



The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism

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Based on extraordinary research: a major reassessment of Ronald Reagan's lifelong crusade to dismantle the Soviet Empire—including shocking revelations about the liberal American politician who tried to collude with USSR to counter Reagan's efforts

Paul Kengor's God and Ronald Reagan made presidential historian Paul Kengor's name as one of the premier chroniclers of the life and career of the 40th president. Now, with *The Crusader*, Kengor returns with the one book about Reagan that has not been written: The story of his lifelong crusade against communism, and of his dogged—and ultimately triumphant—effort to overthrow the Soviet Union.

Drawing upon reams of newly declassified presidential papers, as well as untapped Soviet media archives and new interviews with key players, Kengor traces Reagan's efforts to target the Soviet Union from his days as governor of California to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of what he famously dubbed the "Evil Empire." The result is a major revision and enhancement of what historians are only beginning to realize: That Reagan not only wished for the collapse of communism, but had a deep and specific understanding of what it would take—and effected dozens of policy shifts that brought the USSR to its heels within a decade of his presidency.

The Crusader makes use of key sources from behind the Iron Curtain, including one key memo that implicates a major American liberal politician—still in office today—in a scheme to enlist Soviet premier Yuri Andropov to help defeat Reagan's 1984 reelection bid. Such new finds make *The Crusader* not just a work of extraordinary history, but a work of explosive revelation that will be debated as hotly in 2006 as Reagan's policies were in the 1980s.

The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism Details

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Ryan Splenda says

This is the first historical book that I've read on Ronald Reagan. I bought it about five years ago, and never got around to it. I finally decided to give it a go, and I was both concerned and surprised.

Although Paul Kengor presents a very partial view of the overall Reagan Administration, I can not argue with the historical evidence he used in trying to prove his thesis that Ronald Reagan ended the Cold War. There were very compelling points he made throughout the book, especially Reagan's use of economic warfare (SDI) that placed massive pressure on a failing Soviet economy.

I know that this book was entirely devoted to the Cold War, but I thought it was a poor decision by Kengor to only skim over the Iran/Contra Affair. Nevertheless, I must give him props for admitting that it was a massive stain on Reagan's legacy.

Overall, this book was better than I thought. It was thoroughly researched, and Kengor did a good job of proving his point. I definitely recommend this book to Reagan fans.

Donald Barnett says

Anyone that thinks the Soviet Union fell of it's own accord should read this. This book details the steps that were directed by Ronald Reagan to demolish communism in the Soviet Union and around the world. Our current president is the first one that should read this book. Will we ever have another president that understands what made America great?

Bojan Tunguz says

A few years back, I was having an argument with a (rather liberal) friend of mine about the collapse of European communism. We are both from Europe, but we grew up on different sides of the East-West divide. His was what I came to understand the conventional view of people on the left: the communism collapsed due to its internal contradictions, because it was not the "real" communism, and a string of similar sorts of nonsense. As with many other issues that we argued about, I could not have disagreed more. Indeed, communism had enough of the internal problems that its eventual demise was inevitable, however left to its own devices, the eventual collapse would surely taken many more years, or even decades if not longer to unravel, with incalculable cost in human misery that would have engendered. Those of us who have had the luck to avoid that misery are grateful for all the external pressures exercised on that political system that hastened its demise, in particular the pressure that United States has exercised during all those decades of the Cold War, culminating with the final strong push by president Ronald Reagan and his administration. This book is a valuable record of what motivated Reagan to see the communism for what it really was - an evil system bent on repressing its own citizens. The book documents Reagan's anti-communist stand from his earliest political days, all the way through his years in the office. It gives an invaluable event-by-event chronology of all the systematic and relentless effort that Reagan put into dismantling the communist

influence everywhere in the world that culminated in the final collapse of the Soviet Union and its many Eastern European satellite-states.

If there is one criticism that I would have against this book, it would be that it sometimes portrays Reagan too one-dimensionally. The reader gets the impression that anti-communism was the only motivator behind this great American president. Nevertheless, this is a great and extremely well researched book and it is extremely valuable to anyone with interest in either Ronald Reagan or the Cold War.

