

# THE REAGAN DOCTRINE

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Some time ago, Ronald Reagan pointed out that one couldn't trust the Soviet government because the Soviets didn't believe in God or in an afterlife and therefore had no reason to behave honorably, but would be willing to lie and cheat and do all sorts of wicked things to aid their cause. Naturally, I firmly believe that the president of the United States knows what he is talking about, so I've done my very best to puzzle out the meaning of that statement.

Let me begin by presenting this "Reagan Doctrine" (using the term with all possible respect): "No one who disbelieves in God and in an afterlife can possibly be trusted." If this is true (and it must be if the president says so), then people are just naturally dishonest and crooked and downright rotten. In order to keep them from lying and cheating every time they open their mouths, they must be bribed or scared out of doing so. They have to be told and made to believe that if they tell the truth and do the right thing and behave themselves, they will go to heaven and get to plunk a harp and wear the latest design in halos. They must also be told and made to believe that if they lie and steal and run around with the opposite sex, they are going to hell and will roast over a brimstone fire forever.

It's a little depressing, if you come to think of it. By the Reagan Doctrine, there is no such thing as a person who keeps his word just because he has a sense of honor. No one tells the truth just because he thinks that it is the decent thing to do. No one is kind because he feels sympathy for others, or treats others decently because he likes the kind of world in which decency exists.

Instead, according to the Reagan Doctrine, anytime we meet someone who pays his debts, or hands in a wallet he found in the street, or stops to help a blind man cross the road, or tells a casual truth -- he's just buying himself a ticket to heaven, or else canceling out a demerit that might send him to hell. It's all a matter of good, solid business practice; a matter of turning a spiritual profit and of responding prudently to spiritual blackmail.

Personally, I don't think that I -- or you -- or even president Reagan -- would knock down an old lady and snatch her purse the next time we're short a few bucks. If only we were sure of that heavenly choir, or if only we were certain we wouldn't get into that people-fry down in hell. But by the Reagan Doctrine, if we didn't believe in God and in an afterlife, there would be nothing to stop us, so I guess we all would.

But let's take the reverse of the Reagan Doctrine. If no one who disbelieves in God and in an afterlife can possibly be trusted, it seems to follow that those who do believe in God and in an afterlife can be trusted. Since the American government consists of god-fearing people who believe in an afterlife, it seems pretty significant that the Soviet Union nevertheless would not trust us any farther than they can throw an ICBM. Since the Soviets are slaves to godless communism, they would naturally think everyone else is as evil as they are. Consequently, the Soviet Union's distrust of us is in accordance with the Reagan Doctrine.

Yet there are puzzles. Consider Iran. The Iranians are a god-fearing people and believe in an afterlife, and this is certainly true of the mullahs and ayatollahs who comprise their government. And yet we are reluctant to trust them for some reason. President Reagan himself has referred to the Iranian leaders as "barbarians."

Oddly enough, the Iranians are reluctant to trust us, either. They referred to the ex-president (I forget his name for he is never mentioned in the media anymore) as the "Great Satan" and yet we all know that the ex-president was a born-again Christian.

There's something wrong here. God-fearing Americans and god-fearing Iranians don't trust each other and call each other terrible names. How does that square with the Reagan Doctrine?

To be sure, the God in whom the Iranians believe is not quite the God in whom we believe, and the afterlife they believe in is a little different from ours. There are no houris, alas, in our heaven. We call our system of belief Christianity and they call theirs Islam, and come to think of it, for something like twelve centuries, good Christians believed Islam was an invention of the devil and believers in Islam ("Moslems") courteously returned the compliment so that there was almost continuous war between them. Both sides considered it a holy war and felt that the surest way of going to heaven was to clobber an infidel. What's more, you didn't have to do it in a fair and honorable way, either. Tickets of admission just said, "Clobber!"

This bothers me a little. The Reagan Doctrine doesn't mention the variety of god or afterlife that is concerned. It doesn't indicate that it matters what you call God -- Allah, Vishnu, Buddha, Zeus, Ishtar. I don't think that president Reagan meant to imply a Moslem couldn't trust a Shintoist or that a Buddhist couldn't trust a Parsee. I think it was just the godless Soviets he was after.

