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Norman A. Graebner, Richard Dean Burns, Joseph M. Siracusa Ph.D.

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This work is a contemporary chronicle of the Cold War and offers an analysis of policy and rhetoric of the United States and Soviet Union during the 1980s. The authors examine the assumptions that drove political decisions and the rhetoric that defined the relationship as the Soviet Union began to implode.

This work demonstrates that while the subsequent unraveling of the Soviet empire was an unintended side effect of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, termination of the Cold War was not. Ronald Reagan deserves full credit for recognizing Gorbachev's sincerity and his determination to change the direction of Soviet policies. For this, Reagan felt the full wrath of anticommunist hawks for doing business with a communist leader. But it was Gorbachev who concluded the superpowers had become mesmerized by ideological myths which ruled out any meaningful discussions of a possible accommodation of political issues for more than four decades. The evidence is compelling that Gorbachev himself broke the Cold War's ideological straight jacket that had paralyzed Moscow and Washington's ability to resolve their differences. Though politically weakened, Gorbachev conceded nothing to U.S. military superiority. Never did he negotiate from a position of weakness. In doing so, the last Soviet leader faced even greater political and physical risk. Without Gorbachev the end of the Cold War could have played out very differently and perhaps with great danger.

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