

Transcript

Was the “film star President” inspired by anti-nuclear war TV movie?

Luc-André Brunet:

So I think there is a tendency to think that Reagan was especially influenced by film. Reagan, of course, was famously a Hollywood actor before turning to politics. He was often fairly or not depicted as somebody who was not a great intellectual amongst world leaders and so didn't necessarily master policy briefs and so on. Whereas a film could have a greater impact on him.

The Reagan Diaries, he recorded in his diary his response to it. And so, he wrote, quote, "that the film was very effective and left me greatly depressed." Other NATO leaders were encouraging Reagan to tone down the rhetoric and adopt more dialogue with the Soviet Union. So, throughout 1984 especially, he was looking to address this because it was seen as a political liability as he headed for re-election.

So, all of these factors, I think, can explain this shift towards the so-called Reagan reversal. So, the film, think it would be an exaggeration to say that it changed his mind, or it changed the course of the Cold War. But it was certainly one factor among many that encouraged Reagan down this route.

Mark Fryers:

Just to go back to the point about Reagan, this film star president, so I found that journal entry as well. I didn't know that existed from Reagan. And it's interesting that he said, "My own reaction was one of having to do all we can to have a deterrent and to see that there is never a nuclear war." So, there's a suggestion actually that now he's more entrenched in this idea of keeping nuclear weapons or getting more of them in order to allay the threat rather than unilateralism or anything like that.

It is interesting to think of him as someone who's connected to the film industry in terms of thinking about the impact of cinema as well because he was someone who would frequently reference films. A famous one is he'd seen *Rambo First Blood Part II*. I have to get that title correct.

I think he was just about to broadcast to the nation and think that the microphone picked him up saying about a hostage negotiations. He said, "Boy, after seeing *Rambo* last night, I know what to do next time this happens." He was constantly associated with this idea of cinema.

Again, thinking about that '80s context of neo-conservatism and religious-- yes, re-ignition of the religious right in terms of the moral majority and Reagan. So, Jerry Falwell, the famous campaigning reverend, he organised a boycott against the show's advertisers. So, anyone who booked advertising time, which wasn't many as I understand because they were put off by the extreme content of this film. Whereas, on the other hand, Paul Newman and Meryl Streep apparently both tried to run anti-nuclear proliferation advocacy adverts during the program. So, you've got this left and right battleground, pro and anti-nuclear battleground, and that's before and after.