**Think Piece Assignment #1: MONOGRAPHS (BOOKS)**

Below you will find excerpts from the conclusions of monographs that were written from deliberately opposing perspectives: *Victory: The Reagan Administration’s Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union,* and *Gorbachev’s Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War.* In your Think Piece, please compare and contrast the different perspectives on what led to the break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. As you compare these two excerpts, describe how each author sees which country’s policies were more important to the dynamic changes in world politics. What did the Reagan Administration do? How did Gorbachev and the Soviet leaders respond? Or did they act for other reasons?

Peter Schweitzer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration’s Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union,* 2016.

Recent scholarship proves that US President Ronald Reagan had a very clear understanding of American foreign policy and had already outlined, in his own mind, long before entering office, the direction in which he would ultimately lead his country. Unsurprisingly, his foreign policy thinking mirrors closely the thought of a number of conservative strategists who shared his ideological perspective. His writings also reveal that, contrary to the claims of some, his views on foreign policy did not change appreciably, nor did Reagan feel any need to side with either the “pragmatists” or the “Reaganauts.” Rather, Reagan pursued the course that he believed to be fight, based on his own beliefs and foreign policy goals. While recognizing the need for making pragmatic tradeoffs in foreign affairs, he never allowed such tradeoffs to moderate his determination to achieve his key goals. . .

The Soviet Union did not collapse by osmosis, nor because time was somehow on our side. Had the Kremlin not faced the cumulative effects of Reagan’s Strategic Defense initiative and the defense buildup, geopolitical setbacks in Poland and Afghanistan, the loss of tens of billions of dollars in hard currency earnings form energy imports, and reduced access to technology (all Reagan actions), it is reasonable to believe that it could have weathered the storm. Soviet communism was not an organism doomed to self-destruct in any international environment.

The early Reagan era marked the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union. Although the vital signals at the time did not indicate that death was approaching, the period brought unprecedented stress to an already ill body. It was forced to expend precious lifeblood to run a race against a more athletic foe. The Reagan administration provided covert aid to rebels in Poland and Afghanistan to roll back Soviet power. It undermined the Soviet economy and its dwindling resource base and subverted the Kremlin’s hold on its global empire. These actions led directly to the end of the Cold War.

Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*, 2008.

The radically transformed Soviet foreign policy during the Gorbachev years was an integral part of an ambitious project of internal democratic reform leading to a historic opening of Soviet society to the outside world. It was deliberate behind-the-scenes decisions that led to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the break-up of the Warsaw Pact and the eventually to the demise of the Soviet Union itself and the end of the Cold War.

This argument stands in contrast to a rather simplistic explanation that the unexpected ending of decades of ideological and military confrontation between East and West is reduced to one dimension – the determination of the Western hard-liners. Having rejected the pacification course advocated by naïve promoters of *détente*, as well as ‘realists’ to re-educate communist leaders according to standards of Western civilization, they chose to wear out the Soviet totalitarian system by imposing on it the unbearable arms race and in this way compel it to capitulation. Those who award the prize for bringing about the downfall of the communist project in the USSR exclusively to Western actors tend to present the Soviet colossus merely as an object to be manipulated by alternative versions of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ American power.

What had once been an “arms wrestling” contest between the two superpowers had escalated into a quest for strategic domination via a monstrous arms race that had become a major threat for the whole of humankind. This is why all responsible politicians had to regard ending of the Cold War as their first priority. It is this assumption that led the conception of the ‘new political thinking’ soon to be followed by unprecedented practical initiatives by the Soviet leadership under Gorbachev. The extraordinary political moves, the proposals for unexpected compromise, the unilateral gestures and concessions all would have been inconceivable in the framework of the traditional logic of superpower confrontation. The authors of the new Soviet foreign policy had followed the criteria of the common sense and universal norms of human morality. . .

Gorbachev believed that once they had proclaimed themselves to be new partners of the West in the quest for peace and stability, their former adversaries would eagerly accept Soviet pledges at face value and would adapt their own policies in a practical way. They hoped that once relieved of the fear of the Soviet threat, the West not only would resist the temptation to profit strategically from the transition crisis of post-communist society, in also would meet them halfway in a common effort to remodel international relations along the lines of their project.