal crackdown. Chinese soldiers killed hundreds of protesters, and some ten thousand reformers were arrested.

As American leaders would learn, the end of the Cold War brought new instabilities even as old threats receded. In 1990, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) treaty, which cut about 30 percent of each superpower's nuclear arsenal. In 1996, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a total nuclear test ban treaty. Yet India and Pakistan, hostile neighbors, refused to sign the treaty, and both exploded atomic devices in 1998. The Republican-controlled U.S. Senate defeated ratification of the treaty. "The post–Cold War world is decidedly not post-nuclear," declared one U.S. official. The potential for rogue nations and terrorist groups to develop nuclear weapons posed an ongoing threat.

War in Central America and the Persian Gulf

The United States in the Bush years did not hesitate to exercise its military power near its borders. In Central America, U.S. officials had supported Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, an anti-Communist. But in 1989, Noriega was indicted for drug trafficking, and his troops killed an American Marine, leading Bush to order twenty-five thousand military personnel into Panama (see Map 30.1) to capture him. U.S. forces quickly overcame Noriega's troops, at the cost of killing hundreds of Panamanians, including many civilians. Both the United Nations and the Organization of American States condemned the unilateral action by the United States.

Bush's second military engagement, by contrast, rested solidly on international approval. Viewing Iran as America's major enemy in the Middle East, U.S. officials had quietly assisted the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 until its end in 1988. In 1990, struggling with an enormous war debt, Hussein invaded the small country of Kuwait, moving his troops near the Saudi Arabian border. Faced with this threat to the world's largest oil reserves, President Bush ordered a massive military mobilization and assembled an international coalition to stand up to Iraq. Although he invoked principles of national self-determination and international law, access to Middle Eastern oil was also a key concern.

Reflecting the easing of Cold War tensions, the Soviet Union supported a UN embargo on Iraqi oil and authorization for using force if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait by January 15, 1991. By then, the United States had deployed more than 400,000 soldiers to Saudi Arabia, joined by 265,000 troops from two dozen other nations, including several Arab states. “The community of nations has resolutely gathered to condemn and repel lawless aggression,” Bush announced. “With few exceptions, the world now stands as one.”

When the UN-imposed deadline for Iraqi withdrawal expired, Bush asked Congress to approve war. After a three-day debate, Congress gave its authorization, and U.S. forces led a forty-day bombing campaign against Iraqi military targets, power plants, oil refineries, and transportation networks. The coalition then stormed into Kuwait, forcing Iraqi troops to withdraw, although without deposing Hussein. Instead, U.S. leadership extracted a pledge from him not to rearm or develop weapons of mass destruction and to accept a system of UN inspections.

“By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all,” President Bush exulted when the fighting ended. Most Americans found no moral ambiguity in the **Persian Gulf War** and took pride in their country’s display of military prowess. With the United States steering a coalition in which

Arab nations fought beside their former colonial rulers, the war also seemed to signal a new phase of American global leadership.

Israel, which had endured Iraqi missile attacks, was more secure after the Gulf War, but the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued to boil. Despite military losses, Hussein remained in power in Iraq and turned his war machine on Iraqi Kurds and Shiite Muslims, whom the United States had encouraged to rebel. Hussein also found ways to conceal arms from UN inspectors, ultimately throwing them out altogether in 1998. And the decision to keep U.S. troops based in Saudi Arabia, the holy land of Islam, fueled the hatred and determination of Muslim extremists like Osama bin Laden. The “new world order” appeared to usher in not order but rather global instability.

REVIEW

How did George H. W. Bush respond to threats to U.S. interests as the Cold War came to an end?