



Did America learn to stop worrying and love the bomb?

An examination of the American public's response to nuclear war in newspapers and popular culture, from the Cuban Missile Crisis to *The Day After*

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Nature of Sources	6
Structure of the Thesis	8
Literature Report	9
Broad look at the Historiography of Public Perceptions to Nuclear War	9
Historiography of Specific Events	12
The Cuban Missile Crisis.....	12
Détente	14
<i>The Day After</i> and the Early Nineteen-Eighties.....	15
Gaps in Historiography	18
Conclusions Regarding the Historiographical Debate	19
Chapter 1 – On the Brink: The Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1960s	20
Newspapers Before the Crisis	21
Newspapers During and in the Aftermath of the Crisis	24
Newspapers in the Years Following the Crisis	28
Public Opinion Comparison	30
Popular Culture	32
Conclusion	36
Chapter 2: The Rise and Fall of Détente: The 1970s	38
Newspapers	39
1973 Washington Summit	39
1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe	42
1979 SALT II Summit, Vienna.....	45
Public Opinion Comparison	48
Popular Culture	49
Conclusion	54
Chapter 3: Turning Point? The Day After and the 1980s	56
Newspapers Before <i>The Day After</i>	57
Newspapers on <i>The Day After</i>	60
Influence of <i>The Day After</i> on the Public	62
Further Popular Culture	66
Pubic Opinion Comparison	69
Chapter 4: Did America Learn to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb?	
Comparisons and Conclusions	72
Overall Comparisons	72
Place in the Historiography	73
Bibliography	76
Chapter One: Primary	76
Newspapers.....	76
Popular Culture	77
Chapter Two: Primary	78
Newspapers.....	78
Popular Culture	79
Chapter Three: Primary	80
Newspapers.....	80
Popular Culture	81
Secondary: All Three Chapters	82

Introduction

“Deterrence is the art of producing, in the mind of the enemy, the fear to attack”.¹

Dr Strangelove

Dr Strangelove: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb is one of history’s most iconic films and seen by many as the greatest political satire of all time. Yet did millions of ordinary Americans learn to love the bomb? And to what extent did popular culture and the media play a role in forming public opinion on nuclear weapons? Many see the nuclear arms race of the Cold War as a period characterised by fear and panic about nuclear annihilation, but was this actually the case? Throughout the Cold War the public perception of nuclear weapons fluctuated significantly during various points of the conflict. This thesis concentrates on key events throughout the Cold War in order to track the development of nuclear weapons and their reception by the American public. Focussing firstly on Cuba in 1962, then on Détente throughout the 1970s, followed finally by the airing of the TV-movie *The Day After* in 1983. The aim of the thesis is to use these events to track the reception of nuclear weapons by the American public throughout this roughly twenty-year period. The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and the Able Archer Crisis (1983) are seen as the two most dangerous moments of the Cold War, this thesis will track the development of public opinion between and including these two events.

In the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) a new military doctrine began to emerge, one based on the idea of Mutually Assured Destruction. This doctrine, appropriately abbreviated to MAD, was based on the notion that both the United States and the Soviet Union had enough nuclear weaponry to entirely destroy each other and the world; hence, the assumption was that if no one could be sure of surviving a nuclear war, then a nuclear war would not take place. It hinged on the fact that neither country could have first-strike capabilities; the ability to wipe out the enemies nuclear arsenal in one strike and prevent a retaliatory strike. Consequently, in a war that could have turned hot, it was the fear of such a war that enabled it to never take place.² This study will also establish whether any of the events or MAD itself contributed to a change in public opinion.

¹ Frank Sauer, *Atomic Anxiety: Deterrence, Taboo and the US Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons*,

² John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War; A New History*, (London: Penguin group, 2005), 80-81.

The thesis concentrates on the key events of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Détente and the TV-Movie *The Day After*. Not only are the events three key points in the nuclear arms race, but also by focusing on case studies the research was more manageable due to its narrowed focus. Furthermore, it helped to develop a coherent narrative of the American perception of nuclear weapons and the Cold War in general, highlighting times which saw an obvious change or times in which the research differs to the current accepted norm.

What the research examines throughout the thesis is how certain events were perceived in the wider American community. MAD meant that both the US and USSR had enormous nuclear capabilities and major cities would be the target rather than strategic military points. Therefore, did America learn to stop worrying about the bomb? What was the attitude of ordinary Americans to nuclear weapons throughout the Cold War? To what extent was the attitude altered by specific events? Were newspapers and popular culture gloomy in their outlook on nuclear weapons? And to what extent did newspapers and popular culture influence public opinion?

The public perception of Détente is an area that has had a limited amount of attention in historiography. Yet it is an important period in the history of the Cold War and had it been more successful, it could have possibly resulted in an earlier end to the conflict. Therefore, how did newspapers and the public respond to the attempts from both sides to improve US-Soviet relations? Did it lead to a decrease in nuclear anxiety? And what role did the public perception of Détente play in its failure?

In 1983, American network ABC produced a TV-Movie called *The Day After*, which depicts a nuclear war between the US and USSR and its affects on the residents of Kansas. The movie was watched by over one hundred million people on its initial broadcast and seems to have had profound influence upon American President Ronald Reagan. Consequently, *The Day After* and other portrayals such as *Testament* (1983) have been studied in order to examine their influence.

Methodology

When conducting the research, it was necessary to take a number of things into account in order to ascertain the relevance of each source. When studying primary sources and more specifically the films and novels, a series of questions have been asked in order to work out the relevance. What year was it made? Who created it?

What does the source tell about the perception of nuclear weapons? Did the creator have a particular message they were trying to convey? And the influence and historical importance of the film or novel, was it successful in conveying its message? Was it financially successful in terms of box-office returns or number of readers? And, therefore, was it influential in the way that nuclear weapons were perceived? By answering all the questions with the aid of secondary literature, this thesis has been able to ascertain which popular-culture sources would be the most relevant when investigating the public perception of nuclear weapons. Throughout the research a number of theoretical books regarding how to use film and novels as historical sources have been used, such as *Using Film as a Source* by Sian Barber.³

When using newspapers, a similar series of questions needed to be asked. Who is the author? What is their political leaning? What is their newspaper's political leaning? What message are they trying to convey? Are they successful in conveying that message? And would the article have reached a wide audience? Was it printed in a mainstream or fringe newspaper? By studying newspapers, this thesis has been able to trace the changing perception of a series of publications for the duration of the Cold War. Difficulties have arisen when searching for relevant articles, as there is a wealth of articles on the Cold War and the arms race. By focusing on specific events throughout the Cold War, the research was narrowed down into a more manageable number of articles. Measuring the influence of these publications was also problematic, hence circulation figures and published letters from the public have been analysed, as well as opinion polls regarding the trust in journalism.

When using secondary literature, a series of questions was also asked. Who is the author? What publication are they writing in? Is it a history/political science article? What is their argument? Has someone made the opposite argument or had a different opinion? How does it fit in with the general historiography of the arms race? By using this method, the more relevant and important secondary sources were found. The wealth of literature on the Cold War posed an issue, as the Cold War and the nuclear arms race is something that has long been debated. Therefore, once again the selection of specific case studies allowed me to narrow down the wealth of research.

³ Sian Barber, *Using Film as a Source*, (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2015).

It was also necessary to consider literature from other subjects, not just those of a historical nature. As popular culture formed part of the research, using literature from subjects such as Media/Film Studies or English Literature was useful.

Nature of Sources

A wide variety of source material has been examined. As the nuclear ramifications of the Cold War were such a major political issue throughout the second half of the twentieth century, there is a multitude of books and films that tackle the issue. Stanley Kubrick's satirical take on MAD, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, is a very politically significant film and is a key part of the analysis. Other films studied during the sixties are similar portrayals to *Dr. Strangelove*; *Fail-safe* and *The Bedford Incident*, as well as films with a different outlook of nuclear Armageddon such as *Planet of the Apes*. The seventies has a lack of nuclear depictions, bar *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, but it does have a number of politically charged films that were useful to study. The main film to study in the eighties is *The Day After*. However, other films such as *Testament* and more patriotic depictions such as *Rambo: First Blood Part II* contribute to the research.

A variety of American newspapers from across the country and across the political spectrum have also been researched. These can be accessed using the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database through which you can view the archives of newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The newspapers that have been studied are the liberal *New York Times*, the more conservative *Wall Street Journal*, and the left-leaning *Los Angeles Times*. Southern and mid-western publications were initially sought. However, access to widely read publications in this area was hard to come by. In order to measure public opinion, the examination of opinion polls regarding nuclear weapons throughout the Cold War has been necessary, using organizations such as Gallup⁴ and the Roper Centre for Public Opinion Research.⁵ The journal *The Public Opinion Quarterly* was also particularly useful when studying the opinion polls. They offer a wide variety of articles; some comment on opinion at the time of writing and others are more historical in their nature and look back on an event. Articles such as "Trends: The

⁴ Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>, accessed 5th January 2017.

⁵ Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/>, accessed 5th January 2017.

Cuban Missile Crisis and US Public Opinion” by political historian Tom W. Smith have been important for the research.

The research for this thesis involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources. The qualitative research has been the analysis of primary sources such as newspaper articles and popular culture sources such as films and novels. These have been researched by analysing how they represented public opinion at the time of their release. The quantitative research has been mainly through the use of polling data, used in order to track public opinion throughout the period of research. Quantitative research has also been used in collaboration with qualitative research. In measuring the influence of the newspapers and films data such as readership figures and box-office takings have been vital in assessing whether the articles and films were influential at the time.

There has been a series of challenges during the research process. Firstly, the sheer number of articles on the nuclear arms race has meant that it was very difficult to find articles of the most relevance. In order to combat this, the research concentrates on a select number of newspapers that have high readership figures and represent a wide scope of the American community. Also, by concentrating the research on specific events, the results have been narrowed down further. Secondly, measuring the influence of films and novels was problematic. Box office and book sales only tell half the story, as just because someone went to see the film or read the book does not mean that they were influenced by its message. Reviews helped to some extent, as they will show how critics received them, yet this does not explain how regular Americans reacted to the political message of films such as *Dr Strangelove*. Secondary literature based on the popular culture sources has also been looked at, as research has been done into the cultural influence of films such as *Dr Strangelove*. *Hollywood as Historian American Film in a Cultural Context* by film historian Peter C. Rollins, has a particularly useful chapter on *Dr Strangelove*.⁶ Opinion polls also posed problems, as they at times can be misleading. It was therefore important that the number of respondents is considered, as the more people asked the more accurate the result should be. Different pollsters also word questions differently which often leads to different results. Therefore, to combat this a wide

⁶Charles Maland, “Dr Strangelove”, in *Hollywood as Historian American Film in a Cultural Context*, ed Peter C. Rollins, (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), 190-210.

range of different polls were required to make sure the most accurate results are found.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis covers the period from the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 up until the airing of *The Day After* in 1983, Able Archer also accorded in that year, meaning that 1983 was an important year for American Cold War culture. First, there is a literature report that highlights the historiographical debate and any gaps in research. This is then followed by three main chapters, in which the main analysis has been done. The first chapter deals with the Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1960s in general, using the newspapers and films such as *Dr Strangelove* (1964) for its analysis. The second chapter concentrates of the period of Détente in the 1970s, focussing on the newspapers and films such as *Twilights Last Gleaming* (1977). The third chapter focuses on *The Day After* (1983) and the response to the film, as well as other popular culture sources. Finally there is the conclusion, here, each chapter has been compared and conclusions are drawn. Highlighting any turning point and fluctuation in the public's perception of nuclear weapons. Ultimately, the thesis will answer whether America learned to stop worrying and love the bomb?

Literature Report

Although the Cold War is one of the most written about periods in world history, the development and public response to nuclear weapons is one that has not drawn quite so much attention. However, there has been some academic debate on the issue with scholars highlighting the changes and continuations throughout different Cold War periods. Each period that has been analysed throughout the thesis will be presented in the following literature report. Firstly, a broad historiography of atomic culture has been presented, and the different positions that scholars take on the fluctuations of nuclear war in public opinion have been highlighted. Secondly, an in-depth analysis of specific events has been presented. Therefore, the report establishes the historiography of three specific events that forms the basis of the research, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Détente of the 1970s and finally the TV-Movie *The Day After* and the increased hostilities of the early eighties. What has then been presented is whether any of the historiography is based on false or out-dated information, which can often be the case when dealing with literature that is not recent. Any gaps in the historiography have then been highlighted. Finally, the report demonstrates how research into these gaps, as well as further research into areas that have had more attention, add to the scientific debate on the public perceptions of nuclear war.

Broad look at the Historiography of Public Perceptions to Nuclear War

An important book in the historiography of America's atomic culture throughout the Cold War is *Atomic Culture: How we learned to stop worrying and love the bomb* (2004), edited by historians Scott C. Zeman and Michael A. Amundson, who specialise in the history of atomic culture. This book is an analysis of the atom as presented in various forms of popular culture. Although at times many aspects of the book present its findings on particular films and novels in too much detail to be fully relevant for this thesis, its introduction by the editors does present a series of time periods that they believe atomic culture can be broken into.

Firstly, there is Early Atomic Culture of 1945-1948. In this period Americans first became aware of the bomb and celebrated it as an “answer to our fighting boys’

prayers”. In the later stages of this period Americans were taught about the potential scientific benefits of nuclear technology.⁷

The second period is High Atomic Culture of 1949-1963. In this period fear of the bomb began to rise due in no small part to the Soviet Union’s development of nuclear weapons. However, Zeman and Amundson also see it as a time in which Americans were easily able to disassociate themselves from the damage and potential dangers of nuclear weapons. An example of this is the 1954 film *The Atomic Kid*, which tells the story of someone who survives a nuclear blast and develops special powers. Zeman and Amundson explain that this shows the US’s disassociation from the real dangers of nuclear technology. Towards the end of this period, however, attitudes began to change, events such as the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis, highlighted the realities of the Cold War and helped to shift public opinion. In particular the crisis in Cuba meant that Americans could no longer disassociate themselves from the dangers of a nuclear catastrophe.⁸

The third and most important phase for this thesis is Late Atomic Culture 1964-1991, stretching from the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis to the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Zeman and Amundson see this period as one in which Americans were more openly critical of nuclear weapons. The war in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal meant distrust in the political class had become more widespread. The Cuban Missile Crisis and works of popular culture such as Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr Strangelove: or how I learned to stop worrying a love the bomb* meant that the American attitude to the bomb had evolved into a far more critical position.⁹

In this thesis attention is mainly paid to the late atomic period 1964-1991. Although it is true the period undoubtedly saw an increase in criticism towards and protest against nuclear weapons, the effectiveness of these protests has been questioned. Is it reasonable to view this almost thirty-year period as a whole when at times, hope, fear and the general support or criticism of nuclear weapons fluctuated?

A direct challenge can be made to the notion that the Late Atomic Period was clearly one of increased criticism. Scholars have pointed out that the anti-nuclear

⁷ Scott C. Zeman and Michael A. Amundson, “Introduction”, in *Atomic Culture: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, eds Scott C Zeman and Michael A. Amundson, (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2004), 2-3.

⁸ Zeman and Amundson, *Atomic Culture*, 3-4.

⁹ *Ibid.* 4-5.

weapons protests throughout the sixties and seventies were unorganized and not extensive with the dissenting voices being mainly marginal. In *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism* (1982), influential psychiatrist, who specialised in the effects of war, Robert Jay Lifton and prominent international lawyer Richard Falk believe that America's "universal numbing" towards nuclear weapons in fact lasted until the 1980s, when more coherent criticism began to emerge.¹⁰ Journalist Jonathan Schell, a significant voice in the anti-bomb movement, backs this up. In *The Abolition* (1984), Schell finds that it was not until the early eighties that Americans who had largely ignored the nuclear threat had "been discovering a different faith".¹¹ In stark contrast to the work of Zeman and Amundson, cultural historian Paul Boyer's work *By the Bombs Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* concludes that not only did Americans have a muted acceptance of the bomb until the 1980s, the main initial protest period ended around 1949-1950, a time that Zeman and Amundson view as celebratory and educational.¹² Furthermore, in his book *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984* (1987) Professor of English Paul Briens comments that the events of Hiroshima had nothing like the literary effect that many other military events have had and that there was a lack of cultural discourse regarding the bomb.¹³

These scholarly accounts led cultural historian Margot A. Henriksen to comment, "The few scholars who have addressed the atomic culture of America have reached substantial agreement on the essential apathy and unresponsiveness of atomic age America"¹⁴. The only differing opinion she highlights is the work of American contemporary historian Allan M. Winkler. In *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom* (1993), Winkler contends that "the atomic bomb revolutionised American life", and that the anti-bomb protests in the 1980s were merely a continuation of the demonstrations made throughout the preceding four decades.¹⁵

¹⁰ Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), ix.

Margot A Henriksen, *Dr Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xvi

¹¹ Jonathan Schell, *The Abolition*, (New York: Knopf, 1982), 9.

¹² Paul Boyer, *By the Bombs Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 334.

Zeman and Amundson, *Atomic Culture*, 2-3.

¹³ Paul Briens, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction*, (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1987).

¹⁴ Henriksen, *Dr Strangelove's America*, 387.

¹⁵ Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 9.

Henriksen too agrees that certain elements of dissent throughout the sixties and seventies cannot be ignored, although she does concede that they were not entirely successful. “The cultural revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s had not succeeded in completely overthrowing the ruling systems of belief and authority in America, but it had succeeded in exposing and limiting the most violent manifestations of American power and authority in these years”.¹⁶ Henriksen therefore concludes that atomic age America was not a time of “universal numbing” to atomic weapons as Lifton and Falk have referred to. She concludes, “Life in Dr Strangelove’s America meant living with the bomb, but it did not mean loving the bomb or accepting the bomb’s promise of an apocalyptic future”.¹⁷

Therefore, in terms of a broad outlook on the public response to nuclear weapons throughout the Cold War, there is a historiographical debate with some scholars such as Paul Boyer concluding that coherent anti-bomb protest did not begin until the 1980s and the preceding decades can be characterised as nuclear acceptance. Others such as Margot A. Henriksen highlight times of protest especially in the 1960s and early 1970s, that they feel have gone ignored and suggest that the public perception of nuclear weapons was of a more critical nature.

