

How American and Soviet Women Transcended the Cold War*

A single moment in a mother's life can be the beginning of changing the world. In 1981, a year after a Titan II missile exploded in her home state of Arkansas, Betty Bumpers drove across the United States with her daughter Brooke, a nineteen-year-old college student. As they passed near the construction site for the controversial Clinch River Breeder Reactor in Tennessee, Brooke asked how their family would reunite if they survived a nuclear disaster. Deeply troubled by the question and her daughter's belief that a nuclear war was likely to happen, Bumpers decided she had to do something. Having earlier led a successful, education-based national drive to immunize children, Bumpers decided to employ a similar strategy to educate Americans, especially women, about the danger of nuclear war, which she decided was "the greatest threat to children's health." Earlier she had trusted that her husband, Senator Dale Bumpers (D-AR), and other men would take care of national security issues. Now, amid ominously rising tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, she resolved that she would not continue to defer to men on questions of war and peace.¹

In February 1982, Bumpers founded Peace Links: Women Against Nuclear War as a nonpartisan clearinghouse to provide information to local groups of women all around the United States. Then, after meeting former Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, the head of the Soviet Women's Committee, in New York in June 1982, Bumpers and other leaders of Peace Links decided to organize a series of exchanges that brought Soviet women to the United States and U.S. delegations to the Soviet Union. Extremely ambitious speaking tours around the United States by Soviet women, often accompanied by wives of members of Congress, garnered extensive media attention and significantly affected popular attitudes in many cities. As Bumpers proudly recalled in 1988, "we changed the thinking of thousands of people," who would "never again be

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1. Interview with Brooke Bumpers by David Foglesong, by telephone, August 9, 2020; Brooke Bumpers quoted in Charles Johnson, "Women's drive against nuclear arms gears up in Montana," *Great Falls Tribune*, April 27, 1983; Anna L. Eblen and Martha Jane Eblen, ed., *Betty Bumpers: Champion of Childhood Immunization and Peace* (Lanham, MD, 2013), 27.

programmed into thinking it's OK, or even desirable, to vaporize a nation of men and women and dogs and cats without thinking of these charming women . . . these mothers and grandmothers that they met from the Soviet Union."²

With more than 30,000 participants, Peace Links was one of the largest organizations created in the 1980s by U.S. women spurred by fear of nuclear war and determined to safeguard the futures of their children or grandchildren. The new groups included: Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND), based in Massachusetts; Women for a Meaningful Summit (WMS), a coalition with headquarters in Washington, D.C.; Mothers Embracing Nuclear Disarmament (MEND) in San Diego; and Grandmothers for Peace, centered in Sacramento, California. Women also founded other groups that included men, such as the Center for U.S.-U.S.S.R. Initiatives (CUUI) based in San Francisco and the U.S.-USSR Youth Exchange Program.

The new organizations involved a wide array of women. Most were white and middle or upper class, yet some groups prioritized outreach to women of color and a few Black, Hispanic, and Asian women played prominent roles.³ Some of the female activists were moderate Republicans, more were centrist or liberal Democrats, and a few were socialists. Although some founders of the groups had no previous political experience, many key figures were married to policymakers, had connections to media outlets, or headed influential organizations such as the American Association of University Women. In order to enlist as many women as possible, leaders of some groups urged local organizers to set aside potentially controversial issues such as feminism.⁴ While some of the leaders did not call themselves feminists, others did.⁵ The activists who considered themselves feminists rarely defined "feminism," but they tended to espouse a "traditional first wave feminism," as one participant in the dialogues with Soviet women remembered, that involved emphasis on women having different values from men and invocation of their different outlooks to justify demands for political influence.⁶

2. Elizabeth Durbin, "Children in a nuclear age," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 14, 1988; Melanie Sill, "Forging the links of peace," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), January 19, 1988.

3. For example, Sharon Parker, the African American Chair of the National Institute for Women of Color, led a WMS delegation to Moscow in 1988, and Maria Cristina Caballero, a member of the WMS board, organized an ambitious dialogue between Soviet and Hispanic women in Texas and New Mexico in 1990. "Moscow Summit Notes" by Anne Allen, June 10, 1988, Folder 6, Box 14, National Institute for Women of Color Records, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; press release by Maria Cristina Caballero, March 22, 1990, Folder 3, Box 2, Women for Meaningful Summits Records [hereafter WMS Records], Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

4. "How to Organize a Local Committee of the Woman's Party for Survival," Section 1 of an organizing manual, Accession #93S-2, Box 1, AND/WAND, Women's Action for New Directions Records, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

5. For example, Betty Bumpers did not describe herself as a feminist in the early 1980s, but in later years, she did consider herself a feminist. Interview with Brooke Bumpers by David Foglesong, by telephone, August 9, 2020.

