

face. The analysis presented in this volume only calls for deeper exploration of the post-Nazarbayev epoch.

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Beth A. Fischer, *The Myth of Triumphalism: Rethinking President Reagan's Cold War Legacy*. University Press of Kentucky, 2020.

As its title suggests, *The Myth of Triumphalism* aims to deconstruct the view that the Cold War ended thanks to the bold and proactive policies of the Reagan Administration. Beth Fischer addresses her invectives to so-called “triumphalists,” i.e., scholars and political pundits like Peter Schweizer, Francis Fukuyama, Jay Winik, Paul Lettow, and Francis Marlo among others, who, in the author’s opinion, mistakenly argued the Soviet Union collapsed due to President Reagan’s hawkish policies, unprecedented military buildup, aggressive political rhetoric, and refusal to negotiate with America’s ideological enemy.

Fischer maintains it is a “flawed logic” to presume the Soviets disarmed simply because this was the primary aim of the Reagan administration. To prove triumphalists wrong, the author proposes to take a deeper look into the Soviet decision-making process. The opening of Soviet archives, as well as subsequent publication of interviews and memoirs written by Mikhail Gorbachev’s advisors, provided students of the Cold War with additional primary sources and first-hand data. Combined, they prompted Fischer to reassess some traditional views on the impact that President Reagan’s policies had had on the Soviet domestic developments.

Fischer presents her arguments in six chapters. The first three debunk the conventional view that President Reagan constantly employed only hardline policies toward the Evil Empire. Fischer opposes the claim that his administration decided to launch a military build-up so as to entice the Soviet leaders into an expensive arms race. In fact, she argues, Reagan’s advisors had no intention to

bankrupt the Soviet economy and focused solely on the reduction of nuclear arms.

In the second part of her study Fischer analyzes Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of "New Thinking" and its impact on the Soviet Union's decision to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. The author yet again advances the thesis (which she never tires of repeating, chapter after chapter) that Reagan's bold policies had *no* substantial impact on the reformers in Moscow. The author maintains that Gorbachev decided to decrease defense expenditures and invest in consumer goods and technology purely out of interest to modernize the Soviet Union, not because he was unnecessarily pressured by the Americans.

Beth Fischer has done a commendable job detailing the views of Reagan's inner circle of advisors. Based on the study of primary sources, Fischer narrates a rather intriguing and to a large extent unknown story of "schoolboy scuffles" and "turf battles" within Reagan's inner circle, his foreign policy team comprised of representatives of the White House, the State Department, the National Security Council, the Defense Department, and the CIA. She portrays their passionate debates over policy directions, but does not fully explain who played the crucial role in ensuring the Reagan Administration adopt the "peace through strength" policy.

Still, having accused triumphalists of far-reaching simplifications, Beth Fischer demonstrates a considerable number of her own. Surprisingly, the author does not put Reagan's foreign policy debates into broader geopolitical context and never mentions his productive alliance with British PM Margaret Thatcher, who played a pivotal role in preserving the American-British unity that proved so effective in making the Soviets concede.

The author's promise to provide convincing new arguments against the triumphalists also remains unfulfilled. Although Fischer planned to draw original conclusions based on the analysis of previously unstudied Russian sources, she ended up largely relying on the already available Western academic literature. Her analysis of Gorbachev's reform also sounds unnecessarily optimistic, particularly when the author hails the "boldness" of Gorbachev's foreign policy advisors Alexander Yakovlev, Georgy Arbatov, Yevgeny

Velikov, and Anatoly Chernyaev. Fischer does not take into consideration that members of the Gorbachev foreign policy team were the flesh and blood of the traditional Communist Party apparatus. It would suffice to mention that one of the “reformers,” Georgy Arbatov, began his career as a Communist Party apparatchik and enjoyed strong professional relations with the KGB chief Yuriy Andropov, while the other, Anatoly Chernayev, joined the CPSU Central Committee as early as in 1953 and loyally served the system until his appointment as Gorbachev’s foreign policy advisor in 1986.

Not a historian by training, Fischer manages to squeeze the most fascinating story of the Soviet Union’s collapse into an unremarkable twenty-five pages. Having embarked on the herculean task of identifying the reasons for the Soviet Union’s demise, the author ends up writing a disappointingly perfunctory narrative that offers zero economic data to provide her readers with an idea of the real costs of the Soviet Afghan military gamble and its growing toll on the Soviet economy. Per Fischer’s account, the decision to leave Afghanistan happened almost overnight by the wave of a magic wand: “A reform movement had been growing in the USSR since the 1950s. When reformers finally came to power in 1985 they embarked on a program to revitalize the Soviet system, which included reducing defense expenditures” (p. 99). The author never mentions the effectiveness of various CIA activities that precipitated the Soviet Union’s demise—ranging from pro-active public diplomacy campaigns to off-set the Soviet propaganda to support of the Solidarity movement in Poland (studied by Seth G. Jones in *A Covert Action: Reagan, the CIA and the Cold War Struggle in Poland* (2018)), to CIA Director William Casey’s negotiations with the Saudi Arabian leadership in 1986 in an attempt to make them decrease global oil prices and bring the Soviet Union’s economy to the brink of financial crisis.

Fischer’s concluding chapter attempts to convince her readers that President Reagan prioritized cooperation and dialogue with the Soviets to bring about reform and disarmament. His administration never sought regime change and believed that diplomatic efforts would suffice to make the Soviets disarm.

Beth Fischer’s book is disappointing not only due to its superficial and one-sided rhetoric, but also due to the author’s readiness

to re-apply her deconstructivist arguments about President Reagan's "triumphalist diplomacy" to Washington's present-day policies vis-à-vis the Kremlin. The increasingly revanchist and revisionist Russia sends its "peacekeeping missions" to independent Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine just like its predecessor, the Soviet Union, sent its forces to preserve communist peace and stability in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Following Fischer's arguments, it is completely unnecessary to carry a big stick when talking to Russia, as all previous attempts to push the Kremlin to reform, to observe human rights, and to respect the territorial integrity of its neighbors had proved counterproductive.

The lessons of the Reagan Administration convincingly demonstrate that diplomacy alone could not work. As President Theodore Roosevelt once put it, "a big stick" and "decisive action" were also needed. Paradoxically, Beth Fischer's study only makes its readers support "triumphalists" even more and conclude that her attempts at their demystification have largely failed.

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Victoria Donovan, *Chronicles in Stone: Preservation, Patriotism, and Identity in Northwest Russia*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2019.

The ancient cities of Novgorod, Pskov, and Vologda are dubbed the birthplaces of Russia, yet Western scholars have rarely researched them. Victoria Donovan looks at their "onion-domed churches, kremlin walls, and austere monasteries" as "chronicles in stone" (3). She discusses how the past that they encapsulate was read, interpreted, and exploited between World War II and today. She continues the traditions in modern research on architectural heritage preservation in Soviet Moscow and Leningrad established by