**Ronald Reagan's unyielding style won the Cold War**

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In the 20 years since the fall of the [Berlin Wall](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Berlin+Wall), the collapse of the [Soviet Union](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/U.S.S.R.)is viewed by some commentators as the result of systemic weakness. While it is true that the free nations of the West had significant economic, social and political advantages, the reality is that any existential struggle comes down to two things: the capacity to fight and the will to keep fighting.

Before [Ronald Reagan](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Ronald+Reagan) came along, the West was dangerously close to losing its will. The Soviet Union was on the march, while the [United States](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/United+States) continued to deal with the repercussions of internal political scandals and the pullout from[South Vietnam](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Vietnam). Soviet leaders were flush with confidence; in the West many of the so-called foreign policy establishment accepted the doctrines of moral equivalence and inevitable coexistence.

Reagan always understood the basic fact of the Cold War - that when two victorious armies met in [Germany](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Germany) in 1945, one wanted to go home and leave the people it had liberated in freedom, and the other stayed and occupied and oppressed [Eastern Europe](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Eastern+Europe). It was a war only one side chose.

To win the Cold War, the West had to rediscover its confidence. It had to be galvanized around not just the idea of freedom, but the principle that every person in the world has a right to be free.

Reagan understood this truth and made it his purpose to communicate it to the world. Where others equivocated, Reagan was direct and unyielding, calling the Soviet Union the Evil Empire and standing at the [Brandenburg Gate](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Brandenburg+Gate) and demanding, "[Mr. Gorbachev](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Mikhail+Gorbachev), tear down this wall!"

Reagan understood the necessity of negotiating from strength and the critical importance of leverage. In contrast to much of today's diplomatic posturing, Reagan backed his words with action. Reagan knew a strong national defense was essential to deterring Soviet ambitions, but he had inherited a military weakened by years of neglect.

"History teaches," Reagan told the nation, "that wars begin when governments believe the price of aggression is cheap." He convinced the nation it was time to rebuild.

The Soviets quickly learned not to underestimate Reagan. In 1986, Gorbachev tried to use the international pressure for successful arms reduction talks to get Reagan to abandon the countermissile program. At the end of what had been successful talks, Gorbachev surprisingly said that he would not agree to any of the terms unless President Reagan was willing to abandon the Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI, known as "Star Wars."

Reagan refused. He hated the doctrine of "mutually assured destruction," saying once, it's "like two cowboys in a frontier saloon aiming their guns at each other's head - permanently." He got up and walked out, to tremendous criticism.

A lesser man, a lesser President wouldhave stepped back in the face of thecriticism. But Reagan didn't budge. Afew months later, Gorbachev came back, agreed to every one of the terms that Reagan had imposed on him and left outthe condition on SDI. And I believe inthat act alone the Cold War was won. Ittook us a few years to realize it was won,but it was won by Reagan's willingness to stick to his principles.

In history, nothing is inevitable. Great events - good and bad, noble and tragic - are the results of individuals who exert every ounce of their strength to change the world.

Reagan is one such person, one of history's causers, and a force for good in the world. Had he never been born, the great good that he wrought might never have happened. And most certainly, it would have taken much longer with much more damage and pain for the oppressed. And the world would be a sadder, poorer place.

But his greatest achievement, and the one that surely made him one of the great Presidents of his century, is the way in which he liberated - literally from slavery - millions and millions of people outside of the United States, and therefore helped to produce a world that is safer for Americans and for everyone else, as well.

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