6. Katrina vanden Heuvel to David Foglesong, May 21, 2021.

Like the long-established and left-leaning U.S. section of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the new organizations collaborated primarily with the official Soviet Women's Committee and Soviet Peace Committee. Most members of those committees were well educated professionals and Communists who upheld Soviet government positions. A few Soviet participants in the exchanges were high-ranking government officials and reports on the exchanges were seen by decision-makers. Unlike WILPF, some of the new U.S. organizations sought to contact unofficial groups and non-Party individuals in the USSR, though that was difficult to do on a large scale until the liberalization of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.⁷

These Soviet and U.S. women did not simply or easily establish sisterly relations. In the early and mid-1980s many U.S. women were repelled by the oppressiveness of the Soviet system while Soviet women often one-sidedly blamed U.S. imperialism for all the tension between the superpowers. Deeply frustrated by how Soviet women clung to the Communist Party line, U.S. women often sought to engage in more personal discussion of families, child care, and sexuality, but Soviet women resisted and tried to keep the focus on peace. While some U.S. women anticipated that their feminist beliefs would connect with Soviet women, they tended to be surprised by the cool or negative responses of women in the USSR to "feminism."

Given such friction, how did Soviet and U.S. women manage to cooperate effectively in high profile and large-scale projects that helped to end the enmity between their two nations? This article reveals how the women transcended the Cold War by closely examining key exchanges. It argues that U.S. and Soviet women overcame historic tensions about feminism and women's roles, as well as between their capitalist and communist countries, by emphasizing their common conviction that women everywhere were devoted to protecting their children from the danger of war.

Beliefs in women's commonalities across national boundaries, especially as mothers, had long inspired transnational activism. However, in both war and peace the activists often faced charges of being disloyal or subversive.⁸ In the first years of the Cold War, an attempt to unite women from West and East in a World Organization of Mothers of All Nations faltered under fierce attacks for associating with or being used by Soviet-directed groups.⁹ During the

7. Gale Warner, *The Invisible Threads: Independent Soviets Working for Global Awareness and Social Transformation* (Washington, D.C., 1991). On this issue see also Christian Philip Peterson, "Changing the World from 'Below': U.S. Peace Activists and the Transnational Struggle for Peace and Détente in the 1980s," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 3 (2020): 180–224 esp. 192, 194.

8. Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (Chicago, IL, 2000 [1973]), 212–274; Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ, 1997); Kirsten Marie Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolshevik: The Origins of Female Conservatism in the United States* (Philadelphia, PA, 2012).

9. Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women's Organisations* (Manchester, 2002), 144–165.

1960s, U.S. women active in Women Strike for Peace (WSP) effectively deployed maternal language and imagery to shield themselves from Red-baiting and demand an end to testing of nuclear weapons. Small delegations from WSP and WILPF also participated in transnational dialogue with Soviet and Vietnamese women, with whom they shared identities as mothers.¹⁰

The exchanges of U.S. and Soviet women in the 1980s were much more extensive and had wider impacts on popular attitudes. Working together, Soviet and U.S. women arranged numerous exchanges that led to hundreds of thousands of face-to-face encounters between U.S. and Soviet citizens. They also were featured in hundreds of newspaper articles, magazine features, radio broadcasts, and television reports that greatly amplified their impact. Cumulatively, the exchanges made major contributions to dispelling negative stereotypes and overcoming ideological hostility between the peoples of the two countries.¹¹

The U.S. women's achievement is even more remarkable when considered in the context of the right-wing backlash against women's rights and the fractures in the women's movement in the 1980s.¹² At the beginning of the decade, conservative women in organizations like Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America seemed ascendant. Such women vehemently condemned the combined menaces of feminism, anti-nuclear activism, and communism, while putting their faith in protection by U.S. nuclear weapons and a strategic defense shield.¹³ "Family values" in this decade have been associated exclusively with such conservatives, who supposedly pushed "the entire culture of American democracy rightward."¹⁴ Yet, as Betty Bumpers' response to her daughter suggests, concerns for children and families were central to the mobilization of many female anti-nuclear activists. While many feminist intellectuals came to doubt the possibility of a global sisterhood by the late 1980s or criticized generalized claims as oblivious to differences among women, "mainstream" activists continued to envision a common cause for women of different nations.¹⁵ Women in the anti-nuclear movement eventually helped promote a breakthrough that rattled right-wing women. In

10. Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago, IL, 1993); Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism During the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, NY, 2013); Jessica M. Frazier, *Women's Antinuclear Diplomacy during the Vietnam War Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017).