Historiography of Specific Events

Using and building upon the work of the scholars mentioned above, this thesis examines the period of contention 1964-1991 using specific events as case studies in order to detect the fluctuations of nuclear public approval. The events that receive the most attention are The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Détente with the Soviet Union and the TV-Movie *The Day After* (1983). It is therefore necessary to present the historiography of these three events and more specifically these three events in public opinion.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

An important step in tracking the public perception of nuclear weapons is to assess when America was closest to nuclear catastrophe and then evaluate whether public opinion corresponded to that level of threat. The Cuban Missile Crisis therefore is a key event in this regard. There are many scholarly accounts of the Cuban Missile

¹⁶ Henriksen, *Dr Strangelove’s America*, 387

¹⁷ Ibid.

Crisis, many of which assess just how close America and the Soviet Union came to turning the Cold War hot.

The Cuban Missile Crisis is seen by many as the closest the world has ever come to nuclear war and this is a point reiterated by many scholars. Perhaps the most renowned Cold War historian, John Lewis Gaddis, comes to this conclusion in his 2005 book *The Cold War: A New History*. He states that the crisis is “universally regarded as the closest the world came in the second half of the twentieth century to a third world war”.¹⁸ He also concludes that what it did do was give a glimpse of a future no one wanted: conflicts without likelihood of survival. This he believes “persuaded everyone involved in it that the weapons each side had developed during the Cold War posed a greater threat to both sides than the United States and Soviet Union posed to one another”.¹⁹

This point is reiterated and expanded upon by film historian Tony Shaw in his analysis of the Cold War in film, *Hollywood’s Cold War* (2007). He highlights the period that he and many others feel was the most the dangerous time of the Cold War, “The late 1950s and early 1960s produced what many historians now see as the Cold War’s most frightening phase, culminating in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis”.²⁰ However, he does not elaborate as to whether what is retrospectively seen as the most ‘terrifying’ period was seen that way at the time.

In his 2003 article, “Trends: The Cuban Missile Crisis and U.S. Public Opinion”, political historian Tom W. Smith finds that the public were perhaps not as fearful as many have presumed. Using polling data from the few weeks of the crisis, Smith finds that it was an event that did not produce as much fear and concern as you would expect from an episode that presented clear and present danger and came so close to a devastating conflict. He concludes, “The public was neither paralyzed nor terrorized...politically and psychologically were resilient in the face of these confrontations. They absorbed the shock, backed their leaders and carried on with their lives”.²¹

The polling data used by Smith is of course up for interpretation, many of the polls he used show that the crisis was not at the forefront of many Americans minds.

¹⁸ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 78.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Tony Shaw, *Hollywood’s Cold War*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 151.

²¹ Tom W. Smith, “Trends: The Cuban Missile Crisis and US Public Opinion”, *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 67 (2003), 275.

For example, at the height of the crisis just 23% of Americans had Cuba as their main concern that was on their mind.²² In her book *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis*, historian and journalist Alice L. George presents an American public that was far more varied in its reactions to the crisis, “Americans watch the unfolding crisis warily. Some exhibited panic; some closed their eyes to the danger; others accepted what fate had to offer. As a group they neither lost their head nor showed tremendous bravery”.²³ This therefore comes to a different conclusion than the one of Smith who presents more widespread resilience. George’s conclusion would tie in with many scholars commenting on atomic culture throughout the Cold War, that perhaps many at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis failed to grasp the seriousness of the situation and were still able to disassociate themselves from the ramifications of a nuclear war. Hence, despite the general agreement of the importance and danger posed by the Cuban Missile Crisis, there is still debate about how the American public responded to this crisis.

Détente

The policy of the Nixon administration of the early 1970s is another important period that will be discussed. Starting with his historic trip to Moscow in 1972, Richard Nixon began to make several attempts at improving US-Soviet relations, this period became known as the *Détente*. The period certainly signalled a new attitude and approach by the US government, but as prominent political scientist Anne Hessing Cahn points out it instigated a profound change in US public opinion as well. In *Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA* Cahn suggests, “By 1974, the general mood in the United States concerning the Soviets was positive and upbeat. By and large, public opinion approved of the Nixon administration’s policy of improving relations with the Soviet Union”.²⁴ Cahn cites a number of polls to back up her conclusions; one suggests US approval of the Soviet Union began to grow once Nixon’s *Détente* began to be implemented. Another is one that found 78% of Americans approved of further negotiations in order to reduce arms on both sides.²⁵ However, what Cahn stresses in her book is that *Détente* was not well received by

²² Smith, “The Cuban Missile Crisis”, 273.

²³ Alice L. George, *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 165.

²⁴ Anne Hessing Cahn, *Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 1.

²⁵ Cahn, *Killing Détente*, 7.

many conservative policy-makers and highlights that by 1974 many conservatives were becoming increasingly critical of Nixon and Henry Kissinger's policy of Détente. These hard-line conservatives, helped along the way by other political groups such as neo-conservatives, human rights activists and disillusioned liberals, began an onslaught on Détente using articles, speeches and lobbying. Once Gerald Ford, Nixon's successor, had taken office they were able to deliver "the final coup d'état".²⁶

Modern historian Dominic Sandbrook highlights the influence of conservatives on the policy of Détente and explains how Nixon had begun to tone down his enthusiasm for Détente in order to not alienate conservative voters before a possible impeachment. This meant that the job of framing Détente for the American people was down to Henry Kissinger, who Sandbrook concludes was simply not up to the task. Therefore, the failure of Détente was due to its flawed architects; Sandbrook concludes that Nixon and Kissinger's failed attempts to present Détente to the public meant public support for the policy "proved ephemeral".²⁷ This is a point that is also made by John Lewis Gaddis in *The Cold War*, as he explains how support for Détente was not consistently forthcoming. He states, "Détente required support from below, and this proved difficult to obtain. It was like a building constructed on quicksand: the foundations were beginning to crack, even as the builders were finishing off the façade".²⁸

***The Day After* and the Early Nineteen-Eighties**

The TV-movie *The Day After* (1983) is said to have been hugely influential and is even said to have had an influence on the policies of US President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989). The film depicts the aftermath of a nuclear war on a small Kansas town and left the president "greatly depressed" after he viewed a special screening of it at Camp David. The film stuck in his mind and after a series of security briefings on what the US would do in the event of a nuclear attack, Reagan's diary reads, "In many ways the sequence of events described in the briefings paralleled those in the ABC movie. Yet there were still some people at the Pentagon who claimed nuclear

²⁶ Cahn, *Killing Détente*, 16.

²⁷ Dominic Sandbrook, "Salesmanship and Substance: The Influence of domestic Policy and Watergate", in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, eds Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), eBook.

²⁸ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 199.

war was ‘winnable’. I thought they were crazy”.²⁹ This shows the profound affect that the film had on Reagan and is seen as a ‘pivotal’ moment for the Reagan administration’s nuclear policy.

Although an event that is discussed with far less prevalence than the Cuban Missile Crisis, many scholars see “Able Archer 83” as comparable to the Cuban Missile Crisis in its threat of nuclear war. The 1983 NATO Able Archer exercise, which the Soviet Union mistook for a nuclear strike, could have resulted in full scale nuclear war had the USSR retaliated to the perceived threat. To this day no one is fully sure quite why it didn’t. This event is therefore a key example to examine and comparisons can be made to the public reaction to the Cuban Missile Crisis and assess whether attitudes to nuclear weapons had changed. The year 1983 is seen as a pivotal one according to prominent nuclear historian Richard Rhodes. He points out that Reagan was greatly surprised by the Soviet reaction to the Able Archer exercise and began to rethink his position in its aftermath³⁰, a point also backed up by John Lewis Gaddis who states “The Able Archer Crisis convinced him (Reagan) that he had pushed the Russians far enough”.³¹

The importance of the Able Archer crisis is highlighted by Gaddis in the later stages of his book in which he states: “Able Archer 83...was probably the most dangerous moment since the Cuban Missile Crisis”.³² Gaddis therefore places this event as one of the most dangerous of the Cold War, yet it is an event that he devotes only a few paragraphs too rather than the many pages he spent on the Cuban Missile Crisis. This is a common theme among research that takes a broad look at the Cold War; Able Archer is an under-researched event in the history of the Cold War. However, there can be an explanation for this, as nuclear war historian Len Scott’s article, “Intelligence and the Risk of Nuclear War: Able Archer 83 Revisited” explains. Scott highlights how there is still new evidence coming to light as not all the information has been declassified yet. He states, “We are at an early stage of researching and understanding events, and a number of assumptions about the crisis

²⁹ Ronald Reagan, as quoted in Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, (New York: Konpf, 2007), eBook.

³⁰ Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, (New York: Konpf, 2007), eBook.

³¹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 228.

³² Ibid. 261.

require further exploration”.³³ Furthermore, he believes that it was not until the nineteen-eighties and nineties that the Cuban Missile Crisis began to be fully understood.³⁴ Additionally, the Able Archer crisis was an event that the public heard about only in retrospect, whereas the Cuban Missile Crisis was headline news whilst it was occurring. In fact, the CIA didn’t even discover the Russian reaction to the exercise until a Soviet double agent working for the British intelligence informed them. As the deputy director of the CIA at the time has stated, “the most terrifying thing about the Able Archer crisis is that we may have been at the brink of nuclear war and not even known about it”.³⁵ However, to some extent it did reflect the re-emergence of nuclear hostility and suspicion among the two governments and the general public.

The turbulent times of the early nineteen-eighties are something many have drawn attention to. In *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* edited by Olav Njolstad, Cold War expert Odd Arne Westad highlights the importance he gives to the early-eighties: “With the exception of the last years of the Stalin era and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, we never came closer to a military confrontation”. Therefore, like Gaddis, Westad attributes a high level of importance to the period and the events of it, but still singles out times in the 1950s and 1960s where risk of nuclear war was higher.³⁶

In *The Last Decade of the Cold War* many of the contributors highlight the dangers posed by the early-eighties. The idea that this also manifests itself in public opinion is something that has been addressed in research. In “A Report: Nuclear Anxiety” (1988), Tom W. Smith once again tracks the public opinion of Americans regarding nuclear weapons. He states, “Over time the level of concern has generally covaried with expectations of war, rising in the late fifties, early sixties, and again from the mid-seventies to early eighties, before levelling off and probably declining in the mid-eighties”.³⁷ This consequently suggests that the early-eighties were a time in which ordinary Americans were concerned about nuclear war. In a more broad sense, what we can learn from this is that based on Smith’s findings nuclear anxiety is

³³ Len Scott, “Intelligence and the Risk of Nuclear war: Able Archer-83 Revisited”, *Intelligence and National Security* 26 (2011) 759, 775.

³⁴ Ibid. 775.

³⁵ Ibid 760.

³⁶ Odd Arne Westad, “Series Editor Preface”, In *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njolstad, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), vii.

³⁷ Tom W. Smith, “A Report: Nuclear Anxiety”, *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988), 560.

something that fluctuates with the state of international relations and does not show “any long-term, secular growth”.³⁸ However, this is in contrast to the findings of public opinion analysts Daniel Yankelovich and John Doble. In “Nuclear weapons and the USSR: The Public Mood”, they come to the conclusion that nuclear anxiety has grown over time and that by the mid-eighties the US public was “prepared to take a giant step toward real arms reductions”.³⁹ This is the viewpoint that Smith believes is the most popular among students of nuclear anxiety. However, he disagrees: he argues that once the turbulent times of the early-eighties had ended, “nuclear anxiety does not appear to be a raging neurosis” and that support for disarmament is not something that is widespread: “Americans recognize nuclear war and peace are complex issues, and nuclear anxiety does not translate simply into support for disarmament. To deal with the threat of nuclear war, Americans favour both military preparedness and negotiations with the Soviets”.⁴⁰ In sum, there is a substantial debate in the interpretation of opinion polls throughout the nineteen-eighties.

Gaps in Historiography

As mentioned above, the topic of public perceptions of nuclear war throughout the Cold War has certain gaps in its historiography. A more in depth look at the 1970s is something this thesis brings by incorporating opinion polls and popular culture into a coherent narrative of the public perception of Détente. Comparisons are then made between the areas that have garnered more attention, the 1960s and 1980s and the development of public opinion can be more reliably tracked. In a similar fashion, this paper endeavours to even up the gap in research between the 1980s and the early 1960s in order to draw fair comparisons between the two. What the thesis then does is track the development of public opinion through the sixties, seventies and eighties highlighting times in which opinion radically changed or stood out. Questions are posed such as, why did nuclear anxiety increase from the mid-seventies to early-eighties and result in increased tensions? And was support for disarmament stronger when the public felt threatened by nuclear war or when they felt safer from it? These, plus others, are questions that don't appear to have been widely researched and its these questions that the thesis addresses.

³⁸ Smith, “Nuclear Anxiety”, 561.

³⁹ Daniel Yankelovich and John Doble, “Nuclear Weapons and the USSR: The Public Mood”, *Foreign Affairs* 63 (1984), abstract.

⁴⁰ Smith, “Nuclear Anxiety”, 361.

Conclusions Regarding the Historiographical Debate

Regarding the historiography we can take away a number of conclusions. Firstly, the main debate is at what point in which Americans stopped accepting nuclear bombs as the norm and began to develop a coherent opposition to them. The main theory in this regard puts this point in the 1980s with everything before that regarded as a time of “universal numbing”⁴¹ to nuclear weapons. This conclusion has had some criticisms, however, with scholars highlighting the anti-bomb protests of the 1960s as well as other examples of anti-bomb sentiment. What can be gleaned from the opinion polls and some scholars is that perceptions fluctuated throughout the Cold War and that it is too simple to merely state everything before the 1980s was characterised by “universal numbing”. When it comes to the more specific events, we can also see differences in how historians believe they were perceived at the time. They too show how fluctuations of opinion occurred, as different events came and went during the Cold War. The public response to the Cuban Missile Crisis is still debated; atomic culture is something under-researched. The 1970s and the 1980s are seen as a dangerous times in the Cold War, yet the way the general public perceived such dangers remains debated. It is here that this thesis becomes relevant.

⁴¹ Lifton and Falk, *Indefensible Weapons*, ix

Chapter 1 – On the Brink: The Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1960s

"It is insane that two men, sitting on opposite sides of the world, should be able to decide to bring an end to civilization."

John F. Kennedy⁴²

"The two most powerful nations had been squared off against each other, each with its finger on the button."

Nikita Khrushchev⁴³

For thirteen days between the 16th and 28th of October 1962, tensions between the United States of America and the Soviet Union escalated to an unprecedented extent, seen by many as the closest mankind has come to nuclear war. In April 1961, shortly after President John F. Kennedy's inauguration, 1,300 CIA trained Cuban exiles stormed a Cuban beach, only to surrender *en masse* three days later.⁴⁴ After what was known as the Bay of Pigs invasion, both the Soviet Union and Cuba were concerned about what this meant for the future of communism in Latin America. This resulted in nuclear missile sites being built in Cuba by the Soviet Union; the US perceived this as a direct threat when it found out, especially as US intelligence failed to discover this straight away. When this was uncovered by the US, it responded with a naval blockade around the island preventing any more military supplies being transported to Cuba. Thus started thirteen days of turmoil that was unmatched before and after the crisis. Eventually, after a series of failed communications and a number of dangerous near misses, terms were agreed. The Soviets would remove their weapons and dismantle the bases on Cuba. The US agreed not to invade Cuba without direct provocation and would also remove its weapons in Turkey, although this was kept secret at the time. The world never came this close to nuclear annihilation again, although the arms race continued. Apart from a number of false alarms and errors in communication between the two states, the war remained cold.⁴⁵

⁴² John F Kennedy, as quoted in "Nuclear Test Ban Treaty", *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, (www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty.aspx, accessed March 2 2017).

⁴³ Nikita Khrushchev, as quoted in "Nuclear Test Ban Treaty".

⁴⁴ Piero Gleijeses, "Cuba and the Cold War, 1958-1980", in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War Volume II: Crises and Détente*, eds Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 328.

⁴⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, (London: Penguin group, 2005), 77-78.

"Cuban Missile Crisis", *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, (www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Cuban-Missile-Crisis.aspx, accessed March 2 2017).

Influential social critic and “court historian” to the Kennedy administration from 1961-1963, Arthur M. Schlesinger, highlighted the dangers he felt were posed by the crisis: “Now that the Cold War has disappeared into history, we can say authoritatively that the world came closest to blowing itself up during thirteen days in October 1962.”⁴⁶ Renowned Cold War historian, John Lewis Gaddis, also concludes that what it did do was to give a glimpse of a future no one wanted, conflicts without likelihood of survival. This, he believes, “persuaded everyone involved in it that the weapons each side had developed during the Cold War posed a greater threat to both sides than the United States and Soviet Union posed to one another.”⁴⁷ The historiography surrounding the Cold War is in almost universal agreement with regard to the dangers posed by the events in Cuba in October 1962. Yet were the American people aware of the danger? Did they panic? Or were they resolute in the face of adversity? And how were the views of American society reflected in newspapers and popular culture of the time?

Newspapers Before the Crisis

When studying the reception of nuclear weapons in US society around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, an analysis of the country’s major newspapers can offer a key insight. *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* were three of the US’s most popular newspapers during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and offer differing outlooks on the events. *The New York Times* traditionally has a liberal-leaning editorial stance and endorsed President Kennedy in the 1960 election, although it also supported a number of Republican candidates during the 1950s. *The Wall Street Journal* has a more conservative stance, although it does not endorse presidential candidates. Although *The Los Angeles Times* is now a liberal publication, during the 1960s it routinely endorsed candidates from the Republican Party.⁴⁸ In order to study the outlook of the newspapers, this thesis will pose a series of questions: what was its outlook prior to the crisis in October 1962? What was its outlook during and in the aftermath of the crisis? And was there a noticeable change in their stance in the aftermath of the crisis?

⁴⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, “Foreword” to *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Robert F. Kennedy, (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1999)

⁴⁷ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 77-78.

⁴⁸ Dennis McGougal, “The Perils of Picking Presidents”, *Los Angeles Times*, January 2008, (www.articles.latimes.com/2008/jan/20/opinion/op-mcdougal20, accessed 2nd March 2017)

Prior to the events in Cuba, the USSR and US had been in conflict regarding the testing of nuclear weapons. On September 1st 1961, the Soviets broke an unofficial moratorium banning nuclear testing with the largest nuclear explosion of all time⁴⁹. The press discussed Kennedy's response at length. Therefore, to analyse the outlook of the press prior to the crisis it is useful to investigate its analysis of these events.