Sharolyn Griffith says

Well done, Kengor. Shows pointedly how Reagan really was the optimistic crusader against communism and believed the Soviet Union could fall. Loved the bookends about his lifeguarding on Rock River and how that confidence carried him through on such a "crusade." Great read.

Brian says

Paul Kengor's book is an interesting look at the Reagan legacy with regards to foreign policy. While a Reagan booster and fan of the president I think this book goes to far in asserting what Reagan knew about the downfall of the Soviet Union. Underscored in the Kengor's points is one key difference the Reagan often does not get enough credit for which is that Reagan was the first president who believed the Soviet Union could be defeated. To say however that he came in with a plan to destroy the evil empire is a little far fetched. Overall though Kengor's points are well illustrated and he ties together a thematic view of Ronald Reagan upon the lens of foreign policy. I think the reviewer who puts this between David McCullough and Sean Hannity has it in the exact right place for where it falls in the historical spectrum. While they are more detailed books on Reagan (see Richard Reeves) the are also ones that are unabashed praise which is a bad thing regardless of your political persuasion (see D'souza). For those who want to get a quick overview of Reagan's efforts in foreign policy this is a great place to start.

Hank Pharis says

We all know that Reagan called on Gorbachev to tear down the wall but I had no idea how Reagan had purposely worked for the overthrow of the Soviet Union for decades. He first announced this goal in 1967. He did amazing things that I had never heard about before. For example, he knew that the Soviet economy was struggling so he kept expanding our defense spending. At one point the U.S. was spending twice Russia's GDP on our defense. The Russians finally realized that there was no way they could keep up. Meanwhile Reagan secretly worked a deal with Saudi Arabia for them to flood the oil market. They just sold more and Russia lost one of their most important exports. Also when Reagan had the first SDI missile launched to prove it would work there was a beacon in the target that made our missile hit it. In other words, we duped the Russians into believing we had a SDI prototype. There are many remarkable stories here that I had previously missed.

(Note: I'm stingy with stars. For me 2 stars means a good book. 3 = Very good; 4 = Outstanding {only about 5% of the books I read merit this}; 5 = All time favorites {one of these may come along every 400-500 books})

Tyler says

This book details through thorough archival research and interviews the methods that the "Great Communicator" employed to undercut Communism from 1981-89. Having never read an entire book specifically about Reagan before, I am glad I learned about the inner workings of his administration and the ideas and persistence of the man himself.

Pegg says

Loved this story as it focused on just one aspect of Ronald Reagan on his presidency. The book is about his personal war against communism and the Soviet Union. Truly an inspiring read! Even if you were not a fan of Reagan, you can appreciate his dedication to what he felt was an egregious human rights violation.

The most shocking thing - to me - was the information about Ted Kennedy and his attempts to contact Yuri Andropov to help sway the American Presidential Election in 1984. Incredible. I'd never heard that before but Paul Kengor presented plenty of evidence from the Kremlin, no less.

If you're at all interested in the history of the Berlin Wall and its historic fall - this is a book for you!

Sean says

This is an enjoyable read and makes a strong case that Reagan was one of the greatest American presidents. However, it focuses primarily on Reagan's foreign policy exploits; so don't expect to find much detail about his economic policies.

Regardless, the foreign policy anecdotes are excellent. For example, in 1981 the French brought what was called the "Farewell Dossier" to the attention of U.S. intelligence agencies and Reagan's National Security Staff. A Soviet defector by the name of Colonel Vladimir Vetrov, who was the author of the dossier, wrote that approximately 100 spies throughout the West had infiltrated various government agencies and private corporations and were stealing key defense technology for the Soviets. In response, Reagan authorized U.S. intelligence agencies to leak faulty technology to the Soviets. In one particularly successful instance, the Soviets were leaked faulty computer software, which they in turn used to run their new Siberian gas pipeline. Unbeknownst to them, the software was programmed to initially pass Soviet quality-control tests, until a hidden program within the software eventually instructed the pumps and valves to produce pressure beyond capacity, which in turn caused the pipeline to explode. According to the book, it was "the most monumental non-nuclear explosion and fire ever seen from space."

Needless to say, I hate the Soviets, so this story put a smile on my face.