11. On the effects of three tours of the United States by Soviet citizens, see David S. Foglesong, "When the Russians Really Were Coming: Citizen Diplomacy and the End of Cold War Enmity in America," *Cold War History* 20, no. 4 (2020): 419–440.

12. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York, 2020 [1991]).

13. Beverly LaHaye, *Who But a Woman?* (Nashville, TN, 1984), esp. 13, 121–128; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 291.

14. Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York, 2012), 3–4; also 398.

15. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 145–178, esp. 152, 155.

1988, after U.S. President Ronald Reagan flew to Moscow with a ratified nuclear arms reduction treaty and declared that he no longer considered the Soviet Union an “evil empire,” Phyllis Schlafly bitterly complained about the U.S. switch to a strategy of “PEACE THROUGH WEAKNESS.”¹⁶ Meanwhile, women anti-nuclear activists celebrated the success of their trip to the Moscow summit, where they secured long meetings with Soviet and U.S. officials, and they hailed the shift they saw in the U.S. “from war thinking to peace thinking.”¹⁷ Thus, the U.S. women who mobilized against the danger of nuclear war did not merely resist the militaristic conservatism of the early 1980s; they creatively moved beyond it.¹⁸

The stories of these U.S. women and their Soviet partners have not figured in histories of the ending of the Cold War, which have focused overwhelmingly on great men, particularly Ronald Reagan, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, and U.S. Vice-President and later President George H.W. Bush.¹⁹ Only occasionally have historians recognized the roles of influential women, most notably Margaret Thatcher and Nancy Reagan.²⁰ Even more rarely have scholars analyzed the impact of women and girls who were not government leaders or their wives.²¹ As a result, our understanding of the ending of U.S.-Soviet hostility has been missing a vital dimension.

Examining the interaction of Soviet and U.S. women in the 1980s is important for four reasons. First, it contributes to a reinterpretation of the ending of the Cold War as a process that crucially involved citizen activism from below as well as leaders’ initiatives from above. Thus, it deepens our understanding of how transnational networks overcame Cold War dynamics, a subject addressed in earlier studies.²² Second, it illuminates how maternalist beliefs that may have

16. Phyllis Schlafly, “The Perennial Pursuit of Peace,” *DAR Magazine*, October 8, 1988, 552–554.

17. Anne Allen (Executive Director of WMS), undated “WMS Summit Report,” Box 1, Folder 3, WMS Records, Madison, WI; Anne Allen, “Why Non-Profits Should Be Concerned With World Peace,” November 27, 1988, Folder 2, Box 2, WMS Records, Madison, WI.

18. Cf. Faludi, *Backlash*, 461–463.

19. For excellent examples of this approach, see: Jack Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York, 2004); Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2008); James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev’s Adaptability, Reagan’s Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2014); Jeffrey A. Engel, *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (Boston, MA, 2017).

20. Archie Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the end of the Cold War* (New York, 2020); James G. Benze, Jr., *Nancy Reagan: On the White House Stage* (Lawrence, KS, 2005).

21. Matthias Neumann, “Children Diplomacy during the late Cold War: Samantha Smith’s visit of the ‘Evil Empire,’” *History* 104, no. 360 (2019): 275–308; Margaret Peacock, “Samantha Smith in the Land of the Bolsheviks: Peace and the Politics of Childhood in the Late Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 43, no. 3 (2019): 418–444.

22. David Cortright, *Peace Works: The Citizen’s Role in Ending the Cold War* (Boulder, CO, 1993); Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 1999); Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A*

marginalized female activists in earlier decades facilitated the ultimate success of the Soviet-U.S. exchanges in the 1980s.²³ Third, it adds to the more general recovery of the role of socialist women in the Cold War. It shows how their typical rejection of “bourgeois feminism” complicated but did not prevent positive cooperation with women, including feminists, from the United States.²⁴ Finally, it contributes to the growing understanding of the wider transnational anti-nuclear activism that involved women and men throughout Europe not only in campaigns for disarmament or in opposition to deployment of nuclear weapons, but also in extensive citizen diplomacy projects that helped to overcome the hostility and division between East and West.²⁵

OBSTACLES TO COOPERATION

Soviet and U.S. women had to overcome a number of impediments to harmonious collaboration. Especially in the first half of the 1980s, before Gorbachev introduced *glasnost* (openness), *perestroika* (restructuring) and democratization, Soviet-U.S. exchanges were hampered by ideological differences, polemics typical of the Cold War, and divergent views on the roles of women.