It was not until April 1962 that the US resumed its atmospheric testing, the decision to suspend the ban, and the length of time in which it took President Kennedy to decide upon a course of action, was something that was keenly discussed in the press. *The Wall Street Journal* was particularly critical of Kennedy's apparent indecisiveness. In an article published on the 20th February 1962 titled "Time and Enough to Think"⁵⁰, the editorial team criticised the president and his administration for allowing the Soviets to complete over thirty nuclear tests without America responding with its own. The editorial stated it to be sign of weakness and that lagging behind the Soviets in nuclear strength is no way to deter them from starting war. The article went on to say that America must not be afraid to fight for its survival, even if that means risking nuclear war.⁵¹ Once Kennedy finally resumed testing, the press seemed to agree that it was the correct choice. *The Wall Street Journal* reported, "He simply did what had to be done" and further criticised the president for taking so long to make the necessary decision.⁵² *The New York Times* also agreed that the resumption of tests was necessary. However, it did not celebrate the decision: "This is not a happy day for mankind", and further criticised the Soviet Union for putting America and the world in this position and did not blame Kennedy for taking time over the decision.⁵³

After failed discussions between the US and Soviet Union to implement another test ban in August 1962, *The Los Angeles Times* also reported its support for continued nuclear tests, "To yield our deterrent capacity without fool proof arrangements is in effect to yield to Communists". It further criticised Russia for the failure of the discussions and echoed *The Wall Street Journal* in its calls for the US not to show weakness. The headline of the article "Back Where We Started and It's

⁴⁹ Thomas Graham Jr, *Disarmament Sketches: Three Decades of Arms Control and International Law*, (USA: University of Washington Press, 2002), 237.

⁵⁰ "Time and Enough to Think", *Wall Street Journal*, February 20, 1962. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 4.

⁵² "The Next Question", *Wall Street Journal*, March 5, 1962. 12.

⁵³ "The Test Series Starts", *New York Times*, April 26, 1962. 32.

Better” also suggested a preference against a ban, as many did not trust the USSR to be true to its word.⁵⁴ Scepticism of a test ban is also something found in the reporting of *The Wall Street Journal*. In an article during the test ban negotiations, *The Journal* suggested that even with an agreement you couldn’t rule out the fact that the Soviets may find a way of dodging and continuing to perfect their weapons. It concluded that the dangers of continued tests had been exaggerated and that even with a test ban safety is not guaranteed.⁵⁵ On the contrary, *The New York Times* fully endorsed the need for international agreements. It stressed that not only do the US and the USSR need to reach an agreement, but emerging nuclear powers such as France and China must agree to a test ban, not just due to the dangers of nuclear war, but also because of the radioactive contamination that takes place during a test.⁵⁶

The New York Times appears to have a far more concerned outlook on nuclear weapons, wanting the international community to do more to reach agreements that would in its view make the world a safer place. However, this does come with support for the Kennedy administration, as in its opinion it is the Soviet Union, not America, that is halting this progress. *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times*, however, were more sceptical about test ban agreements. Although they agree that if both parties were to keep to their word, this would be the safest option, both do not have enough trust in the USSR for that to be a satisfactory resolution. A *Los Angeles Times* article on January 4th 1962 titled “A New Balance of Terror”, reports the views of nuclear physicist Hans Bethe. Bethe didn’t have much faith, according to *The LA Times*, in the civil defence of anti-missile missiles, but did believe the threat of nuclear war is likely to diminish. His reasoning was effectively mutually assured destruction: if both sides now have so many weapons that neither side could be wiped out in a surprise attack, no one will risk it because of the retaliation that would ensue.⁵⁷ This sums up the viewpoint of *The LA Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis: they do not trust the Soviets enough to endorse nuclear agreements. Therefore, the safe option is to expand the nuclear arsenal as a deterrent. Was this an outlook that continued after the events in Cuba? Or did they rethink their position after coming so close to nuclear war?

⁵⁴ “Back Where We Started and It’s Better”, *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1962. A4.

⁵⁵ “Tests and Traps”, *Wall Street Journal*, July 17, 1962. 14.

⁵⁶ “Better Nuclear Test Detection”, *New York Times*, July 9, 1962. 30.

⁵⁷ “A New Balance of Terror”, *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1962, G4.

Newspapers During and in the Aftermath of the Crisis

During the crisis, the major newspapers supported the Kennedy administration and encouraged everyday Americans to do the same. In articles on the 23rd and 25th October, *The Los Angeles Times* emphasised the need to rally behind the president in this time of crisis.⁵⁸ However, it was not optimistic in its outlook when explaining the dangers posed by the crisis, stating that the events in Cuba were “a threat as potentially grave as any in our history”.⁵⁹ *The New York Times* had a similar outlook on the 24th October, presenting a bleak situation: “If a misstep were to be made, all humanity might founder”. Explaining its support for the president and his Cuban blockade, it clarified that this is a crisis created by the Soviets, to which America is responding in the only reasonable manner: “President Kennedy is right in placing the responsibility squarely on Soviet Russia...stretching out its nuclear arm across the Atlantic to confront us”.⁶⁰

The Wall Street Journal, which had been the most critical of Kennedy’s Cold War performance up to this stage, agreed with both of the *Times*. On the 24th October, it explained how the president needed to work hard to dispel any doubts in his judgement and get the American people on his side. It declared its support and highlighted the difficulty and danger that lies ahead: “What the President has now done is, we believe, well done. But we have no illusions about what it entails”⁶¹, and went on to explain that “it is imperative that the country have full confidence in the president”.⁶² This is in contrast to the message of *The Journal* before the crisis. However, once the crisis seemed to be over, there is evidence it returned to its pre-crisis stance. In an article published on the 31st October, it quoted former President Eisenhower who stated, “A united America need not and should not degenerate into a conformist America, a silenced America”.⁶³ In other words, despite Kennedy’s impressive handling of the situation, his decisions must now need to be questioned. The article goes on to highlight a few of the decisions throughout the crisis that perhaps needed further investigation. Therefore, the overall stance of the press during the crisis was concern regarding the dangers, yet support for the actions of the

⁵⁸ “The Challenge of Cuba”, *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1962. A4.

“Allies in a Common Cause”, *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1962. A4.

⁵⁹ “The Challenge of Cuba”, *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1962. A4.

⁶⁰ “The Soviet Challenge in Cuba”, *New York Times*, October 24, 1962. 38.

⁶¹ “The Presidents Next Task”, *Wall Street Journal*, October 24, 1962. 16.

⁶² “The Presidents Next Task”, 16.

⁶³ “The Insecurity of Silence”, *Wall Street Journal*, October 31, 1962. 16.

government. However, this support was not universally maintained, *The Wall Street Journal* returned to its more critical stance of the president once the immediate danger appeared to have subsided.

In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, the papers all published articles in which they assessed the events of the previous two weeks and expressed what they believe the future brings. “The Reaction”, published in *The New York Times* on the 28th October, the final day of crisis, sums up the what it believes was everyday America’s reaction to the crisis: “The dominant reaction was a rallying behind the president”, due to the feeling of satisfaction that something was finally being done about Cuba. Although there was an element of panic buying of food, water and medicines, the widespread bi-partisan support for the government’s actions was the overriding reaction.⁶⁴ However, it highlights the criticisms that a small number of people had towards US actions. Many believed Kennedy acted too late and the scale of the crisis could have been prevented had he intervened once he had first found out about the Soviet missile bases in Cuba. Others claimed that a mere blockade was not going far enough and stronger measures such as an airstrike or an invasion would be necessary, something the Kennedy administration thought would unnecessarily risk war. However, these criticisms were limited, it is support that mainly characterises the US response to the crisis. *The New York Times* offers its thoughts on the future of the conflict in “A Triumph of Reason” on the 29th October; it claims that the events in Cuba offer solutions to the broader problems dividing East and West. It suggested Cuba may be a turning point in which solutions are found to issues such as Berlin and NATO, although they admit this may be ‘idyllic’; Cuba has “injected new vigour and hope into the pursuit of a peace of benefit to all mankind”.⁶⁵

The Los Angeles Times assessed the crisis in “The Unfinished Crisis” on the 30th October. In response to the Soviets’ promise to remove their Cuban missile bases and weapons, *The LA Times* highlighted this as Kennedy’s finest hour as president due to his “able and forceful manoeuvring”.⁶⁶ It also believed the crisis allowed the US to gain prestige as a world power, as it showed its strength on the global stage. In many ways its outlook was optimistic in the aftermath of the crisis. However, it did highlight that this does not solve the other problems of the Cold War and that more

⁶⁴ “The Reaction”, *New York Times*, October 28, 1962. 176.

⁶⁵ “A Triumph of Reason”, *New York Times*, October 29, 1962. 28.

⁶⁶ “The Unfinished Crisis”, *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1962. A4.

conflict was still to come, yet “we will prevail if we remain resolute and strong”.⁶⁷ Therefore, despite the dangerous crisis that just occurred, *The LA Times* was fairly optimistic due to the decisive way in which it was handled. Although dangerous times lie ahead, it was confident of victory.

The Wall Street Journal on 30th October was similarly impressed with the way that the crisis was handled and assessed what that means for the future of the Cold War. Using a chess analogy, it suggested that the US had proven to the Soviets as well as themselves, that they are able to play a long drawn out game and defend themselves whenever necessary from Soviet attacks. However, it also suggests that Cuba was merely a pawn in the Soviet’s game and was used to test the US response, which the US passed impressively. *The Journal* therefore takes a pragmatic approach; the US victory in Cuba was a decisive one and bodes well for the future, yet it was merely a minor strike in the Soviet plans and more conflict is still to come.⁶⁸

In the weeks that followed the crisis, the newspapers made further conclusions on the implications of the events in Cuba. *The New York Times* published many articles emphasizing the danger still posed by Cuba and how it could be a danger for some time until the USSR could control leader Fidel Castro.⁶⁹ Negotiations with the Soviet Union were something *The New York Times* emphasised, to solve the problems in Cuba as well as the broader Cold War issues. On the 28th October, in the article titled “As We Step Back From Danger”, it highlighted the need for diplomatic discussions to avoid sinking back into the point prior to the crisis. It is now time to make progress on disarmament and nuclear testing, which could lead to a great *Détente*. In contrast, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times* are more interested in continuing the firmness and strength that was shown during the crisis by Kennedy. In a number of articles⁷⁰, *The Wall Street Journal* called for the continuation of the firmness shown towards the Soviet Union: “It is necessary for us

⁶⁷ “The Unfinished Crisis”, A4.

⁶⁸ “Pawns and Gambits in a Long Game”, *Wall Street Journal*, October 30, 1962. 14.

⁶⁹ “Snag Over Cuba”, *New York Times*, November 2, 1962. 30.

“New Threats from Cuba”, *New York Times*, November 19, 1962. 30.

“Cuba: Plus and Minus”, *New York Times*, November 10, 1962. 18.

“In the Caribbean”, *New York Times*, November 21, 1962. 32.

⁷⁰ “The Turning Cuban Tide”, *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 1962.10.

“What Might Have Happened in Cuba”, *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 1962.16.

“The Spirit of Compromise”, *Wall Street Journal*, December 4, 1964. 16.

“The View Beyond Cuba”, *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 1962. 14.

to use force in circumstances affecting our national security”.⁷¹ The use of force, however, should still only be in exceptional circumstances. Cuba showed that excessive force was not necessary, as the conflict was resolved through strong and firm demands.⁷² *The Los Angeles Times* mirrored its New York counterpart by highlighting the present danger of Cuba in a series of articles.⁷³ However, it differed in the way it saw the situation being resolved. In “Cuba the Incomplete Victory”, *The LA Times* expressed its mistrust of the Soviet Union and its leader Khrushchev; it felt his co-operation in the removal of missiles from Cuba was a way of limiting nuclear inspections in the future. It concluded that at this stage negotiations would be futile, as “having been lied to once, we dare not take the chance again”, and it urged a continuation of firmness, not compromise when it comes to negotiations with the USSR.⁷⁴

When considering the changes between the outlooks before and after the crisis, the three publications did not seem to alter their outlooks drastically; it is during the crisis that the differences occurred. *The New York Times* was fairly consistent with its outlook pre-and post-the crisis. Throughout the crisis it maintained its support for President Kennedy, praising his firm but necessary approach. In the preceding few months it had emphasised negotiations with the Soviet Union on nuclear weapons and the crisis only strengthened this opinion. It hoped the crisis would be a warning sign for the US and the Soviet Union and that they would recognise the need for negotiations. This made it optimistic, yet wary of a world without such diplomatic agreements. Before the crisis, *The Wall Street Journal* was highly critical of the Kennedy administration and its actions regarding the Cold War. However, this changed during the crisis and the paper offered its support to the president and encouraged the public to do the same. Nevertheless, once the crisis had calmed down, it began to scrutinise the president’s actions once again. After the crisis it maintained its scepticism of negotiations with the Soviet Union, favouring firmness rather than compromise. This is similar to *The Los Angeles Times*, which also, due to its mistrust of the USSR, preferred a firmer approach to diplomacy, given its success in Cuba. It too emphasised support for the government during the crisis. Once the

⁷¹ “The Turning Cuban Tide”, *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 1962. 10.

⁷² “The View Beyond Cuba”, 14.

⁷³ “The End of the Cuban Blockade”, *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1962. A4.

“Sabotage, Managed From Cuba”, *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1962. A4.

“Cuba the Incomplete Victory”, *Los Angeles Times*, November 12, 1962. A4.

⁷⁴ “Cuba the Incomplete Victory”, A4.

crisis had died down, both of the publications resorted to their previous stance; perhaps the only change was a slight increase in optimism, as after such a turbulent and dangerous thirteen days, it was the US that emerged victorious.

Newspapers in the Years Following the Crisis

Following the crisis there were attempts from both sides to improve relations, before Kennedys assassination in 1963 and Khrushchev's ousting in 1964. This took the form of public speeches and gestures, there was not an official meeting between the two powers until the Glassboro summit in 1967, between President Lyndon B. Johnson and Soviet Premier, effectively the deputy soviet leader, Alexei Kosygin. After the Six-Day War broke out, between Israel and an Arab coalition, on the 5th June 1967, the two super powers were almost brought into to conflict once again. However, because of the of the first use of the 'hotline' introduced after the Cuba crisis, they were able to cooperate and they agreed to meet in Glassboro, New Jersey from the 23-25 June. They were hoping to ease the tension that had been created by Vietnam and the conflict in the Middle East. Although ultimately few concrete decisions could be agreed without Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev being in attendance.⁷⁵

The newspapers had a subdued outlook on the summit, although none had a negative outlook towards it. Prior to the summit *The New York Times* was optimistic for what the summit meant for the future of the Cold War, although conceded that little concrete progress could be made, it stated: "The important fact is that that the two men will meet together in a simple, human act of coexistence. That in itself is worth while in this dangerous world".⁷⁶ Following the first day's events *The Times* maintained its positive outlook on the proceedings, "The dramatic change of atmosphere is a fact and the prospects of peace are better than they were 24 hours ago".⁷⁷ After the summit, although *The Times* understood that little major progress was made in terms of policy, it hailed the symbolic meaning of the summit, "It is a measure of the conferences accomplishment that the goal has been stated and by the Premier of the Soviet Union standing alongside the President of the United States".⁷⁸

⁷⁵ John M. Clearwater, "Johnson, McNamara, and the Birth of SALT and the ABM Treaty 1963-1969", (PHD Diss, Kings College London, 1996), 112

⁷⁶ "Meeting Half Way", *New York Times*, June 23, 1967, 33.

⁷⁷ "Conference at Glassboro", *New York Times*, June 24, 1967, 22.

⁷⁸ "Perspective on Glassboro", *New York Times*, June 26, 1967, 32.

In a slight contrast *The Wall Street Journal* was less enthusiastic about the summit. Prior to the summit *The Journal* felt too much hope could be put on the talks, it highlighted how it was unlikely that any major agreements would come as a result of the conference. Nevertheless it suggested that if Americans approached the summit pragmatically, perhaps the conference could be viewed as a success. Ultimately if the meeting is unsuccessful, “No one should be too surprised or too disappointed that another long shot failed to pay off”.⁷⁹ After the summit *The Journal* had a fairly negative outlook on the proceedings. It conceded that in the nuclear age concessions must be made with the Soviets in order to keep the peace, however, it felt that Kosygin showed how little the US and Soviets could agree on over the course of the meetings: “What must be avoided is the wishful thinking that the tough men presently in the Kremlin are actually our kind of people. Mr Kosygin’s intransigence should help dispel any such illusion”.⁸⁰

The *Los Angeles Times*’ outlook was a little more disparaging, it felt that as the summit failed to make any concrete progress, little could be celebrated. It highlighted issues such as the Middle East and Vietnam as areas in which little progress was made: “They were not even able to announce a single step that would have constituted a positive move on the checkerboard of the world’s trouble spots”.⁸¹ It did, however also offer a more positive take, it emphasised that despite the lack of substance emerging from the summit, “The President and Premier had the chance to further mutual understanding, of each other and of their government’s policies. This itself justifies the exercise in summitry”.⁸²

The Glassboro summit was seen as limited in its scope by the press, with *The Los Angeles Times* criticising the lack of substance to the meetings. However, the papers in general praised the symbolic nature of the meetings and what it may have meant for the future of the conflict between the two nations, although, mistrust in the Soviet Union is still apparent.

Tom Wicker, “In the Nation: Reflections on Glassboro”, *New York Times* June 27, 1967, 38.

⁷⁹ “A Lesson in Reality”, *Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 1967, 14.

“The Sincere Soviets”, *Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 1967, 17.

⁸⁰ “The Convergence Theory”, *Wall Street Journal*, June 27, 1967, 14.

⁸¹ Arthur J. Dommen, “Kosygin’s Public Moods Vary: Two Different Moods Shown by Kosygin”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1967, 1.

Tom Lambert, “Sky, Summit Picture Cloudy”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1967, 12.

⁸² “The Johnson-Kosygin Talks”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1967, A4.

Public Opinion Comparison

How then does the outlook of the press compare to popular opinion? In 2002, to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the crisis, historian and political scientist Tom W. Smith wrote the article “Trends: The Cuban Missile Crisis and US Public Opinion”, in which he analysed a series of opinion polls regarding the crisis in Cuba. Much of what he found matches the newspaper findings. Firstly, support for the president is how many Americans responded to the crisis, not just the press. Kennedy’s approval rating rose by 13-15 points, having steadily declined up until October 1962. The country almost universally supported the blockade and the attempts to remove missiles from Cuba, with only 4% disapproving the blockade.⁸³ However, support for invasion was not widespread and was never favoured by more than a quarter of Americans.⁸⁴ Many Americans did not support invasion, as they feared the consequences, this outlook is likely due to the Bay of Pigs debacle the previous year. Moreover 41% of Americans felt the people of Cuba would topple Castro within three years anyway.⁸⁵ Like the newspapers, the public supported Kennedy’s firm handling of the situation, but not an excessive use of force. However, Kennedy’s approval rating did decline following the crisis, with his support dropping steadily once again by December 1962.⁸⁶ This is common, however, for a president after a crisis. As *The Wall Street Journal* highlighted, the crisis saw strong support for the president. However, once the conflict had died down, a healthy criticism once again emerged. One of the main characteristics of the newspapers was their increased optimism after the crisis; this is also mirrored by the opinion polls. By April 1963, only 5% expected world war in the next year, the lowest level recorded in the 1950s and 1960s. Hence, the Cold War was seen more optimistically and like *The New York*

⁸³ Lydia Saad, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: 40 Years Later”, *Gallup*, October 2002, (www.gallup.com/poll/6979/cuban-missile-crisis-years-later.aspx, accessed 2 March 2017).

