



Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War

Frances Fitzgerald

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Using the Star Wars missile defense program as a magnifying glass on his presidency, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Frances FitzGerald gives us a wholly original portrait of Ronald Reagan. Drawing on extensive research, FitzGerald shows how Reagan managed to get billions in funding for a program that was technologically impossible by exploiting the fears of the American public. The Reagan who emerges from FitzGerald's book was a gifted politician with a deep understanding of the national psyche, and an executive almost totally disengaged from the policies of his administration. Both appalling and funny, *Way Out There in the Blue* is the most penetrating study of Reagan's presidency to date.

Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War Details

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From Reader Review Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War for online ebook

Ray Schneider says

Too many long chapters that were very technical in describing the nuclear arsenals of both countries and the the SDI technology. Some of the internal political battles in Reagan's cabinet were interesting. The book will answer the question: Who was more responsible for the end of the Cold War - Reagan or Gorbachev? I won't spoil it with the answer according to the book.

Erik Graff says

Dry, this book details the history of the Strategic Defense Initiative, 'Star Wars', from its beginnings under the Reagan administration until the time of publication in 2000. It also serves as a history of the Reagan administration from a defense policy standpoint and, incidentally, of the INF and START negotiations. All in all, not a pretty picture.

In fact, the SDI, for a long while a stumbling block to disarmament treaties with the Soviets, was never a good idea. Other than the fact that the technologies developed did not work--despite false claims to the contrary, and were prohibitively expensive, countermeasures were cheaply available. In the end, while warning the USA that it was wasting money, Gorbachev dropped Soviet objections.

What's amazing is how many public figures on the right clung to such dubious and expensive proposals even after the Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had studied and rejected them. This, the apparent irrationality of it all, is only substantially treated in terms of President Reagan himself. The motives of the likes of George Will, Jack Kemp, Newt Gingrich, Henry Kissinger and Caspar Weinberger are not deeply examined.

The big villain of this tale is Defense Secretary Weinberger, cast in perpetual opposition to Secretary of State Schultz, one of the few level headed members of the Reagan cabinet. The unexpected hero, however, the real shining star, is Mikhail Gorbachev, consistently running circles around the doddering and unprepared Reagan. He, unlike the proponents of SDI, was the true man of vision.

Absurdfarce says

An account of the Reagan administration told through the life and times of the Strategic Defense Initiative. The Ronald Reagan described by Fitzgerald was always willing to play a role. The President latched onto the larger themes of SDI while staying ignorant of the details and offering little in the way of guidance or direction to his staff. To those who lived through the experience very little of this will sound surprising.

George Shultz comes off reasonably well here while Caspar Weinberger and the other hard-liners (including a young, or at least younger, Richard Perle) don't fare quite so well. Yet if there is a "hero" in this story it

might very well be Gorbachev, who appears in these pages as something of an anti-Reagan: knowledgeable, energetic and engrossed in the details of policy.

The book is quite rich in detail and Fitzgerald's prose is satisfying throughout. The book's structure is a bit of a problem: individual chapters are quite long, denying the reader a natural point of division. The topics covered here are quite intricate (and they are covered in considerable detail) so the length is to some degree understandable. That said, slightly smaller chapters might have made for a bit of an easier read.

If you're at all interested in the history of this period this book makes for excellent reading.

Michael Burnam-Fink says

Reagan's legacy is a complex topic, and unfortunately I felt that *Way Out There in the Blue* didn't do it justice. FitzGerald used Strategic Missile Defense to approach Reagan's time in office, but SDI never amounted to much. At best, it was just a poker chip bounced around between the Department of Defense, State, the National Security Council, and arms treaty negotiators, as various factions within the American government tried to advance any kind of coherent Soviet policy. Reagan and his administration do not come off looking well in this account. The man himself is profoundly disinterested in both policy and personnel, the movie star who sees his job as selling the American public on whatever his advisers have decided. Reagan was an idealist in the worst sense of the word, someone who dreamed of a world without nuclear weapons and of an American triumph, but without the fortitude to work out the messy details of his technologically impossible visions. Perhaps the most damning flaw is that despite the billions of dollars poured into SDI and new strategic weapons during the 80s, the Soviets never bit at the arms race, keeping their expenditures essentially flat without changing the classic Mutually Assured Destruction balance. According to FitzGerald, the USSR fell because of internal flaws and Gorbachev's overly ambitious reforms, not anything Reagan did. If that's the case, why should we even care about Reagan's foreign policy? And finally, despite the billions of dollars invested in basic research, science and scientists barely appear in this work, aside from a few pages with Edward Teller. How can you write the history of a scientifically dependent weapons system without the science?

There's probably an interesting (and much more theoretically ambitious) book about the *imaginaries* of strategic missile defense out there, but it isn't this book.

Heather says

My favorite part is how Reagan kept telling Gorbachev all of these personal anecdotes that were really just plots from his old movies.