Yet perhaps he was just being cautious in not mentioning the fact that the variety of deity counted. But even if that were so there are problems.

For instance, the Iranians are Moslems and the Iraqi are Moslems. Both are certain that there is no god but Allah and that Mohammed is his prophet and believe it with all their hearts. And yet, at the moment, Iraq doesn't trust Iran worth a damn, and Iran trusts Iraq even less than that. In fact, Iran is convinced that Iraq is in the pay of the Great Satan (that's god-fearing America, in case you've forgotten) and Iraq counters with the accusation that it is Iran who is in the pay of the great Satan. Neither side is accusing the godless Soviets of anything, which is a puzzle.

But then, you know, they *are* Moslems and perhaps we can't just go along with any old god. I can see why Reagan might not like to specify, since it might not be good presidential business to offend the billions of people who are sincerely religious but lack the good taste to be Christians. Still, just among ourselves, and in a whisper, perhaps the only people you can really trust are good Christians.

Yet even that raises difficulties. For instance, I doubt that anyone can seriously maintain that the Irish people are anything but god-fearing,

and certainly they don't have the slightest doubts concerning the existence of an afterlife. Some are Catholics and some are Protestants, but both of these Christian varieties believe in the Bible and in God and in Jesus and in heaven and in hell. Therefore, by the Reagan Doctrine, the people of Ireland should trust each other.

Oddly enough, they don't. In Northern Ireland there has been a two-sided terrorism that has existed for years and shows no sign of ever abating. Catholics and Protestants blow each other up every chance they get and there seems to be no indication of either side trusting the other even a little bit.

But then, come to think of it, Catholics and Protestants have had a thing about each other for centuries. They have fought each other, massacred each other, and burned each other at the stake. And at no time was this conflict fought in a gentlemanly, let's-fight-fair manner. Any time you caught a heretic or an idolater (or whatever nasty name you wanted to use) looking the other way, you sneaked up behind him and bopped him and collected your ticket to heaven.

We can't even make the Reagan Doctrine show complete sense here in the United States. Consider the Ku Klux Klan. They don't like the Jews or the Catholics, but then, the Jews don't accept Jesus and the Catholics do accept the Pope, and these fine religious distinctions undoubtedly justify distrust by a narrow interpretation of the Reagan Doctrine. The protestant Ku Klux Klan can only cotton to Protestants.

Blacks, however, are predominantly protestant, and of southern varieties, too, for that is where their immediate ancestors learned their religion. Ku Kluxers and Blacks have very similar religions and therefore even by a narrow interpretation of the Reagan Doctrine should trust each other. It is difficult to see why they don't.

What about the Moral Majority? They're absolute professionals when it comes to putting a lot of stock in God and in an afterlife. They practice it all day, apparently. Naturally, they're a little picky. One of them said that God didn't listen to the prayers of a Jew. Another refused to share a platform with Phyllis Schlafly, the moral majority's very own sweetheart, because she was a Catholic. Some of them don't even require religious disagreements, just political ones. They have said that one can't be a liberal and a good Christian at one and the same time so that if you don't vote right, you are going straight to

hell whatever your religious beliefs are. Fortunately, at every election they will tell you what the right vote is so that you don't go to hell by accident.

Perhaps we shouldn't get into the small details, though. The main thing is that the Soviet Union is Godless and, therefore, sneaky, tricky, crooked, untrustworthy, and willing to stop at nothing to advance their cause. The United States is god-fearing and therefore forthright, candid, honest, trustworthy, and willing to let their cause lose sooner than behave in anything but the most decent possible way.

It bothers the heck out of me therefore that there's probably not a country in the world that doesn't think the United States, through the agency of the CIA and its supposedly underhanded methods, has upset governments in Guatemala, Chile, and Iran (among others), has tried to overthrow the Cuban government by a variety of economic, political, and even military methods, and so on. In every country, you'll find large numbers who claim that the United States fought a cruel and unjust war in Vietnam and that it is the most violent and crime-ridden nation in the world.

They don't seem to be impressed by the fact that we're god-fearing.

Next they'll be saying that Ronald Reagan (our very own president) doesn't know what he's talking about.

1981.

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