⁸⁴ Tom W. Smith, “Poll Trends: The Cuban Missile Crisis and US Public Opinion”, *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 67 (2003), 270.

“Kennedy Library Releases New Report on Cuban Missile Crisis-Study Documents Impact of Crisis on American Public Opinion”, *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, October 2002, (www.jfklibrary.org/About-Us/News-and-Press/Press-Releases/Kennedy-Library-Releases-New-Report-on-Cuban-Missile-Crisis-Study-Documents-Impact-of-Crisis-on-Amer.aspx, accessed March 2, 2017).

⁸⁵ Smith, “The Cuban Missile Crisis”, 271.

⁸⁶ “Presidential Approval Ratings – Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends”, *Gallup*, (www.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx, accessed March 2 2017).

Times, hope for a peaceful agreement between the US and USSR increased.⁸⁷ There was little evidence of widespread stress and panic regarding the situation, as the papers highlighted people were happy that something was finally being done about the Cuba situation, as Smith explains: “The US people were resilient in the face of these confrontations. They absorbed the shock, backed their leaders, and carried on with their lives”.⁸⁸

How influential were the press in forming this outlook? Faith in the mass media and journalists during the 1960s was far greater than it is today, meaning a majority trusted what they read. A 1956 American National Election Study found that 66% of Americans thought newspaper coverage was fair and could be trusted.⁸⁹ Newspapers were also very widely read, in 1963 daily circulation of newspapers was at 58,905,000, rough one newspaper for every three Americans. In comparison, 2016 figures show a circulation of 34,657,199, roughly one newspaper for every ten Americans.⁹⁰ With this in mind as well as clear similarities between newspapers and public opinion, the fact that they were widely read, and contained views from both sides of the political debate, these publications must have played a key role in forming these outlooks. Newspapers influence public opinion but it is also important to consider the influence public opinion has on newspapers. A newspaper does not want to provide an opinion that its readers will disagree with, due to concerns over its future circulation. As journalism historian, James Aucoin, states, “to a considerable extent newspapers and magazines reflected the attitudes of their audiences. The mainstream news media, largely worked within a social and cultural atmosphere that precluded their taking an aggressive stance against institutions and government”.⁹¹ Consequently in order to ascertain the outlook of everyday Americans during this period, newspapers should strongly reflect how the public felt, regardless of whether they influenced this opinion or not.

⁸⁷ Smith, “The Cuban Missile Crisis”, 268.

“Cuban Missile Crisis-Study”.

⁸⁸ Smith, “The Cuban Missile Crisis”, 275.

⁸⁹ Jonathan M. Ladd, *Why Americans Hate the News Media and How It Matters*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1.

⁹⁰ Michael Barthel, “Newspapers Factsheet”, *Pew Research Center: Journalism and Media*, June 2017, (www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers/, accessed July 13, 2017).

⁹¹ James Aucoin, *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism*, (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2005), 43.

Popular Culture

The 1960s saw a number of films and novels that depict nuclear annihilation, or something close to it. Yet how common were these depictions? And were they influential in forming public opinion? The historiography is torn on what the 1960s meant for public opinion and the popular culture of nuclear war. Historians Scott C. Zeman and Michael A. Amundson explain, in their book *Atomic Culture: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (2004), that the 1960s was the beginning of a period in which Americans were more critical of the bomb.⁹² Other influential works disagree with this view. Books such as *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism* (1982) by physiologist Robert Jay Litfton and international lawyer Richard Falk, and *The Abolition* (1984) by journalist Jonathan Schell, saw the period up until the 1980s as a “universal numbing” by the American people towards the dangers of nuclear weapons.⁹³ Others, such as cultural historian Margot A. Henriksen, contend that there were certain elements of dissent in the 60s and 70s, although they were not entirely successful.⁹⁴ More specifically popular culture was seen by Zeman and Amundson to adopt this more critical position.⁹⁵ However, Professor of English Paul Brians suggests in *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984* (1987), that nuclear weapons had a limited literary effect and that there was a lack of cultural discourse regarding the bomb.⁹⁶ Similarly, cultural historian Paul Boyer suggests in *By the Bombs Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1994), that there was a cultural ‘Big Sleep’ from 1963-1980, in which the nuclear theme largely disappeared from TV and movies. He believes the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963, which prohibited all above ground test detonations of nuclear weapons, gave the

⁹² Scott C. Zeman and Michael A. Amundson, “Introduction”, in *Atomic Culture: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, eds Scott C Zeman and Michael A. Amundson, (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2004), 4-5

⁹³ ⁹³ Robert Jay Litfton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), ix.
Jonathan Schell, *The Abolition*, (New York: Knopf, 1982), 9.

⁹⁴ Margot A Henriksen, *Dr Strangelove’s America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 387.

⁹⁵ Zeman and Amundson, *Atomic Culture*, 4-5.

⁹⁶ Paul Brians, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984*, (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1987), 3.

public a false sense of security regarding nuclear war and that the danger never really subsided.⁹⁷

In the year 2000, Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove: Or how I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb* (1964) ranked 3rd in the American Film Institute's 100 greatest comedy films of the 20th century.⁹⁸ It is seen as one of the most important political satires of all time. Yet how influential was it at the time? And to what extent did it contribute to public opinion? *Dr Strangelove* satirically depicts what would happen when a rogue general decides to fire a nuclear bomb at Russia and details how a room full of politicians and generals frantically attempt to stop it.⁹⁹ The bomb successfully found its target and the film offered a stark message on deterrence and the ideas of Mutually Assured Destruction. The film itself was based on the novel *Red Alert* (1958) by Peter Bryant, the major difference between the two being the film's use of black comedy compared to the more serious novel.¹⁰⁰

Success of the film far outweighed the novel, with it becoming a controversial talking point in discussions surrounding nuclear weapons. It was a modest commercial success and received widespread acclaim, grossing over \$9,000,000 and earning four Academy Award nominations. Yet reception of the film's message was polarized as highlighted by a number of letters to *The New York Times*. In a letter published on 4th March 1964, from a member of the public, the author referred to the film as 'anti American' and "dangerous pacifist propaganda", not matched even by America's declared enemies.¹⁰¹ Similarly, a letter published on the same day suggested the film was "a highly dangerous form of public opinion tampering" and claims the current "thawing" in the Cold War is down to the strategic power of America's nuclear arsenal and therefore should not be mocked.¹⁰² One of *The New York Times'* film critics criticised the film for mocking America's servicemen and making them seem incompetent. In a response to this review Lewis Mumford, a prominent historian and philosopher of technology, claimed that the reviewer had

⁹⁷ Paul Boyer, *By the Bombs Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 334.

⁹⁸ "AFIs 100 years... 100 Laughs", *American Film Institute*, June 2000, (www.afi.com/100Years/laughs.aspx, accessed March 2 2017).

⁹⁹ "Dr Strangelove", *Internet Movie Database*, (www.imdb.com/title/tt0057012/, March 2 2017).

¹⁰⁰ Ronnie D. Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies: Film, Fiction, and Foreign Policy*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 86.

Peter Bryant, *Red Alert*, (New York: Ace, 1958).

¹⁰¹ Jeanne McQuade, "Strangelove Reactions", *New York Times*, March 1, 1964, X8.

¹⁰² Michael Getler, "Strangelove Reactions", *New York Times*, March 1, 1964, X8.

missed the point of Kubrick's satire. By filling the film with incompetent characters he was not making a point about the American military, but the ineptitude and stupidity of US nuclear policy.¹⁰³ *Dr Strangelove* was discussed heavily after its release; yet its exact influence is hard to measure. What can be said though, is that it started a necessary discourse on nuclear policy in an important election year, which perhaps played a role in the re-election of Lyndon B. Johnson, a man seen as a safer pair of hands when it came to nuclear policy than his rival Barry Goldwater, due to the latter's more aggressive approach to foreign policy.

Government and film historian Jonathan Kirshner views the film as a precursor to the revisionist approach to Cold War analysis that surged in popularity during the 1970s. Up until the war in Vietnam, the dominant interpretation of the Cold War was that sole blame for the conflict should be placed on the Soviet Union due to their expansion into Eastern Europe. However, during the sixties, the revisionist approach emerged which questioned US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. It argued that America was not an innocent bystander in the war and placed more of the blame on the United States. Kirshner explains, *Dr Strangelove*, as well as other films offered a critical perspective on the Cold War. Yet, *Dr Strangelove* had an almost apolitical outlook, it did not take sides, instead choosing to ridicule both.¹⁰⁴ As Kubrick stated himself, "What could be more absurd than the very idea of two megapowers willing to wipe out all human life because of an accident, spiced up by political difference that will seem as meaningless to people a hundred years from now as the theological conflicts of the Middle Ages appear to us today?"¹⁰⁵

Dr Strangelove was one of a number of Cold War depictions during the sixties. Another was the novel *Fail-Safe* (1962) and its film adaptation of the same name (1964). Both the film and book were similar in theme to *Dr Strangelove* and *Red Alert*, resulting in a lawsuit against the author of *Fail-Safe*, which was settled out of court and gave *Dr Strangelove* an earlier release date.¹⁰⁶ *Fail-Safe* depicts a scenario in which an electronic glitch has meant American bombers are on their way

¹⁰³ Lewis Mumford, "Strangelove Reactions", *New York Times*, March 1, 1964, X8

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Kirshner, "Subverting the Cold War in the 1960s: Dr. Strangelove, The Manchurian Candidate and The Planet of the Apes", *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 31 (2001), 40.

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Kubrick, as quoted in David Hughes, *The Complete Kubrick*, (New York: Random House, 2013)

¹⁰⁶ Bernard F. Dick, *The Screen is Red: Hollywood, Communism and the Cold War*, (USA: University Press of Mississippi, 2016).

to destroy Moscow. After failing to prevent the attack, the US president decides that he must sacrifice a US city in response. New York is chosen and once destroyed the balance of power is restored. The film is a sombre look at Mutually Assured Destruction; it was well received, but a box office flop due to the success of *Dr Strangelove*.¹⁰⁷ Another film, *The Bedford Incident* (1965), is also similar in message; it follows the destroyer USS Bedford as it hunts an elusive Soviet submarine. The film is based on a novel of the same name (1963), which in turn drew parallels from *Moby Dick*. Miscommunication results in the Bedford firing at the submarine, resulting in Soviet retaliation and nuclear war.¹⁰⁸ All these films share a commentary of Mutually Assured Destruction: building a strong nuclear arsenal is dangerous when electronic failures; miscommunication and rogue generals could lead to the end of the world.

Although not related to the bomb, John Le Carre's novel *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* (1963) and its film adaption (1965) can offer insight on Cold War culture. The story is almost unique for the time, as it shows the harsh realities of Cold War espionage, in which a British agent is betrayed by MI-5 in order to protect one of its Soviet double agents. This was different to the normal depictions of good vs. evil, as it showed the West was not always the heroic good guy. The book is now seen as one of the greatest spy novels of all time, and the film was well received by both critics and the box-office. However, in comparison to *Dr Strangelove*, its influence was minor.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the message was outweighed by the popularity of films that promoted the good vs. evil message, such as those in the James Bond series who exceeded the box office takings of *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* and even *Dr Strangelove* by tens of millions. *Goldfinger* (1964), *Thunderball* (1965), and *You Only Live Twice* (1967) all appeared in the top 25 grossing films of the decade. *Planet of the Apes* (1968), set in a post-apocalyptic world after a nuclear war, is the most successful film to offer a critical perspective on the Cold War. However, the criticism is limited in comparison to *Dr Strangelove* and others. Furthermore, it grossed a mere

¹⁰⁷ Dick, *The Screen is Red*.

Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Arne Axelsson, *Restrained Response: American Novels of the Cold War and Korea 1945-1962*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 125.

¹⁰⁹ Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies*, 61-62.

\$33.4 million in North America, \$110 million less than *Thunderball*, the most successful Bond film of the decade.¹¹⁰

Although there were a number of films during the 1960s making a similar message about US nuclear policy and Mutually Assured Destruction, their influence was limited. *Dr Strangelove* was able to start an important dialogue. However, its true influence is hard to measure. Films with a more critical analysis of the East and West conflict struggled in terms of success in comparison to those that used a heroic narrative and glorified the good vs. evil message. Hence, the commentary on nuclear weapons was outweighed by the message of the more successful popular films.

Conclusion

The Cuban Missile Crisis did not result in a drastic change in public opinion on MAD or in how the US should approach the arms race. As shown, before the crisis the press was calling for action on nuclear weapons. *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times* were of the opinion that negotiation was not the way forward and that a show of strength through a strong nuclear arsenal was the best form of deterrent. *The New York Times* was more cautious and stressed the need for international agreements to limit the testing and build up of nuclear weapons. All three publications came out of the crisis with a similar outlook as before the turbulent thirteen days, the only difference being an increased sense of optimism. To *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times* this was due to the encouraging firm leadership shown by Kennedy. For *The New York Times* it was because it hoped the events would act as a wake up call and both parties would agree to limitations on their nuclear power. The major differences came during the crisis, in which *The Journal* and *The LA Times* offered increased support for the Kennedy administration and *The New York Times* advocated and supported a firmer approach to the Soviet Union. Public opinion favoured the stance of *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times*, with Kennedy's approval rating and support rising during the crisis, yet steadily decreasing in the following months. The public also continued to support the firm approach to the Cold War, although excessive force never had widespread backing. By 1967, slightly improved relations meant more support for negotiations at the Glassboro summit. All three papers supported the meeting for their symbolic importance, although *The Los*

¹¹⁰ "All Time Box-Office Hits (Domestic)", *AMC*, (www.filmsite.org/boxoffice2.html, Accessed June 15, 2017).

Angeles Times was sceptical about its importance. Overall, like the papers, the public never overtly panicked or stressed; they were concerned about events, but supported them wholeheartedly and got on with their lives. Although it is difficult to measure the exact influence of newspapers, trust in the press was high and its outlook matched that of the public. When all is considered, the press would have played an import role in the formation of this outlook, or at least reflected it.

There were a number of important bomb-themed films and novels throughout the 1960s and around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Films such as *Fail-Safe*, *The Bedford Incident* and *Dr Strangelove* all carried the same concerned message when it came to US nuclear policy. *Dr Strangelove* was able to begin a discourse on nuclear weapons, yet was only marginally successful in influence. These films lacked the success of major blockbusters such as the James Bond series, whose message of good vs. evil outweighed its more critical competition. To some extent then, Paul Boyers claim of a ‘big sleep’ in popular culture’s depiction of nuclear weapons was correct, although there were a number of exceptions.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the idea of a ‘universal numbing’ towards nuclear weapons in this period is perhaps exaggerated. People were concerned about the bomb, yet this didn’t necessarily translate to support for limitations or disarmament. Support for negotiations came in 1967 when relations had improved and fear of the bomb was less significant.

¹¹¹ Paul Boyer, *By the Bombs Early Light*, 334.

Chapter 2: The Rise and Fall of Détente: The 1970s

“The greatest honour history can bestow is the title of peacemaker”¹¹²

Richard M. Nixon, 1969.

“Neither the United States nor any other nation which is committed to world peace and stability can continue to do business as usual with the Soviet Union”¹¹³

Jimmy Carter, 1980.

In his inaugural address on January 20th 1969, President Richard M. Nixon declared, “After a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiations with the Soviet Union”.¹¹⁴ With the help of his national security advisor, later Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, Nixon was able to bring about an era of cooperation that limited Cold War tensions. He developed a personal relationship with Soviet leaders and was able to reach a number of US-Soviet agreements, including on arms control, commercial relations, and political cooperation. A fragile Détente began to foster. Initially Détente was a success and reduced popular anxieties towards the Soviet Union, bringing about a number of historical events such as Nixon’s trips to Beijing and Moscow, as well as Leonid Brezhnev’s visit to Washington DC. Yet Détente still had its opponents from across the political spectrum, i.e. those that felt cooperation with the USSR meant appeasement of their human rights abuses, and those that continued to fear Soviet military power. Nixon and Kissinger’s use of secrecy and manipulation also meant the policy struggled to find political backing. Once Gerald Ford took over office in 1974, support for the policy was in steady decline. After the communist win in Vietnam and the universal criticism of the Helsinki Accords the policy hit a rapid decline and was almost certainly over when Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980.¹¹⁵

In retrospect historians view Détente favourably, although many question the methods and motives of its two architects, Nixon and Kissinger. John Lewis Gaddis argues, “Détente did not free the world from crisis, but the new spirit of cooperation,

¹¹² Richard M. Nixon, as quoted in, Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Greatest Comeback: How Richard Nixon Rose from Defeat to Create the New Majority*, (United States: Crown Forum, 2014), ebook.

¹¹³ Jimmy Carter, as quoted in, Michael B. Froman, *Development of the Idea of Détente; Coming to Terms*, (London: Macmillan, 1991), 93.

¹¹⁴ Robert D. Schulzinger, “Détente in the Nixon-Ford Years, 1969-1976”, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War Volume II: Crisis and Détente*, eds Melvyn P Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 373.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 374.

did seem to limit their frequency and severity”.¹¹⁶ Both nations chose to limit the scope of their rivalry and subsequently reduce the chances of nuclear war. In his joint 2007 biography of Nixon and Kissinger, historian Robert Dallek was critical of their secretiveness and manipulation of others. However, he did conclude, “Détente did not end the Cold War, but in conjunction with containment and deterrence...it set a process in motion that came to fruition under Mikhail Gorbachev at the end of the 1980s”.¹¹⁷

The following chapter assesses the American attitude to nuclear weapons during Détente and how the fall of Détente was reflected in newspapers and popular culture. Were the public fully supportive of Détente policy? And did their outlook match the growing mistrust between the two states in the later years of the decade?