Jeff says

To all who feel Ronald Reagan was a sweet talking, below average intelligent dolt whose only role in ending the Cold War was simply being in the right place at the right time, read this book! You are wrong! Through meticulous and broad research using dozens of recently declassified documents from both the Americans and Soviets as well as in- depth interviews with key players on both sides, this book proves that Ronald Reagan's hand in ending the Cold War was not only guided by his own intelligence and determination, but that the Cold War would simply not have ended when it did if it wasn't for Reagan. Again, I can't say enough about the solid research that bolsters Kengor's argument. He goes right to the source and gives you a front row seat in the White House and Kremlin themselves during the Cold War and allows you to witness first hand the very real war that was being waged between freedom and oppression. Kengor also discusses the critics of Reagan in several of the chapters, going right to their main arguments and elaborating on either how they have come to their conclusions through misinterpretation of evidence or how their interpretations were formed simply with a lack of available evidence at the time (like I said, many of these documents have only been declassified within the last few years). Perhaps the greatest declassified document included is actually included in its entirety in the appendix, and it is a letter from then Senator Ted Kennedy to the Soviets in 1984 concerning his and the Democrats' disgust with Reagan's "warmongering" and "crazy tactics" and their desire to get a more "moderate" candidate elected who is more effective at working with the Soviets. I couldn't believe it. The verdict of history has clearly established the winners and losers of the political debates of the 1980s. In short, Ronald Reagan defeated an enemy, Communism, that was responsible for more deaths than both World Wars combined without so much as a single military engagement.

RECOMMENDED FOR:

1. People who want to be inspired and motivated by a man's crusade to spread the fruits of freedom to the oppressed of the world.
 2. OR anyone who believes Reagan's legacy is a myth and he was simply a charismatic dolt who was unintelligent and largely not responsible for the successful policies of his advisors.
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Natalie says

This is an excellent book. Ronald Reagan was an amazing leader with such a clear mission. He had vision of what the world could be and he never wavered in his actions in accomplishing this. He truly has been one of the best leaders this country and the world for that matter has ever seen. Anyone interested in learning about what Reagan accomplished should read this book. In fact, I would go so far as recommending this book to anyone. It is an important part of our history that needs to be remembered. We need a generation to rise up with the fortitude of Ronald Reagan.

Don says

Great Read from my Son!

Kent says

Excellent, easy read which describes how Reagan proactively went after the Soviet Communists early in his administration. The book tells a lot of what went on behind the scenes during the 80s, most of which no one ever realized or discussed since it was secret. Important book.

Cliff says

Paul Kengor, a professor at Grove City College, has written a number of books, and I've enjoyed each one of them. He's excellent at writing biographic sketches of people, backed by good academic work, but doing an excellent job of discussing the actual person, as a person, and what made them tick. This is his best book yet, because his scholarship is just getting stronger and more thorough, and he's getting better and better at weaving it in to his personal biographic sketches.

This one is heavy on the "what" and the "how" and then explaining "why" as part of the fabric of the story. He does the most thorough job of explaining what Reagan's foreign policy was, and how he went about doing it, that I've read up to this point, including in many books written by people that were closer to him at the time. Part of this is because there have been a lot of declassified documents, both in the US and in the USSR and its client states, but part of it is just because Kengor is better at weaving these themes together in a seamless narrative.

Bottom line is this book is a real winner. Anyone interested in foreign policy of the Reagan Presidency, or any facet thereof, would benefit greatly from reading this book.

Jeffrey says

I just finished this one. It was so amazing. I only thought Reagan was my hero before. He is firmly my favorite president in the history of our nation. Only Washington and Lincoln equal him in true greatness, But for me Reagan eclipses them. He was MY president. I wish I had been old enough to vote for him.

Well, about the book...

Kengor creates a cohesive and meticulously documented portrait of a perceptive and purposeful Cold Warrior who never had any foreign policy goal other than the destruction of communist totalitarianism and the expansion of freedom around the world. Kengor clearly shows a philosophical consistency from Reagan's days as president of SAG to his last years of lucidity (pre-Alzheimer's).

Anyone that really wants to understand how America won the Cold War should read this fantastic book.
