

## Reagan Revisited

By MARY CLAIRE KENDALL

**Reagan's Secret War: The Untold Story of His Fight to Save the World From Nuclear Disaster** by Martin and Annelise Anderson; The Crown Publishing Group, [www.crownpublishing.com](http://www.crownpublishing.com), or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). List price is \$32.50; 480 pages.

A.C. Lyles, longtime Paramount producer and close Reagan friend, recently commented to me that he thought President Ronald Reagan's legacy was becoming much greater as time went by.

That the end of Reagan's presidency coincided with the Cold War's denouement, and we are only now appreciating the integral role Reagan played in this dramatically unfolding history, is, perhaps, the biggest reason why.

Far from the "amiable dunce," as his detractors painted him, Reagan was a strategic genius who belongs on Mount Rushmore.

*Reagan's Secret War: The Untold Story of His Fight to Save the World From Nuclear Disaster* by Martin and Annelise Anderson explains why.

Their book, full of previously classified documents, sets forth

exactly how Reagan proceeded to meet the central challenge of his presidency — ending the Cold War that threatened civilization through a nuclear holocaust.

The threat had enveloped the world since the United States dropped the A-bomb on Hiroshima to end World War II, and the Soviets rebuffed President Dwight Eisenhower's vision of destroying these pernicious weapons, setting in motion a fierce nuclear arms race.

Reagan's own desire in this regard was galvanized while serving during World War II in a unit making training films. His review of films showing the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps no doubt made a deep impression. As he wrote in *Where's the Rest of Me?*, once his rosy assumptions about the war's effects were displaced by the reality of a world "almost the same and perhaps a little worse," he decided to use his talents to "try and bring about the regeneration of the world."

Reagan, unlike so many, was more than talk. Gradually, as a film actor, television and radio personality, governor of California, and eventually president, he developed a firm resolve that the best way to deal with the no-win nuclear arms race was to find a way to stop it.

As former Sen. Sam Nunn writes, "If the world makes it to the nuclear-free mountaintop, we have President Reagan to thank for inspiring the climb."

While Reagan's vision of a nuclear free world is nothing new today — indeed it's President Barack Obama's vision, too — it was "stunning" when Reagan first publicly acknowledged it in response to a *New York Post* editor's question on March 23, 1982. "[W]e must go," he said, "at the matter of realistically reducing — if not totally eliminating the nuclear weapons — the threat to the world."

So stunning was Reagan's suggestion that few of his advisers paid much attention, perhaps considering it the product of an old

star conflating Hollywood's fantasy with geopolitical reality.

However, "During the latter part of 1982," write the Andersons, "Reagan's high-powered national security staff began taking him seriously. . . . Some were aghast; others argued with him. No one seemed to encourage him, except Pope John Paul II."

The friendship, support, and collaboration of the Pope and the president is a wondrous story — one that will not be fully revealed "for 50 or more years," when the Vatican declassifies John Paul II's letters to Reagan.

But, suffice it to say the friendship was extremely close. Indeed, former First Lady Nancy Reagan told Martin Anderson, John Paul II was Reagan's closest friend.

In 1981 alone, as Reagan was solidifying his foreign policy, the two exchanged about a dozen letters.

On January 11, 1982, Reagan sent another personal letter to John Paul II that decisively spelled out their collaborative vision, as excerpts of this previously classified National Security Council letter reveal:

"For the last several weeks, we have consulted closely on the events in Poland. . . . I would like to respond in this letter to another joint concern, the prevention of nuclear war.

"Your letter of November 25 and a Delegation from the Pontifical Academy of Sciences described eloquently your convictions about the nature of nuclear war and the necessity of preventing its outbreak. On December 15, Cardinal Casaroli and I had an excellent and thorough discussion of the subject. . . .

"I fully share your horror at the disastrous consequences of nuclear conflict, the 'last epidemic of mankind.' I am determined to prevent such a catastrophe. . . .

"May we both successfully carry out our responsibilities to mankind."

In carrying out his responsibilities, Reagan realized that American economic and military strength was needed to negotiate

with the Soviets from a position of strength; conversely, Soviet economic weakness, achieved by forcing them to spend money on arms buildup, would enhance our bargaining position. The strategic defense initiative (SDI or "Star Wars") was another key element since, Reagan reasoned, once nations disarmed they would need a defense against rogue nations who somehow acquired nuclear capability — a prescient stance, indeed.

By 1983, the American economic and military position revived, Reagan started to reach out to Soviet leaders to negotiate a reduction in nuclear arms.

"Reagan's idea," write the Andersons, "unique, as far as we know, was to marry the idea of missile defense with his vision of eliminating all nuclear weapons."

Yet, from the moment Reagan made his "Star Wars" speech on March 23, 1983, the Soviets insisted he drop SDI from any nuclear arms reduction agreement, even though Reagan offered to share technology with them so we would not have unfair strategic advantage. But the Soviets never bought the idea Reagan was increasing America's military arsenal only to reduce nuclear weapons.

Reagan held firm, though risking plummeting polls, which played out excruciatingly after he walked at the Reykjavik Summit when Mikhail Gorbachev refused to bend on SDI. Reagan would soon lose the Republican-controlled Senate, a weakness that caused him to realize even greater political damage as a result of the Iran-Contra scandal.

But, Reagan's firmness paid off. In early 1987, Gorbachev issued a statement, sans SDI reference, declaring he was ready to continue Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START).

On December 8, 1987, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the treaty was signed in Washington.

As the world looked on, few knew this crowning achievement was ultimately made possible by the close collaboration of Ronald Reagan and John Paul II.

"No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true Socialist."

Pius XI, *Quad. Anno* (1931)