Newspapers

In order to assess the outlook of newspapers to the rise and fall of Détente, this chapter focuses on three separate summits between the US and Soviet Union. Focus will be given to the 1973 Brezhnev visit to Washington DC, the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe held in Helsinki, and the 1979 Vienna Summit for the second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II). Each of these summits came at different stages of Détente: Washington at the height of US-USSR cooperation, Helsinki at a time when cracks in the relationship were beginning to show, and Vienna at a time of reignited hostilities. Although Leonid Brezhnev remained a consistent fixture throughout this period, the US had three different presidents, Richard Nixon during the Washington Summit, Gerald Ford for Helsinki and Jimmy Carter at the time of the Vienna summit.

1973 Washington Summit

The 1973 Brezhnev visit to Washington DC came just a year after a similar summit held in Moscow and attended by Nixon. Nixon made considerable progress through his first term, becoming the first president to visit both Beijing and Moscow. Hence, at the time of the Brezhnev’s visit it could be argued that relations were the best that they had ever been since 1945. However, relations begin to deteriorate by October because of the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, between a coalition of Arab States and Israel. This effectively became a proxy war between the two Cold War

¹¹⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, (New York, Penguin, 2005), 198

¹¹⁷ Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 618.

powers, which supported their respective allies. The good relations in June led to a subdued and muted affair in comparison to Nixon's visit to Moscow. This is something that many of the newspapers drew attention to. Prior to the visit, on the 15th June, *The Wall Street Journal* stated, "The extraordinary thing about General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev's impending arrival in Washington is the feeling that hardly anything out of the ordinary is occurring". It highlighted that the American-Soviet Détente had become such an established policy that Brezhnev's visit seems almost routine.¹¹⁸ A number of *New York Times* articles also highlighted the apparent routine nature of the visit. On the 17th June *The Times* stressed the thaw in US-Soviet relations, "No one in Washington, or anyone else in the United States, seemed to be excited... relations are so good with Moscow that few people fear the Soviet Union anymore".¹¹⁹ It followed that up on the 24th June by expressing how the summit conference had come across as "relaxed normality". However, it did highlight an incoming problem, emphasising that even if this summit influenced and improved the situation for generations to come, Nixon may well have to relinquish the credit with the Watergate committee beginning in the next few days.¹²⁰

Hope is something that characterised many of the newspaper reports at the time. *The Los Angeles Times* stressed a number of reasons to be hopeful: "The two world powers have in fact turned a historic corner in their relations".¹²¹ This is due to the arms agreements that were agreed, which *The LA Times* believed would help reduce the risk of nuclear war. It does highlight that Brezhnev may be playing a 'clever' game. However, the commitment that he showed both strongly and publically means a more optimistic conclusion is justified.¹²² The *New York Times* also expressed its hope and optimism with regard to Brezhnev's visit. It emphasised that if "the Nixon-Brezhnev conversations produce major new progress towards reducing both the burden of arms and the danger of war, and toward a better and more rewarding Soviet-American relationship, the United States, the USSR and the world can only be gainers".¹²³

¹¹⁸ "Brezhnev In America", *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 1973, 12.

¹¹⁹ Bernard Gwertzmann, "What They Seek at The Summit", *New York Times*, June 17, 1973, 177.

¹²⁰ R W Apple Jr, "Brezhnev Comes A-Calling", *New York Times*, June 24, 1973, 175.

¹²¹ "Reason for Hope at the Summit", *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1973, F2.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ "The Brezhnev Visit", *New York Times*, June 16, 1973, 26.

However, not all voices were ones of support and elements of criticism can be found. On June 21st, *The Wall Street Journal* took a more critical position, as it believed that although Détente was the only lasting solution to the problem of nuclear war, celebrating blindly was not the way forward. It saw the on-going SALT II negotiations as key, after which the US will have a better idea of whether the USSR was interested in continuing Détente on the basis of equality, “only then will we know whether this week’s celebrations are fitting or premature”.¹²⁴ *The Los Angeles Times* also highlighted some cause for concern. In an article on the 29th June shortly after the summit concluded, it brought attention to the Chinese development of nuclear weapons. “The Chinese nuclear test was an awful thing. For any addition to atmospheric radioactivity increases the risk of mutation in future generations. And each nuclear bomb, wherever it explodes, measures how far, how very far, the nations have to go to find world security”.¹²⁵ Hence, while not criticising Nixon or Détente, *The LA Times* was still concerned about the dangers of nuclear weapons, especially as they became available to more and more states.

Most reports covering the summit and the Cold War at the time were positive, and supported and praised the work of both Nixon and Brezhnev. It even led to some, cautiously, suggesting that the Cold War was now in fact over. This is something that was suggested in two *New York Times* articles following the summit. Firstly, in an article on the June 29th Spartak Beglov, a political commentator for the Soviet press agency Novosti, stated, “The Cold War is over as far as the Soviet Union is concerned, because it is a poor substitute for a genuine peace”.¹²⁶ The possibility was entertained once again on July 1st in *The Times*’ retrospective on the summit, “Rhetorically, the Cold War seems to be over”. This, however, didn’t not mean the Cold War itself is over, but merely the often-public rhetoric battle between the two nations. It believed the Cold War itself will naturally continue, “competition and rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union will continue both because of their ideological differences and because of their clashes of national interest in different parts of this globe.” Despite this they now felt as though both states

¹²⁴ “Celebrating the Détente”, *Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 1973, 18.

¹²⁵ “The Chinese Bomb – An Awful reminder”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1973, E10.

¹²⁶ Spartak Beglov, “Mr Brezhnev’s Visit”, *New York Times*, June 29, 1973, 37.

“articulate more clearly and probably more sincerely...that limits must be placed on the lengths to which their rivalry goes”.¹²⁷

Consequently, the outlook of these newspapers is generally positive, with a few messages of caution. *The New York Times* was the most optimistic about the situation, highlighting the normality of Brezhnev’s visit and suggesting a possible end to the Cold War, if not a complete end to the ideological struggle. *The Los Angeles Times* offers a similar outlook with regard to the routine nature of the state visit, yet still has a number of concerns when it comes to nuclear weapons, especially China’s entry into the nuclear arena. *The Wall Street Journal* offered the most criticism, emphasising the need to not just blindly celebrate, but continued to offer criticism on developments. Nevertheless, it conceded “the United States and the Soviet Union could achieve one of mankind’s dreams, a world without war, or at least major war, for a long time to come”.¹²⁸

1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

However, this attitude began to slowly deteriorate and already by 1975, just two years later, responses to Détente were far less supportive. Détente was still a delicate period even throughout the early seventies; conflict between the two powers had not been eradicated. Surrogate conflicts had begun to replace the direct clashes between the two powers, conflicts such as Vietnam and Yom Kippur meant that relations never truly thawed and mistrust was still apparent. Despite Brezhnev’s apparent commitment to the Détente period, he was still widely mistrusted, this due to proxy war conflicts like Vietnam, but also due to some of his comments regarding the period. In comments to the Soviet executive committee, the Politburo, in 1971 he stated, "We communists have to string along with the capitalists for a while. We need their credits, their agriculture, and their technology. But we are going to continue massive military programs and by the middle 1980s we will be in a position to return to a much more aggressive foreign policy designed to gain the upper hand in our relationship with the West."¹²⁹ Consequently, despite the thawing of relations, conflict and mistrust were apparent. Once Nixon left office in 1974 these issues had already begun the deterioration, which continued under President Gerald Ford.

¹²⁷ “Summit Perspective”, *New York Times* (July 1st, 1973), 154.

¹²⁸ “Celebrating the Détente”, 18.

¹²⁹ Leonid Brezhnev, “Remarks to the Politburo”, 1971.

The 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, held in Helsinki, is an example of the support for Détente beginning to unravel. The main act of the conference was the signing of the Helsinki Accords, which recognised the borders of post-war Europe, effectively confirming Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe. The accords also pledged to respect the sovereignty of nations and human rights, as well as a host of other promises. The goal was to improve Soviet relations with the West. However, the accords were not legally binding and did not have treaty status.¹³⁰

The conference was not well received by newspapers at the time, with critics across the political spectrum. This is shown in *The Wall Street Journal* on July 25th, explaining how the conference is “considered a bad idea... by a spectrum of American opinion ranging from ourselves to *The New York Times*”.¹³¹

This is backed up by *The New York Times* which explained how it would be preferable that the president not attend the summit, it stated: “Critics, including opposition Democrats, conservative Republicans, and many independents such as ourselves view this development as a regrettable, unilateral gain for the Soviet Union without any corresponding value for the United States”.¹³² *The Wall Street Journal* echoed *The Times*’ calls for Ford not to attend the conference, once again highlighting the bi-partisan nature of this criticism. In an article titled “Jerry, Don’t Go”, it cited Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a Russian Nobel Laureate and outspoken critic of the Soviet Union, who called the president’s decision to attend the conference “The betrayal of Eastern Europe”.¹³³

A betrayal of Eastern Europe is also something other publications reiterate. *The Los Angeles Times* suggested that the West could have done more to protect Eastern Europe: “The fact that the West is in no position at the moment to argue about the political division of Europe is no reason why it should sign away the possibility of arguing about it in the future. But that is what has happened”.¹³⁴ Similarly, in *The New York Times* on July 21st, it stressed its opposition to the acceptance of Soviet dominance over Eastern Europe. It stated that the conference’s 100-page declaration

¹³⁰ “The Helsinki Accords”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (<https://www.britannica.com/event/Helsinki-Accords>, Accessed March 2, 2017).

¹³¹ “An Item of Helsinki”, *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 1975, 6.

¹³² “Symbolic Journey... Into the Future”, *New York Times*, July 27, 1975, E16.

¹³³ “Jerry, Don’t Go”, *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 1975, 14.

¹³⁴ “A Victory, On Points, For the Russians”, *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 1975, E5.

is, “so little, and yet so much”.¹³⁵ So little, as it was not legally binding, meaning there is no guarantee that the USSR will keep its word when it comes to respecting the sovereignty of nations and human rights. And so much, because it symbolically ratifies the status quo, confirming Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe.¹³⁶

Despite these wide-ranging views of dissent, there were some who saw cause for hope and optimism. In *The Los Angeles Times* on August 3rd, a more positive view was offered. It agreed that this is a blow for many Eastern Europeans that were hoping for independence. However, it highlighted the fact that the West was never going to seriously challenge Soviet dominance over Eastern Europe, at least not anytime soon. It concluded that it is perhaps the West that gains the most from this conference, “Thus the Western side merely promised, in effect, to refrain from doing what it had no intention of doing anyway. The Russians, on the other hand, find themselves in the position of pledging to refrain from doing things they have done in the past and will feel an ideological compulsion to do in the future”.¹³⁷

However, optimism surrounding the conference was rare in comparison to the criticism. A lot of the criticism was aimed at the Soviet Union in particular, it seems the lack of fear and suspicion that signified the Nixon Détente era was coming to an end. *The New York Times* on August 1st questioned the ability of the Soviets to cooperate in good faith, claiming that Moscow has the attitude of “what’s ours is ours and what’s yours is negotiable”.¹³⁸ It elaborated on this on 3rd August, explaining how it wishes to be proved wrong by the conference, and hopes the meeting proves to be a step towards the end of the nuclear arms race and genuine cooperation. However, the Soviet Union must play its part or this will not become the reality, “Détente has to be a two-way street if it is to be real and if it is to have a significant role in shaping the world of tomorrow”.¹³⁹ Mistrust of the Soviets led many to question the notion of Détente, as explained in the *Wall Street Journal*. It highlighted how critics are beginning to question the policy of Détente: “They say America’s complex dealings with Moscow are increasingly one-sided, with the Soviets gaining and the Americans losing most of the time. Better to stop, or at least redirect the policy than continue,

¹³⁵ “European Security... and the Real Détente”, *New York Times*, July 21, 1975, 14.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

¹³⁷ “By the Promises We keep”, *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1975, C2.

¹³⁸ “Brezhnev at Helsinki”, *New York Times*, August 1, 1975, 19.

¹³⁹ “After Helsinki”, *New York Times*, August 3, 1975, 156.

they conclude”.¹⁴⁰ However, *The Journal* refuted this stance; it claims there is no better alternative at this time, with Détente critics failing to produce one. It goes on to stress the importance of Détente, “Détente isn’t a naïve campaign to persuade Moscow to be friendly for friendships sake. It involves building a web of relationships to keep the Soviets reasonably restrained”.¹⁴¹

Fear and suspicion had therefore crept back into American society by 1975 and the work done by Nixon was beginning to unravel in the aftermath of Watergate and the direction taken by his successor Gerald Ford. The newspapers were in almost universal agreement in their criticism of the conference in Helsinki. *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* all offered criticism of the Accords and Ford’s handling of Détente. However, Détente itself is still strongly supported, with suspicion of the Soviet Union being the main hindrance of progress.

1979 SALT II Summit, Vienna

By 1979, relations had deteriorated and the period of Détente was said to be over. Indirect conflict and surrogate clashes continued throughout the end of the decade in areas such as the Middle East, Chile, Ethiopia and Angola.¹⁴² President Jimmy Carter had a strained relationship with the Soviet Union during his administration; the Russians believed that he wanted to return to a period of more confrontation. This was brought about by Carter’s repeated criticism of Soviet interventions and their human rights record. Public opinion leaned further and further to the right at the end of the decade due to the fallout from Watergate and the subsequent mistrust in government, as well as the growing Soviet nuclear arsenals that saw the USSR leading the arms race in number of nuclear weapons by the end of the decade. The Neo-Conservative wing of the Republican Party began to grow and people responded to their critique of the Détente period. All this led to a collapse in the military and strategic relationship between the two super powers, resulting in a period of escalating conflict during the early eighties.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Robert Keatley, “The Give and Take of Détente”, *Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 1975, 8.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, 178.

¹⁴³ Odd Arne Westad, “Series Editor Preface”, In *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njolstad, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), vii. Tom W Smith, “Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism”, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47 (1983), 277-279.

The 1979 SALT II summit in Vienna was the first meeting between the US and Soviets in four years since the Helsinki conference, having had five in just over three years from 1972-1975. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Treaty was a far more polarizing issue than the Helsinki Accords, the latter being non-binding and therefore more symbolic than the SALT II Treaty. Furthermore, Carter was proving to be more unpopular than Ford and was subject to bipartisan criticism of his foreign policy, highlighted by the loss of his second term as president the following year to Ronald Reagan. Carter is now seen a transition president, he was leader in an era in which Americans were drawn to the patriotic and aggressive leadership of the new look Republican party in the form of Reagan. Ultimately he was seen as too conservative by Democrats and too liberal by Republicans.¹⁴⁴ Although critical, many of the newspapers continued to call for a closer relationship with the Soviet Union. Though, this time the US had to start virtually from scratch, not build upon an already established D tente.

One of the prevailing outlooks of the newspapers is unenthusiastic support; supporting the SALT II Treaty due to the lack of a better alternative. *The New York Times* on June 19th highlighted the need for arms control agreements, “The nation’s defences remain as secure as a still-growing nuclear arsenal can make them. We shall support SALT II, if no better case is made against it, not with a sense of achievement but with a hope that must be sustained”.¹⁴⁵ It believed negotiations like this were important, almost regardless of what they agree upon, as they brought an important sense of hope to the arms race. Communication is valuable, especially at a time when US-Soviet relations have been strained, “There is value also in talking about the race while running it; the talk leaves each side that much less paranoid”.¹⁴⁶

In contrast, some articles supported the treaty to avoid any problems that would arise from not limiting arms in some way. On June 19th *The Los Angeles Times* suggested that although the summit produced no surprises and a treaty in which the prospects of success are up for question, it should be supported as, “If the new SALT treaty is rejected by the Senate, then all bets about D tente between the superpowers will be off, or at least sharply reduced in size and odds”.¹⁴⁷ Conversely, *The Wall*

¹⁴⁴ Erwin C. Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good*, (Louisiana: Louisiana State Press, 1988), 193.

¹⁴⁵ “Down From the Summit Clouds”, *New York Times*, June 19, 1979, A20

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Don Cook, “Summit Combined Many Diverse Problems”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1979, A14.

Street Journal played down the possible risks if no treaty was to be ratified. On the 19th June, it concluded that, “If there is no treaty, the essential constraints on Soviet behaviour will remain. If a bad treaty is approved, the result is not likely to be a more reasonable Soviet Union. Rather, the result will be even more bold and strident Soviet demands”.¹⁴⁸ This therefore suggests that contrary to what many had been saying; rejecting the treaty would in fact be the safe option.

Much of the criticism surrounding the summit was not, however, the treaty itself, but President Carter, who found himself in a very unpopular position by 1979. A number of articles were highly critical of the US president. On the June 15th *The New York Times* published an article depicting a fictional conversation between Carter and Brezhnev. In the article Brezhnev states this to Carter: “Mr Carter you have wasted three years of your term and my old age. We could have signed SALT II within weeks of your inauguration”.¹⁴⁹ *The Los Angeles Times* also made some unflattering claims with regard to Carter’s political ability. On June 24th it stated, “But Brezhnev certainly looked like a physical lame-duck to the Americans, just as Carter looks like a political lame-duck to the Soviets. They may already have made about all the history together that they are going to make”.¹⁵⁰

By 1979 relations were particularly strained and this was reflected in the newspapers. A sense of foreboding and doom was present in discussions regarding the SALT II Treaty. *The Wall Street Journal* was the most critical of the treaty, deciding that cooperation on this matter was not necessarily the safe option. However, both *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* were in agreement that although the treaty may be flawed and may even be unsuccessful, it is necessary to restore a sense of hope to the Cold War.

During the 1970s, the outlook of newspapers gradually changed. In the early seventies, they were more optimistic and the fear and suspicion that characterised the Cuban Missile Crisis era had been replaced by hope and optimism in the face of Détente. Yet by the end of the decade, fear and suspicion had returned, as well as a general gloominess towards the Cold War with the Soviet Union. *The New York Times* was initially very positive, praising the normality of the Brezhnev summit and suggesting that a possible conclusion to the Cold War had been found. However, its

¹⁴⁸ “Fear of Rejection”, *Wall Street Journal*, June 19, 1979, 22.

¹⁴⁹ “Vienna, in Three-Quarter Time”, *New York Times*, June 15, 1979, A26.

¹⁵⁰ Don Cook, “SALT Summit: One More Without Feeling”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1979, E1.

support and optimism with regard to US foreign policy began to decline, it was not a supporter of the Helsinki Accords, mainly because an element of mistrust surrounding the Soviet Union had returned to its outlook. By 1979 it was highly critical of the Carter administration, supporting SALT II only because it saw it as the last chance to reclaim some kind of Détente. *The Los Angeles Times* had a similar change of outlook; it praised the success of Détente and the Brezhnev meeting as something that could help lessen the chances of nuclear war. Mistrust did, however, still linger in its attitude, as it entertained the possibility that Brezhnev could be playing a ‘clever game’. Consequently, by 1979, suspicion had fully returned to its outlook and it supported SALT II only to save what remained of détente. *The Wall Street Journal* was the most critical over the course of the decade; in 1973 it was positive, but called for more criticism of the government’s Cold War policy rather than just blind celebration. It was among the majority that criticised the Helsinki Accords in 1975. By 1979 it opposed the SALT II treaty, as it believed signing the treaty was the riskier option. Despite the optimism and hope seen at the start of the decade, by the end of it newspapers had a more negative outlook. Support for Détente, however, was still apparent from *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*, who both supported the SALT II treaty to save any chance of reigniting US-Soviet cooperation.

Public Opinion Comparison

To what extent did these outlooks reflect public opinion? In “The Polls: American Attitudes to the Soviet Union and Communism”, poll analyst Tom W. Smith charts the development of US attitudes across the 1970s. He explains how positive opinion toward the Soviet Union had increased steadily up until 1973, with most holding a neutral position and a fifth having a positive outlook on the USSR. However, this began to decline and reached a low point in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979,¹⁵¹ something that led to the Senate ratification of the SALT II Treaty being delayed. The mutual ties and bilateral agreements were still supported across the 1970s. Nevertheless, opinion did become more critical towards the end of the decade. As Smith States, “growing minorities began to doubt the mutual advantage and actual benefits during the late seventies”.¹⁵² Similarly to the

¹⁵¹ Tom W Smith, “Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism”, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47 (1983), 277.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 279.

newspapers then, the public maintained a support for Détente, yet it was a more critical one. The public and newspapers seem to have a similar outlook once again, Americans largely agreed with the outlook of all three papers throughout the decade, becoming more critical, like *The Wall Street Journal*, as the decade went on. Interestingly, in a later article Tom W. Smith highlights the lack of nuclear-based polling data from the late-sixties and seventies, this because the questions were simply not asked. This makes it difficult to ascertain what Americans felt during this period, although, the lack of questions suggests can't have been a major point of concern to the public otherwise the questions would have been asked.¹⁵³

What influence did the newspapers have on this opinion? Once again trust in journalism was high in comparison to today's numbers. By 1973, readership of US newspapers hit an all time high of 63,147,000. Moreover, in 1972 a Gallup poll judged that 68%¹⁵⁴ of Americans had at least a fair amount of trust in journalism, this increased even further due to major journalistic successes, most notably *The Washington Post's* investigation into Watergate. By 1976, trust in journalism had reached an all time high of 72%.¹⁵⁵ Although TV had become its competitor, readership remained high and journalists exerted extraordinary influence over public opinion.¹⁵⁶

Popular Culture

There are very few depictions of nuclear issues in the 1970s, fewer than the 1960s even. However, this is not to say that the films of the 1970s did not give an insight into the public's feelings towards the Cold War, the Soviet Union and nuclear weapons in general. Films with a political message were still prevalent throughout the decade, from the big screen depiction of the Watergate scandal in *All the President's Men*, to films that presented the harsh realities of the Vietnam War such as *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter*. Through analysis of films such as these, this thesis assesses how they influenced the political outlook and the attitude to US foreign policy, of the American public. Using some of the few films that feature nuclear depictions as well as the politically motivated films, this thesis then comes to

¹⁵³ Tom W. Smith, "A Report: Nuclear Anxiety", *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988), 559.

¹⁵⁴ Jeffery M. Jones, "Americans' Trust in Mass Media", *Gallup*, 2004, (www.gallup.com/poll/11428/americans-trust-mass-media.aspx, accessed March 2, 2017).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Marlee Richards, *America in the 1970s*, (Minneapolis: 21st Century Books, 2010).

a conclusion as to whether popular culture influenced public opinion on nuclear weapons and the Cold War in general.

In a similar fashion to *Dr Strangelove*, although not to the same extent, *All the President's Men* (1976) has become an extremely influential film and is seen as one of the greatest political thrillers of all time. The film is an adaptation of the non-fiction book of the same name by Watergate journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, and depicts their uncovering of the scandal. The film was hugely successful; no other purely political film has been so successful at the box-office, it also won two Academy Awards and was nominated for Best Picture.¹⁵⁷ *All the President's Men* showed that corruption and 'bad' men were at the heart of US politics. Critical depictions of government systems were less common than they are today and the film's message grabbed the public's attention. Despite its negativity, the heart of the film's message is the heroism of individuals and the importance of a free press. It reassured viewers that although corruption and conspiracy occurred, it could be exposed and defeated.¹⁵⁸ The film was hugely influential at the time, with many Americans still unsure and confused by the Watergate scandal; a film adaptation gave less politically savvy Americans an understanding of the situation. Its influence was so great, according to its screenwriter, Ronald Reagan saw it as the reason for Gerald Ford's defeat to Jimmy Carter in the 1976 election; its April 1976 release and extended run due to its success, meant many Americans voted with the transgressions of a former Republican president fresh in their mind. The screenwriter states, "We are talking about a movie that might just have changed the entire course of American History".¹⁵⁹

Robert Redford, star and producer of *All the President's Men*, also starred in another political thriller the previous year *Three Days of the Condor* (1974). The film depicts a young CIA researcher returning to his office to find his co-workers dead. In his search for the truth he learns of a conspiracy involving the CIA and maybe even the press. This is another example of cynicism towards previously lauded institutions and reflected the more critical nature of public opinion. Although less successful than *All the President's Men*, *Three Days of the Condor* was well-received and a box office hit. Its critical and cynical outlook on politics was something that

¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth Haas, Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas, *Projecting politics: Political Messages in American Films*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 177.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

resonated with the public in post-Watergate America.¹⁶⁰ Film historians Terry Christensen and Peter J Haas highlight the political paranoia that became apparent in films of the seventies, “movies emphasised the corrupting nature of power: good men became evil, or had to walk away from politics to preserve their honour.”¹⁶¹ However, to say both these films influenced public opinion would be a stretch too far. *All the Presidents Men* was particularly successful. However, it came at a time when public trust in government had been falling for the past decade. Trust that the federal government did the right thing always or most of the time was at an all-time high in 1964 at 77%, by 1974 this has declined to 36%, due to Vietnam, civil unrest in the form of anti-war and civil rights protests, as well as the Watergate scandal.¹⁶² Therefore the film probably tapped into this already existing public mood, rather than change it itself.

One of the defining elements of late seventies Hollywood was its depictions of the Vietnam War. Two of the most influential of these depictions were *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Both films present the harsh realities of the war, something that not all Americans were aware of. These films present a war that was physiologically traumatic for both the soldiers and the US public as a whole. *The Deer Hunter* presents the story of young working class steel workers who volunteer for service in the war. The film juxtaposes the characters home life in Pennsylvania before and after the war, with brutal depictions of their time in Vietnam. Its central characters have different fates; the war destroyed one of them and he dies by his own hand, in its iconic Russian roulette scenes; the other was able to endure the experience and was even strengthened by it. That is perhaps the message of the film that the war will leave a psychological scar on US society for years to come; yet Americans are strong enough to overcome it.¹⁶³ *Apocalypse Now* follows a Special Forces soldier in his search for a former US soldier who has gone rogue and started fighting the war on his own terms. It presents the psychological effects that war had on the soldiers and the madness that ensues. It blurs the lines between good and evil in the way it portrays the violence of both sides. Both films have been referred to as both pro-and anti-war, due to the way that they portray the violence. *The Deer*

¹⁶⁰ Haas, *Projecting Politics*, 176.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 151.

¹⁶² “Beyond Trust: How Americans View their Government”, *Pew Research Center*, accessed June 2, 2017, (www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/1-trust-in-government-1958-2015/)

¹⁶³ Michael Paris, “The American Film Industry and Vietnam”, *History Today* 37 (1987).

Hunter's Vietnam scenes were criticised for xenophobia, mainly because of the barbaric portrayal of the South Vietnamese, especially in the iconic Russian roulette scenes. *Apocalypse Now* was also criticised for presenting the South Vietnamese as enticing the US into violence.¹⁶⁴ General consensus, however, now finds both films to have an anti-Vietnam message; nevertheless there is patriotism present in both films, especially *The Deer Hunter*.

Neither film celebrates or glorifies the conflict, in fact quite the opposite, yet they are both seen to have a patriotic gaze on the events, with Michael Paris of *History Today* suggesting that they were both indicative of the more patriotic and aggressive nature of the Reagan administration that assumed office just a couple of years later. In *The Deer Hunter's* final scene the characters are depicted singing “God Bless America”, the meaning behind this has been debated, “was it meant ironically or not, as a critique of patriotism or a paean to it?” From the perspective of this research an “ironic” ending would not have been in tune with the film’s tone. Consequently, the film can be seen as a critique of Americas actions in Vietnam, yet a celebration of its enduring spirit. Both films were largely successful in terms of box-office takings and critical acclaim. *Apocalypse Now* was nominated and *The Deer Hunter* won the Academy Award for Best Picture. However like *All the President's Men*, they too tapped into already existing public opinion; by the late seventies only a quarter of Americans had trust in their government. The contested messages of the films also make it unclear as to how the public reacted to the portrayals.

One of the more critical Vietnam films is also one that puts nuclear war at its forefront. *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1977) depicts a rogue general; although contrary to other depictions, he is not the typical anti-Soviet rogue general; he is one looking to spread the truth regarding Vietnam. Aware of Vietnam secrets, the general threatens to launch a nuclear weapon unless the American people are told the truth about the war. Interestingly, the president agrees to his demands. However, both are killed before they are able to reveal the truth, showing that a higher power is in control of America and they would even sacrifice the president. *Twilight's Last Gleaming* portrayed the similar cynicism of government institutions as depicted in *Three Days of the Condor* and *All the President's Men*. It also showed the ‘good guys’ losing,

¹⁶⁴ Ronnie D. Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies: Film, Fiction, and Foreign Policy*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001)

something that characterised a lot of films in the seventies.¹⁶⁵ This film was not a commercial success, however, and perhaps highlights the public lack of appetite for depictions of nuclear war in comparison to the 1960s. Nuclear power plants were also an area that was touched upon by films in the 1970s. *China Syndrome* (1979) depicted a TV reporter and her cameraman who discover a series of cover-ups at a power plant and strive to reveal the truth.¹⁶⁶ The film highlights the fear that had emerged surrounding nuclear power, not just weapons. Furthermore, it is another example of mistrust in the powerful elite and paranoia about the way in which society was run.

The James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), also offers a perspective on the public's attitude to the Cold War. The film shows nuclear weapons being stolen from both the British and the Russians, ultimately Bond and a KGB agent team up and investigate the issue together. Although this shows there is still a fear of nuclear weapons, perhaps it shows that the Soviet Union were no longer seen as the enemy. Although, it was released in 1977 and production began in 1975, perhaps it reflected the feeling of the Détente era rather than the period of deterioration in the late seventies.

Boyer's assertion is once again correct, with the 1970s having limited depictions of nuclear war. However, political thrillers and films with a political message were popular. *All the President's Men* and *Three Days of the Condor* portrayed a cynicism towards government that was prevalent in post-Watergate America. *All the President's Men* was hugely influential, given its apparent links to the 1976 election result. However, the Vietnam films of the late 1970s show a return to a more patriotic outlook, although *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* presented the brutality of war, they also portray American strength. One of the decades only portrayals of nuclear issues, *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, continued the cynicism of the earlier films, yet was unsuccessful at the box office. Nevertheless, most of the films cannot be said to have had a huge influence over the public, rather they merely tapped into an already existing public outlook. A correlation can be found between the newspapers and films; at the start of the decade Americans were no longer satisfied with the good vs. evil narrative of the Cold War, as they no longer had an entirely negative view of the Soviet Union. Therefore, negative depictions of the United States became popular when combined with the failure in Vietnam and the Watergate

¹⁶⁵ Haas, *Projecting Politics*, 185.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 156.

scandal. Similarly, the newspapers were supportive of Détente, yet not always supportive of their own government's actions. Films later in the decade show the rise in patriotism that is then reflected in Ronald Reagan's election win of 1980; the papers also depict a decline in support for Cold War cooperation. Both could perhaps be explained by the breakdown in US-Soviet relations.

Conclusion

The 1970s appear to be a tale of two halves and this is reflected through the outlook of newspapers, popular culture and public opinion. As highlighted by the research into Brezhnev's visit to Washington in 1973, the early stages of the decade were characterised by a sense of hope and positivity regarding US-Soviet relations. *The New York Times* highlighted the normality of the Brezhnev visit and even suggested a possible end to Cold War after such successful meetings, *The Los Angeles Times* were similarly hopeful, although were still concerned about the nuclear threat, particularly from emerging power China. *The Wall Street Journal* offers a more critical outlook on Détente, it believed that this is not a time for blind celebration and people should continue to critique further developments. Nevertheless, it was hopeful about what Détente will mean for the future of the conflict, "the United States and the Soviet Union could achieve one of mankind's dreams, a world without war, or at least major war, for a long time to come".¹⁶⁷

As relations began to deteriorate, the outlook of the newspapers became less positive and none of them supported the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1975. This was due to the nature of the negotiations: many felt that the Soviet Union was being handed Eastern Europe and the West's agreement to these terms was a betrayal of those people. This came at a time when more and more people were beginning to question the equality of the Détente discussions and whether or not the US were getting a fair deal.

This had further escalated by 1979 for the SALT II meeting in Vienna. By this stage further surrogate conflicts, friction between President Carter and the Soviets, and an emerging Neo-Conservative movement in the US meant that the Détente period had all but ended. *The Wall Street Journal* was critical of the SALT discussions and concluded that this particular arms limitation deal was not necessarily

¹⁶⁷ "Celebrating the Détente", 18.

the safe option. Conversely, although *The New York* and *The Los Angeles Times* saw the treaty as flawed, they supported it as they wished to return to a time of hope and cooperation.

The 1970s can therefore be seen as a period of deterioration in regard to the outlook of the newspapers. *The New York* and *The Los Angeles Times* see their positive and hopeful outlook turn to concern and fear by the end of the decade. Although *The Wall Street Journal* began the decade from a more critical perspective, by 1979 it too had lost its more hopeful outlook for the future. This is also reflected in the public opinion. Opinion polls show a similar deterioration in American attitudes towards the Soviet Union, peaking in 1973 and reaching a low point in 1979. Although newspaper influence is hard to measure, readership of newspapers was high in the seventies and journalists were well trusted after high profile stories such as Watergate and the Pentagon Papers. Given the similarities between the newspaper outlook and public opinion, newspapers would have had a key influence on forming this public perception.

There are very few films depicting nuclear issues throughout the 1970s. What the decade did see was a rise in politically charged films such as *All the President's Men*, the nuclear related *Twilight's Last Gleaming* and the Vietnam War films of the late seventies. Due to the controversy surrounding the war in Vietnam as well as Watergate, people began to have less and less faith in the US government. Rather than influence this opinion, however, it is more likely that the films merely tapped into an already existing public perception. The lack of nuclear depictions once again fits in with the existing historiography that suggests an unresponsive apathy in atomic culture prior to the 1980s. However, perhaps this was because for the good relations in the conflict, rather than apathy towards the bomb. Whether the 1980s is truly a turning point, is examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Turning Point? The Day After and the 1980s

“Yes, let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness—pray they will discover the joy of knowing God”¹⁶⁸

Ronald Reagan, 1983.

“Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”¹⁶⁹

Ronald Reagan, 1987.

Many scholars view the early 1980s as a renewal of the Cold War. Events such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the subsequent boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow and the economic problems that both countries faced, led to renewed tensions and a definite end to the Détente policies of the Nixon era. President Ronald Reagan was elected on an anti-Soviet platform and much of his first term was about getting ahead of the USSR in the arms race, with the introduction of his Strategic Defence Initiative, an elaborate defence system that Reagan hoped would be able to intercept nuclear weapons in space. However, towards the latter half of decade, things began to change, there was a growing nuclear freeze movement that could no longer be ignored by the government. The Able Archer 83 exercise and TV-Movie *The Day After* are said to have had an impact on Reagan’s outlook on nuclear war. By the time Reagan left office in 1988, with the help of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, he had laid the groundwork for the end of the Cold War.

The turbulent times of the early nineteen-eighties are something many have drawn attention to. In *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* edited by Olav Njolstad, Cold War expert Odd Arne Westad highlights the importance he gives to the early-eighties: “With the exception of the last years of the Stalin era and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, we never came closer to a military confrontation”.¹⁷⁰ In *The Last Decade of the Cold War* many of the contributors highlight the dangers posed by the early-eighties. The idea that this also manifested itself in public opinion is something that has been addressed in research. In “A Report: Nuclear Anxiety” (1988), Tom W. Smith once again tracks the public opinion of Americans regarding nuclear weapons. He states, “Over time the level of

¹⁶⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Evil Empire, National Association of Evangelicals, March 8, 1983.

¹⁶⁹ Ronald Reagan, “Tear Down this Wall”, *Brandenburg Gate*, June 12, 1987.

¹⁷⁰ Odd Arne Westad, “Series Editor Preface”, In *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njolstad, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), vii.

concern has generally covaried with expectations of war, rising in the late fifties, early sixties, and again from the mid-seventies to early eighties, before levelling off and probably declining in the mid-eighties”.¹⁷¹ This consequently suggests that the early-eighties were a time in which ordinary Americans were concerned about nuclear war. In what way did newspapers and popular culture influence this? Was the rise in tensions reflected in their output?

Newspapers Before *The Day After*

On November 20th 1983, the American television network ABC aired *The Day After*. The ground-breaking film depicted a fictional conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, that escalates into full-scale nuclear war between the US and the Soviet Union. Rather than portray the drama through the eyes of the government or the military, the film puts focus on the ordinary residents of Lawrence, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri. The film offers a vivid depiction of what would happen to these relatively minor US cities in the event of nuclear war. What is shown is a harrowing 126 minutes in which the residents of Lawrence and Kansas City are reduced to cinders, radiated or perhaps worst of all, depicted as surviving and continuing on with something that could scarcely be called living.¹⁷² Films with nuclear depictions in the 1960s and 1970s had shied away from portraying the actual fallout of a nuclear war either having the bomb drop in its climax (*Dr Strangelove*), or using a post-apocalyptic approach and depicting events years after the nuclear event (*Planet of the Apes*). In this sense *The Day After's* distressing representation of nuclear fallout was a ground-breaking approach. The film was hugely controversial before and after its airing, with anti-bomb campaigners praising its unwavering depiction, whereas supporters of Mutually Assured Destruction condemned its alarmist message. It was a huge ratings success for ABC, boasting over 100 million viewers and a 62% audience share, making it the most watched TV-movie in television history.¹⁷³ The film became hugely influential in the anti-bomb movement and is said to have influenced the opinion of many Americans, even that of President Ronald Reagan. The following section charts the influence of *The Day After* as well

¹⁷¹ Tom W. Smith, “A Report: Nuclear Anxiety”, *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988), 560.

¹⁷² Alistair Cooke, “Letters From America: The Day After”, BBC Radio 4, November 25, 1983.

¹⁷³ Deron Overpeck, “Remember! It’s Only a Movie! Expectations and Receptions of *The Day After* (1983)”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 32 (2012), 267.

offer insight into everyday America's attitude to nuclear weapons across the 1980s as a whole.

In order to chart the influence of *The Day After*, firstly this chapter assesses American attitudes to nuclear weapons prior to the film's airing. Newspapers *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Wall Street Journal* are studied with specific focus on the announcement of Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), dubbed Star Wars by many, on March 23rd 1983. SDI was a defence system that was said to be able to intercept nuclear missile from space. As a vocal critic of Mutually Assured Destruction, Reagan felt the US would be able to get the upper hand in the Cold War and leave the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete".¹⁷⁴ SDI proved to be far too technically demanding and expensive, although elements of the programme still exist today, and its more overly ambitious ideas were scrapped by the time Bill Clinton took office.¹⁷⁵ Yet how did newspapers respond to this new initiative? Did they support the new approach to the arms race? Or were they concerned about what it meant for the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction?

The New York Times, *Los Angeles Times* and *Wall Street Journal* offered a variety of reactions to Reagan's announcement. Firstly, a common reaction was to question the plausibility of Reagan's plans. *The New York Times* on March 27th highlighted the implausibility of a missile-proof shield around America and its allies, calling it a "pipe dream, a projection of fantasy into policy". It did emphasize, that despite MADs success of preventing nuclear war for many decades now, mankind yearns for a safer alternative, although "there's no statesmanship in science fiction".¹⁷⁶ *The Los Angeles Times* had a similar if not a more mixed outlook. In an article on March 25th, it too questioned whether the initiative could become reality: "Most defence scientists remain unpersuaded that an effective anti-ballistic missile system is feasible". It did conclude that research should be conducted in this area, although it questioned whether Reagan's proposal was the best option.¹⁷⁷ In comparison, in another article by *The Los Angeles Times* on April 1st, T.A Heppenheimer, an associate fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, made his case for SDI. He conceded that although "we are far from being able to achieve it", what was "impossible in 1945 was well worth pursuing 10

¹⁷⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Star Wars Speech", March 23, 1983.

¹⁷⁵ "Nuclear Strategy", Encyclopedia Britannica

¹⁷⁶ "Nuclear Facts, Science Fictions", *New York Times*, March 27, 1983, E18.

¹⁷⁷ "Lost In Space?", *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1983, D6.

years later”.¹⁷⁸ *The Wall Street Journal* had the most positive outlook on the proposed initiative. On March 25th it outlined its support: “We think the US should arm itself in a way that makes the best use of advanced technology and recognizes urgent needs”. It went on to state that Reagan is on solid ground morally and militarily and that there is “indeed greater cause for hope”.¹⁷⁹

Not all reactions focused on the plausibility of the project. Some were concerned with what the initiative would mean for the arms race, regardless of its conceivability. In *The Los Angeles Times* of April 10th, Ivan Selin, who would later become chairman of Nuclear Regulation Commission (1991-1995), weighed up the pros and cons of nuclear defence and Mutually Assured Destruction. He concluded that abandoning Mutually Assured Destruction would be too dangerous. He stated that anti-ballistic missile defences would not stand up to a large-scale attack and would “invite a nuclear war, not prevent one”. He elaborated that it is far safer to rely on MAD as well as diplomatic steps to prevent war between two heavily armed nuclear camps.¹⁸⁰ In *The New York Times* on April 1st, Marcus Raskin, a senior fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, was also critical of SDI, although he came to a different conclusion than Selin. He agreed that an anti-ballistic defence system would only compound the security problems of the US. However, his answer would be to introduce nuclear disarmament, “national security requires that we halt the arms race in its tracks rather than seek a magic-bullet solution.”¹⁸¹ Support for SDI was not widespread, *The New York* and *The Los Angeles Times* both felt uneasy about dropping the assurances of mutual destruction, considering its success up to this point in the Cold War. *The New York Times* went the furthest believing that if an alternative was needed to MAD, disarmament was the only option. In contrast *The Wall Street Journal*, a publication with a conservative outlook, was fully supportive of SDI and Reagan, believing that his vision of a large-scale defence system was cause for hope. Prior to the release of *The Day After*, all three papers showed concern for the future of nuclear weapons, something that wasn’t particularly present in the 1970s. *The New York* and *The Los Angeles Times* had more fear and concern at this stage, especially

¹⁷⁸ T.A Heppenheimer, “Space Defense: Turning Warfare Upside Down”, *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1983, C7.

¹⁷⁹ “Star Wars Reality”, *Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 1983, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Ivan Selin, “Nuclear Strategy is a Balancing Act”, *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1983, K5.

¹⁸¹ Marcus Raskin, “Now Reconsider Disarmament”, *New York Times*, April 1, 1983, A27.

on the direction that Reagan is taking nuclear policy. In contrast, *The Wall Street Journal* was supportive of the administration's plans and consequently more hopeful.

Newspapers on *The Day After*

The Day After was a much-discussed topic before and after its release, and drew many polarizing opinions. Prior to the airing of the programme, *The Wall Street Journal* was sceptical about its message and motive. On November 18th, it highlighted how in US television November is “sweeps” month, in which television ratings are closely monitored for advertising reasons. Often, in a “sweeps” month, networks will make a big ratings push. *The Wall Street Journal* was therefore cynical of ABC's motives, and suggested that they were exploiting a serious subject for a ratings gain. They concluded that rather than tune in to watch *The Day After*, the public watch the football game between the Rams and Redskins instead, “you can see Kansas City destroyed during the reruns next summer”.¹⁸² After the film had aired, *The Wall Street Journal's* enthusiasm did not improve. On November 25th, in its summary of the week's television, it claimed viewers “yawned their way through the first half” and were ultimately underwhelmed by the programme. It claimed viewers were not panicked by the depiction, citing a *Washington Post* poll that found fear of nuclear war had diminished and Reagan's approval rating had improved.¹⁸³

Nevertheless, there was one positive response to the film from *The Wall Street Journal*. On November 21st, Sam Cohen, a physicist often credited as the father of the neutron bomb, reacted positively to the film. He stated that the film was, “an extremely thoughtful, sensitive and objective accounting of the nuclear war issue”. Cohen highlighted how he was often left frustrated with depictions of nuclear war, as all too often they had an anti-nuclear bias. However, he did not feel that *The Day After* shared this bias, the message being that the American people must be better prepared in the event of a nuclear attack.¹⁸⁴

The New York Times had a similar mixed, if not more positive, outlook on the film. In a letter to the editor published on December 1st, journalist Raymond Gastil explained how the film highlighted the horror and foolishness of a nuclear exchange and how efforts should be made to avoid such an event. However, he did concede not

¹⁸² “As the World Burns”, *Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 1983, 30.

¹⁸³ “A Swell Week, Not Hell Week”, *Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 1983, 12.

¹⁸⁴ Sam Cohen, “On The Day After, a Plan for Saving Ourselves”, *Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 1983, 24.

many Americans would welcome disarmament or any other radical measures to halt nuclear war. What was necessary, Gastil believed, is for Americans to be better prepared for nuclear war. Like Cohen, Gastil believed the film's message was "a serious indictment of the lack of civilian preparedness."¹⁸⁵ Many responses from *The New York Times* were largely positive. On November 22nd, reporter Glenn Collins visited schools to investigate the reactions of children, of all ages, to the programme. Most reactions were positive, with the children feeling scared and hopeless after viewing, yet thankful that they were able to learn about the realities of nuclear war. Also praised was the ABC panel show after the programme that discussed the many aspects of nuclear war, from various different standpoints.¹⁸⁶

However, not all responses from *The New York Times* were positive. Prior to the airing William V. O'Brien, Professor of Government at Georgetown University, stated the influence of "anti-deterrent" films and other peace movement "propaganda" could leave the country open to a nuclear attack. He believed the overly emotional message of the film could spur a popular movement with the aim of eliminating nuclear weapons. He highlighted how the threat of communism is still apparent and human nature will never rid the human race of its proclivity for aggressive war. Therefore, a strong nuclear deterrent is needed, and the emotional "propaganda" could undermine it and lead to tragic consequences.¹⁸⁷ However, on the same day Paul R. Ehrlich, Professor of Biological Sciences at Stanford University, posed the question, "what is wrong with injecting emotion into the nuclear debate?" He believed that in the East and West fear of the enemy was the overriding fear of nuclear war. By injecting emotion into the debate, people were able to see that what divided them was not worth the devastation of a nuclear war.¹⁸⁸

The film was not discussed as heavily in *The Los Angeles Times*, although it did publish a number of letters from its readers. Nevertheless, in one of the few articles published by *The LA Times*, it views the film in a particularly positive light. On November 22nd, it referred to it as an "Inspiration for Peace". It commended the filmmakers for what was an important and useful broadcast, which can illuminate the

¹⁸⁵ Raymond Gastil, "A Country Unprepared for War Survival", *New York Times*, December 1, 1983, A26.

¹⁸⁶ Glenn Collins, "Students Voice Fear and Hopelessness In Talks the Day After 'The Day After'", *New York Times*, November 22, 1983, A26.

¹⁸⁷ William V. O'Brien, "An Anti-Deterrent Film", *New York Times*, November 20, 1983, E21.

¹⁸⁸ Paul R. Ehrlich, "See the Effects of Nuclear. Be Emotional" *New York Times*, November 20, 1983, E21.

arms-control and national-strategy debate. It called the situation an “opportunity for nuclear disarmament”, although it conceded that action needed to be taken by the Soviet Union, not just the US, and that might not be forthcoming.¹⁸⁹ In its film section it was not so positive, criticising the film’s artistic merit. The film is compared unfavourably to another depiction of a nuclear holocaust, *Testament* (1983) that is discussed later in this chapter. Sheila Benson, the critic, did not question the intent of the film, believing that it was an attempt to make a “humane contribution to the world”. Although she highlighted what she saw as clichéd and banal, with overuse of special effects and thinly layered characters. Regarding the film’s influence, she questioned whether the public, through inferior art, would properly receive the message. Although she conceded, perhaps after a diet of poor television, they won’t “even notice how shoddy the packaging of this message really is”.¹⁹⁰

Consequently, the *Journal* does have mixed messages about the merits of the film. The criticism suggested that the film either exploited a serious subject or had an overly anti-nuclear bias, whereas the praise was for its balanced approach, suggesting a strong pro-nuclear stance from *The Journal*. In contrast, *The New York Times* had a more anti-bomb outlook in some of its articles, praising the film for its unwavering portrayal of the events. Yet, on the whole its outlook was still mixed, with many concerned about how a growing peace movement would undermine the country’s deterrent. *The Los Angeles Times* offered less insight into the debate surrounding the film. It was fairly damning of the film in its critical analysis, although it did not question the merit of the film’s message. Furthermore, in its editorial it heavily praised the programme, and hoped the film could ignite the nuclear-debate. It is the most hopeful of all the papers, explaining the film may motivate a broader peace movement, it is “not an occasion of despair or helplessness”.¹⁹¹

Influence of *The Day After* on the Public

Letters from readers published by the newspapers can be used to show how the public responded to the film and its coverage in the press. Both the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* published letters from their readers. However, there is a deliberate balance, as both papers publish letters from both sides of the

¹⁸⁹ “Inspiration for Peace”, *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1983, C6.

¹⁹⁰ Sheila Benson, “Critic’s Notes: On the Day of ‘The Day After’”, *The Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1983, N26.

¹⁹¹ “Inspiration for Peace”.

argument, with the result, it is difficult to gauge public opinion on the matter. They do, however, offer an insight into various different reactions to the film. In *The Wall Street Journal*, a lot of debate was about *The Journal's* editorial that suggested viewers tune into the football rather than film, believing that ABC had an ulterior motive for showing it.¹⁹² Many of the letters suggested that it was wrong to question ABC's motives, others believed it didn't matter what ABC's motivations were, as an important programme was made. Conversely, others were in agreement about the motives of ABC and questioned the merit of the film. One reader even suggested making, "The Other Day After", in which "we capitulate to Soviet nuclear blackmail".¹⁹³

The *Los Angeles Times* also published a series of letters for and against the film. Many praised the film and *The Times* editorial, "Inspiration for Peace", and suggested it was time to push on for comprehensive arms reductions or disarmament. Others however, saw the film as a sign that the US must stay comprehensively armed, as they felt this was the only way to prevent the film's events from becoming real life. Like *The Wall Street Journal*, some felt that a film depicting Soviet blackmail after the US had lost its deterrent was now necessary, or even a film depicting an opposing view on nuclear war, though, this point is contested. One reader believed that *The Day After* made no political statement; it merely dealt with the destructive effects of nuclear war. The reader goes on to say, "I assume that an opposing view must mean a presentation on the beneficial effects of such war. I don't know of any".¹⁹⁴ Due to the balanced nature of the letters section of both newspapers, and the relatively small number of letters available it is difficult to fully gauge how the public responded to the film. Nevertheless, it does give an insight into the variety and depth of opinions that readers had on the film and the controversial nature of its airing.

There were a number of reports published after the airing of the film that measured the influence of the film on people's attitudes to nuclear weapons. In one such report by psychologists Randy Kulman and T. John Akamatsu, it was found that

¹⁹² "As the World Burns"

¹⁹³ "Letters to the Editor: Fallout From TV's Cowing Inferno", *The Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 1983, 31.

¹⁹⁴ "Readers Comments: A Weekend After ABC's 'The Day After'", *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1983, W102.

"Letters to the Times: 'The Day After' Nuclear Drama", *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1983, E4.

"Letters: Nuke 'The Day After'", *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1983, W111.

"Letters to the Times: Uneasy Peace in Nuclear Age", *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1983, C4.

the film had an impact on the outlook of many viewers towards nuclear weapons. They highlighted a number of distinct effects that the film had on viewers. Participants in the survey were questioned before and after viewing the film; after watching the film participants had increased levels of worry and concern, indicating higher levels of awareness about nuclear war. Additionally, respondents had decreased levels of ‘nuclear illusions’, suggesting those that watched *The Day After* “developed a more realistic and comprehensive view on the possible effects of nuclear war”.¹⁹⁵ Subjects that viewed the film also reported increased concerns of the impact nuclear war might have on their future, especially in regards to raising children. The report also suggested that participants had an increased agreement for groups that were campaigning for an end to the nuclear arms race, such as nuclear freeze or disarmament movements. However, the film did not impact the participants’ perception of the likelihood of nuclear war. This may be because the film depicted the events after a nuclear strike, not the events leading up to it.¹⁹⁶

In a study by psychologists Janet W. Schofield and Mark A. Pavelchak similar results were found; the overall fear and concern regarding nuclear war increased for those that watched the film. It presents that people’s belief in their likelihood to survive a nuclear attack fell. Moreover, people were less likely to wish to survive such an attack after *The Day After* highlighted the devastation.¹⁹⁷ Schofield and Pavelchak highlight what they refer to as the “media event effect”, this refers to the film being widely publicised. They show that many respondents that did not watch the film were still influenced by it. As the film was so highly publicised, it was “all one seemed to hear about on TV, radio and in the newspapers”, a report at the time found that a mere 6% of adults were unaware of the film.¹⁹⁸ The “media event effect” may therefore have influenced the results of the study; the report highlights that nuclear war was less present in the minds of people who responded to the study after three weeks rather than one, suggesting that once the media controversy had died down, people began to return to their pre-film outlooks.

Nevertheless, Schofield and Pavelchak emphasize that “although this “media event effect” seems to be quite powerful, the effects of watching the film itself should

¹⁹⁵Randy Kulman and T. John Akamatsu, “The Effects of Television on Large-Scale Attitude Change: Viewing ‘The Day After’”, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18 (1988), 1128.

¹⁹⁶“Ibid, 1128-1129.

¹⁹⁷Janet W. Schofield and Mark A. Pavelchak, “Fallout From *The Day After*: The Impact of a TV Film on attitudes related to nuclear war”, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 19 (1989), 441.

¹⁹⁸“Fallout From *The Day After*”, 445.

not be ignored. Watching the film appears to have influenced individual's beliefs about the consequences of nuclear war as well as their behavioural intentions".¹⁹⁹ In their evaluation of the film, political scientists Stanley Feldman and Lee Sigelman come to similar conclusions. They explain that it was the by-products of the programme (the associated coverage and discussion), which had more of an effect than the programme itself. Hence, what the programme did do was give added salience to the idea of nuclear war and its impact rather than change people's attitudes on the issue.²⁰⁰

Not only did the film have an influence on everyday Americans, it was also said to have had an influence on President Ronald Reagan. According to prominent nuclear historian Richard Rhodes, the film left the president "greatly depressed" after he received a special screening of it at Camp David. The film stuck in his mind and after a series of security briefings on what the US would do in the event of a nuclear attack, Reagan's diary reads, "In many ways the sequence of events described in the briefings paralleled those in the ABC movie. Yet there were still some people at the Pentagon who claimed nuclear war was 'winnable'. I thought they were crazy".²⁰¹ This shows the profound effect that the film had on Reagan, and Rhodes believes that it was a 'pivotal' moment for the Reagan administration's nuclear policy.

The year 1983 is seen, in many ways, a turning point for Reagan's nuclear policy. The nuclear freeze movement had already led to some advisors to suggest easing tensions with the Soviet Union in the wake of the movement.²⁰² Furthermore, many scholars see "Able Archer 83" as an event comparable to the Cuban Missile Crisis in its threat of nuclear war. The 1983 NATO "Able Archer" exercise, which the Soviet Union mistook for a nuclear strike, could have resulted in full scale nuclear war had the USSR retaliated to their perceived threat. To this day no one is fully sure quite why they didn't. Richard Rhodes points out that Reagan was greatly surprised by the Soviet reaction to the Able Archer exercise and began to rethink his position in

¹⁹⁹ "Fallout From *The Day After*", 446.

²⁰⁰ Stanley Feldman and Lee Sigelman, "The Political Impact of Primetime Television: 'The Day After', *The Journal of Politics* 47 (1985), 556.

²⁰¹ Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, (New York: Knopf, 2007), eBook.

²⁰² Adrian Hanni, "A Chance for a Propaganda Coup? The Reagan Administration and *The Day After* (1983)", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 36 (2016), 427.

its aftermath²⁰³, a point also backed up by Gaddis who states “The Able Archer Crisis convinced him (Reagan) that he had pushed the Russians far enough”.²⁰⁴

The Day After (1983) was an extremely controversial and important film with regard to the nuclear debate. All three of the newspapers studied were mixed in their opinion of it. Some articles praised the film and were worried and concerned about the potential of nuclear war, others who praised the film saw it as cause for hope; they felt that it would encourage more people to join the freeze or disarmament movements. In contrast, many were critical of the film for its perceived anti-bomb bias, critics were mainly concerned that if a strong peace movement grew from the film and the government responded to this, the country’s deterrent would be lost and they would be more open to a nuclear strike. The film’s influence on the public is debated; although attitudes changed after its broadcast, once the media hype had died down attitudes were not too different from prior to its airing. However, the film was successful at igniting the nuclear debate and improved the salience of the impact of nuclear war in the minds of Americans. Perhaps its most important effect was its influence over President Ronald Reagan, along with the rising freeze movement and the Able Archer 83 exercise, *The Day After* contributed to what is seen as a pivotal year for the Reagan administration’s nuclear policy.

Further Popular Culture

The increased tensions, due to the Soviets overtaking the US in the number of nuclear missiles, as well as Reagan’s anti-Soviet rhetoric when he gained office, resulted in a number of films with a more anti-Soviet and patriotic agenda. This built upon Washington’s own efforts to restore American confidence and the perceived weaknesses of the 70s. The second Rambo film, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), is a perfect example of this. In the film Vietnam veteran John Rambo is approached by his old commanding officer in prison and offered release if he returns to Vietnam on a mission to prove that there are no American prisoners of war left, although this then turns out to be a false claim by the US government. On the mission Rambo is eventually captured and subjected to torture by both the Vietnamese and the Russians, although he eventually escapes in a violent fashion. Ultimately, he saves all of the

²⁰³ Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, (New York: Knopf, 2007), eBook.

²⁰⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, (London: Penguin group, 2005), 228.

POWs in a show of America's superiority over Vietnam and the Soviet Union.²⁰⁵ Despite its patriotic and anti-Soviet message, there was still an element of suspicion of the US, which was prevalent in many films of the 1970s. Rambo's mission is rigged; the US government sent him to a site where they thought there were no POWs, hoping this would offer proof to their false claim. At the end of the film Rambo is shown to be outraged by the US government and the CIA and their treatment of POWs. Consequently, despite the show of patriotism and American superiority, mistrust is still shown to the US government itself. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* is ultimately the most culturally recognised of the Rambo films. It was a worldwide box-office hit, selling 42 million tickets in the US and finishing 1985 as the second highest grossing film.²⁰⁶ Similarly, *Red Dawn* (1984) highlights this patriotic and anti-Soviet sentiment. The film depicted a Soviet invasion of the United States and the American teenagers who fight back to protect their Midwestern town. At the time of release it was the most violent film of all time, according to the Guinness World Records.²⁰⁷ It too was successful at the box office and counters the more critical Cold War depictions that had begun to emerge. Yet, rather than influence the audience, it is probably more likely that the films tapped into American public opinion at the time, as anti-Soviet and patriot rhetoric were prevalent at the time due to the increased Cold War tensions.

Perhaps another significant film of 1983 was *Testament*, this film was very similar in its subject matter, nuclear holocaust, to *The Day After*, although it treats the subject in a different way. In contrast to *The Day After*, *Testament* is a far more low-key affair. The story centres on just one family, and boasts none of the special effects seen in *The Day After*. A nuclear strike happens suddenly without explanation, the father, away in the city, dies in the blast. The rest of the family not caught up in the main blast, are confused yet appear to be safe as they are far enough away from the explosion. However, one by one their neighbours begin to die from radiation, the mother then loses two of her three children and in the end the viewer is left to wonder whether she and her remaining son will survive.²⁰⁸ The film was very well received and generally seen as superior to *The Day After*, though the film was nowhere near as

²⁰⁵ Ronnie D. Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies: Film, Fiction, and Foreign Policy*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 146.

²⁰⁶ "Rambo: First Blood Part II", *Box Office Mojo*, (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=rambo2.htm>, accessed May 5, 2017).

²⁰⁷ "Red Dawn Condemned as Rife with Violence", *New York Times*, September 4, 1984.

²⁰⁸ *Cold War Fantasies*, 95.

influential, with only modest box office returns. As film historian Ronnie D. Lipschultz states, “In *The Day After*, there were survivors and heroes, but the sheer desperation of the living occupies the mind. In *Testament*, there are no heroes, just people, whose loved ones die, one by one”.

Another interesting depiction of nuclear weapons was *Special Bulletin* (1983) a TV-Movie that aired on ABC, this film portrays a group of anti-nuclear terrorists who demand to be given all of the nuclear trigger devices at the US Naval base in Charleston, North Carolina; they have created their own nuclear device and will use it if the government does to agree to their demands. The film uses a mock-news report style to portray the events, leading some viewers to believe the events are real. The Special Forces successfully kill the terrorists but are unable to prevent the bomb going off, a news report a few miles from the scene shows the mushroom cloud and the chaos that ensues.²⁰⁹ Ultimately, the film's impact was minimal in comparison to *The Day After*, with far less people tuning in. It did cause minor controversy though, as many viewers thought they were watching a real newscast and that nuclear war was imminent, however, these people were among a small minority.²¹⁰ The film is another example however of realistic nuclear portrayals, its message is somewhat mixed though. It shows the devastation caused by a nuclear bomb and the dangers posed by it, yet, also depicts anti-nuclear activists as terrorists. The film is ultimately critical of the bomb yet also critical of the anti-bomb movement.

Although to some extent Americans responded to *The Day After* with an increased awareness of nuclear issues, *Testament*, it seems, was perhaps a harrowing step too far and *Special Bulletin* was watched by far less people. The mixed opinion of *The Day After* in newspapers, as well as the polarizing perspectives of *Testament* and *Rambo*, perhaps highlights a divided society when it comes to the perception of nuclear war. The growing nuclear freeze and peace protests led to an increase in popular depictions of a nuclear holocaust as people became more aware and concerned about the dangers. However, the rise of Reagan and a more patriotic style of leadership led to films such as *Rambo*. Ultimately, the early eighties saw an increase of critical perspectives on nuclear weapons; nevertheless many Americans were content with the status quo and even supported a more aggressive foreign policy.

²⁰⁹ Robert E. Bartholomew and Benjamin Radford, *The Martians are Coming!: A History of Media Driven Panics and Hoaxes*, (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2012), 37

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

Public Opinion Comparison

Does public opinion reflect this divide in cultural depictions? In his 1988 article, “A Report: Nuclear Anxiety”, Tom W. Smith presents a selection of polling data on the public’s outlook towards nuclear weapons. Smith highlights that expectation of war peaked in 1982-83 due a variety of world events such as the Iranian Hostage Crisis, the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, as well as the growing nuclear freeze and peace movements.²¹¹ The 1980s also saw increased pessimism about the chances of surviving a nuclear war; in 1984 77% of the public rated their chances of survival as ‘poor’, compared to 44% in 1961. This perhaps due to the increased awareness of nuclear consequences, the peace movements and *The Day After*. The growth of the peace movement is highlighted by their public protests. On June 12th 1982, approximately one million people demonstrated in New York’s Central Park against nuclear weapons and the arms race. To this day it is the biggest US nuclear protest and at the time was the largest political protest in US history.²¹² Despite this, in the succeeding years this anxiety and fear subsided due to a succession of Reagan-Gorbachev summits to deal with the nuclear problem and mend the fractured relationship. Furthermore, increased nuclear fear and anxiety did not necessarily correlate with increased support for disarmament. Often the public’s support for disarmament was tempered by their mistrust of the Soviets, it wasn’t until the mid-eighties that this began to subside and support for mutual negotiations was preferred.²¹³ A CBS/*New York Times* poll showed a drop in support for increases in military spending, from 61% in 1981 to 16% in 1985.²¹⁴ Overall, Smith concludes that Americans understand the complex nature of the arms race, he states: “To deal with the threat of nuclear war, Americans favour both military preparedness and negotiations with the Soviets”.²¹⁵

Conclusion

The early eighties was a period characterised by the return of fear and concern to the Cold War stage stemming from the deterioration that occurred during the late

²¹¹ Tom W. Smith, “A Report: Nuclear Anxiety”, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988), 559.

²¹² Jonathan Schell, “The Spirit of June 12”, *The Nation*, July 2, 2007.

²¹³ Smith, “Nuclear Anxiety”, 560.

²¹⁴ Schell, “The Spirit of June 12”.

²¹⁵ Smith, “Nuclear Anxiety”, 561.

seventies. Ronald Reagan had been elected on the back of anti-Soviet rhetoric and a more aggressive approach to foreign policy. This manifested itself in attempts to develop an ambitious nuclear defence system dubbed “Star Wars”. Newspaper support for this approach was mixed, both *The New York* and *The Los Angeles Times* were uneasy about what this meant for Mutually Assured Destruction, an imperfect policy but one that had prevented nuclear war so far, and the scientific plausibility of the project. *The Wall Street Journal*, a strong supporter of Ronald Reagan, was more positive, however, seeing it as a cause for hope. Ultimately the *Times*’ felt that negotiations were the best way to limit the chances of war, not a project that could possibly cause further conflict with the USSR, whereas *The Wall Street Journal* saw “Star Wars” as a chance for the US to gain the upper hand in the nuclear arms race.

When it comes to the airing of *The Day After* in November 1983, opinion is mixed on the film. The debate is torn between whether the film was a public service broadcast or mere propaganda. *The New York Times* was the most positive, with *The Wall Street Journal* being the most critical. However, both do offer polarizing opinions. *The Los Angeles Times* had limited coverage of the film, although was positive about the film’s message if not its artist merit. The film caused widespread controversy and debate at the time of airing, which at the very least brought the issue of nuclear war to the centre of public debate. Its influence of public opinion is contested, but its success at raising nuclear issues with the general public is agreed. Nevertheless, consensus seems to agree that although the public showed signs of increased support of peace movements, after the controversy died this effect had waned. Its influence over Ronald Reagan, however, does seem to have been profound and contributed a possible turning point regarding Reagan’s nuclear policy in 1983.

Further popular culture analysis shows a trend in the eighties for depictions of harrowing effects that nuclear war would have on a community, with *The Day After* and *Testament*. This highlights an emerging trend of criticism towards nuclear weapons and their impact on society. However, conversely, there was also a trend for patriotic and anti-Soviet depictions in the early eighties such as *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Red Dawn*. This perhaps highlights a polarized society regarding nuclear weapons at this time.

Were the early eighties the turning point like the historiography suggests? There was an increase in popular critical depictions of nuclear war, yet this was countered by many opposing depictions. Furthermore, this increase did not

necessarily result in support for limitations or disarmament. By the late eighties support for this did grow. However, this follows a trend that was prevalent in the sixties and seventies, that support for negotiations, understandably improved when relations between the two powers improved. Also, although the Cold War ended yet nuclear weapons continued, many countries still have them today. Suggesting less of a turning point than was previously highlighted.

Chapter 4: Did America Learn to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb? Comparisons and Conclusions

Overall Comparisons

When the results of each chapter are compared what conclusions can be drawn? During the sixties the newspapers and the public largely supported the escalation of the arms race in order to send a message to the Soviets, in their eyes the Cuban Missile Crisis highlighted US superiority over the USSR. Therefore, a continuation of the arms race would further deter the Soviets from escalating the conflict, although they did not rule out negotiations with the USSR, under the right circumstances. *The New York Times* offered a slightly different perspective, calling for more negotiations in order to prevent another Cuba style crisis, however at no point do they call for disarmament. By 1967 all three papers supported the Glassboro summit, although there was an element of uneasiness about how far the US should trust Russia. The crisis did inspire some critical perspectives on nuclear war. However, these weren't largely watched, even the iconic *Dr Strangelove* had modest box-office returns.

In comparison, the seventies began with all three newspapers praising the progress of Détente and what it would mean for the future of the Cold War, they all supported co-operation between the two superpowers. This is a continuation of the public feeling around Glassboro summit, except this time with far less trepidation about whether to trust the USSR, although some were still sceptical. By 1975 this mistrust had returned and the Helsinki conference was not widely supported. Support for Détente was still the prevailing outlook, though people were concerned about whether the US were getting a fair deal. Nevertheless, support for cooperation and arms limitations was still greater than in the sixties. By 1979 this outlook had deteriorated. *The Wall Street Journal* was calling for a more aggressive Reagan style approach to foreign policy, whereas *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* longed for the cooperation of the previous years. Public support was for *The Journal's* approach, mistrust of the Soviets had escalated and the public preferred aggressive tactics rather than negotiations. Watergate and Vietnam lead to popular politically charged films, yet the good relations throughout most of the seventies meant very few dealt with nuclear issues. By 1979 concern and fear of the USSR and the conflict was

greater than it ever was during the sixties, despite the positive outlook that was prevalent at the start of the decade.

The early eighties saw a continuation of this fear and concern and support for aggressive and patriotic foreign policy. Although, with this came greater call for disarmament and peace, something that had begun to be reflected by *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* at the end of the seventies. The response to *The Day After* highlighted this polarized outlook, some praising it as a public service broadcast, other calling it dangerous propaganda. Although the influence of the film is contested, it does highlight the emergence of this critical perspective, along with the growing arms freeze and peace movements. This divide in perspectives on nuclear war was also reflected by other popular culture; *Testament* further highlights the interest in nuclear depictions and critical perspectives, yet, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Red Dawn* highlight the popular patriotic and anti-Soviet depictions. Fear and concern of nuclear weapons and the Cold War was high during this period, however, the divided response to both the “Star Wars” project and *The Day After*, shows a period of mixed opinion.

After the Cuban Missile Crisis, nuclear weapons were not an overt concern, with many supporting the escalation of the arms race. As relations between the two powers grew closer, support for negotiations grew, mainly due to the improved image of the Soviet Union in the minds of Americans. Yet, the unfairness of Détente negotiations and proxy wars led to a weakened relationship and Americans were less positive in their feelings towards Russia. Support for negotiations and the interest in critical perspectives did become apparent in the early Eighties, as the historiography has found, yet the patriotic and anti-Soviet messages cannot be ignored. Throughout all three periods, despite concern and fear, the public were often happy for the arms race to escalate. Showing that fear of the bomb didn’t necessarily translate as support for disarmament, as fear of the bomb often coincided with periods of significant mistrust in Soviet motives.

Place in the Historiography

How does this research fit into the Historiography? In the literature review, research found that up until the early 1980s Atomic Age America could be described as a

period of ‘universal numbing’.²¹⁶ This is the conclusion of Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk (1982), Jonathan Schell (1984), Paul Briens (1987) and Paul Boyer (1985). As Margot Henriksen (1997) states, “The Few Scholars who have addressed the atomic culture of America have reached substantial agreement on the essential apathy and unresponsiveness of atomic age America”.²¹⁷ She, however, comes to a different conclusion, stating, “Life in *Dr Strangelove’s* America meant living with the bomb, but it did not mean loving the bomb or accepting the bombs promise of an apocalyptic time”.²¹⁸ The findings of this research suggest more agreement with the conclusion of Henriksen. Although, there is undoubtedly a lack of critical depictions of nuclear war in the 1970s and the depictions of the sixties weren’t widely popular, this did not mean that people were completely ‘numb’ to the bomb’s consequences. For much of the period the public supported an escalation of the arms race. However, when Cold War relations were close they supported negotiation and arms limitation. The public took a pragmatic approach, when they felt the USSR could be trusted to co-operate in good faith they supported the idea of less nuclear weapons, suggesting they understood the dangers of nuclear weapons and supported their removal when they felt it was safe to do so. Supporting the arms race did not mean people weren’t scared and concerned about the nuclear bomb threat, often it was at this time when they had the most fear. As Tom W Smith states, “nuclear war and disarmament are complex matters, and there is no simple relationship between nuclear anxiety and support for disarmament. In particular the public's desire for negotiations and arms reductions has been tempered by serious reservations about Soviet intentions”.²¹⁹ However, the nuclear peace and disarmament movements did begin to have more success in the early eighties, as they began to have more influence over government policy. The Eighties also saw a rise in the number of nuclear depictions, this did not necessarily translate as support for disarmament in the long run and much of their influence was tempered by other patriotic and anti-Soviet depictions. Ultimately, disarmament never came and even in a post-Cold War era, America as well as a number of other countries continued to maintain their nuclear arsenals. Consequently,

²¹⁶ Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), ix.

²¹⁷ Margot A Henriksen, *Dr Strangelove’s America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 387.

²¹⁸ Henriksen, *Dr Strangelove’s America*, 387

²¹⁹ Tom W. Smith, “A Report: Nuclear Anxiety”, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988), 560.

the debate still rages about whether to have nuclear weapons in 2017. Many scholars writing on this subject published their work in the Eighties at a time when they may have expected nuclear weapons to become a thing of the past. Therefore, in retrospect perhaps the early-Eighties was the not the turning point many saw it as at the time.

Were newspapers and popular culture gloomy in their outlook on nuclear weapons? And to what extent did newspapers and popular culture influence public opinion? What was the attitude of ordinary Americans to nuclear weapons throughout the Cold War? And To what extent was the attitude altered by specific events? Did America learn to stop worrying about the bomb? In answering the research questions, this thesis has found that America never learned to stop worrying about the bomb, yet they did learn to live with it. Newspapers during the Cold War were widely read and would have had a profound impact on this outlook; a large number of people relied on them and trusted the papers' opinion. Popular culture would have been less influential. Critical perspectives of nuclear war were not widely watched until the early Eighties and even then their influence was tempered by a contrasting message. Public fear and concern never developed into widespread calls for disarmament, as fear of the Soviet Union often prevented such a thing. Specific events altered this outlook massively; at a time of good relations, such as *Détente*, more Americans supported limitations. However, during a period of hostilities such as the late seventies, the arms race was supported due to the mistrust of Soviet intentions. Ultimately, the outlook of Americans covaried over time, based on world events and expectations of war, "rising in the late fifties, early sixties, and again from the mid-seventies to early eighties".²²⁰ Hence, although the eighties saw an increase in nuclear concern, it did not mean anything prior was a period of 'numbing'. Furthermore, although the peace movements had increased success, their outlook was by no means universal and ultimately the world still has nuclear weapons to this day.

²²⁰ Smith, "Nuclear Anxiety", 560.

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