U.S. citizen activists who traveled to the Soviet Union have often been disparaged as naively pro-Soviet pawns of the KGB or dupes of Communist propaganda.²⁶ However, many U.S. women who traveled to the USSR in the early 1980s were wary and critical of aspects of the Soviet system. As participants in Peace Links prepared for a trip to the Soviet Union in 1983, some of them worried about their coming interaction with the Soviet Women’s Committee (SWC), a “public” organization funded in part by contributions from people across the Soviet Union yet supervised by the Soviet government.²⁷ One Peace Links leader, for example, feared that the SWC was merely a mouthpiece for official Communist ideology, that discussions would therefore be useless, and that the SWC might pull “tricks” such as including intelligence operatives in

Transnational History of the Helsinki Network (New York, 2011); Petra Goedde, *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History* (New York, 2019).

23. Emily S. Rosenberg, “Gender,” *Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (1990): 116–124; Goedde, *The Politics of Peace*, esp. 10, 129, 131; Laville, *Cold War Women*, 125–126.

24. See Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women’s Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War* (Durham, NC, 2018), esp. 15, 23.

25. Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present* (Stanford, CA, 2003); Astrid Mignon Kirchof, “Finding Common Ground in Transnational Peace Movements,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (2015), 432–449; Patrick Burke, “European Nuclear Disarmament: Transnational Peace Campaigning in the 1980s,” in *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War of the 1980s* eds. Klimke and Varon (Cambridge, 2017), 227–250.

26. For example: Robert Service, *The End of the Cold War, 1985–1991* (New York, 2015), esp. 3, 99, 262; Anton Troianovskii, “As Bernie Sanders Pushed for Closer Ties, Soviet Union Spotted Opportunity,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2020.

27. On the SWC see G.N. Galkina, *Komitet sovetsskikh zhenshchin: Stranitsy istorii (1941–1992)* [The Committee of Soviet Women: Pages of History, 1941–1992] (Moscow, 2013); and Linda Racioppi and Katherine O’Sullivan See, *Women’s Activism in Contemporary Russia* (Philadelphia, PA, 1997).

visits to the United States.²⁸ Even in 1986, a year after Gorbachev came to power, women who traveled to Moscow for dialogue found the Soviet political system “as alien as ever.”²⁹

Sanctimonious statements, highly ideological views, and harsh criticism of the United States by leading Soviet women also inhibited dialogue with U.S. women.³⁰ In a conversation with U.S. professional women in Cambridge, Massachusetts in December 1983, for example, Natalia Yeliseyeva, deputy mayor of Leningrad, insisted: “We did not engage in an armed invasion of Afghanistan—they appealed to us for help in defense of their new country from foreign elements” and “bandit gangs armed to the teeth by your arms.”³¹ At an international seminar on problems of peace in Leningrad in September 1984, similarly, Soviet speakers declared one-sidedly that the United States was “responsible for the arms race” and combined denunciations of U.S. imperialism with self-righteous depictions of the Soviet Union as consistently devoted to peace.³²

Sayre Sheldon, President of Women’s Action for Nuclear Disarmament, objected at the Leningrad seminar to the idea that the United States was solely responsible for the arms race, argued that the Cold War had complex origins, and urged education to “destroy dangerous myths” on both sides. After interviewing two other U.S. women who traveled to the USSR in 1985, Sheldon noted that they agreed that “the major problem in discussing peace between our countries is that the Soviets claim their government is doing everything it can and the U.S. isn’t.”³³

Other U.S. women shared that frustration with the self-righteousness and defensiveness of Soviet women. In January 1984, after participating in a meeting

28. Memo from Catherine Menninger, November 20, 1982, Folder 1, Box 34 and memo from Debbie Harding to Catherine Menninger, January 20, 1983, Folder 3, Box 34, Peace Links Records, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR.

29. Alida Brill, “Reaching for a Russian Rhetoric: Reflections on the Women’s Dialogue – US/USSR,” *The Wingspread Journal*, December 1986.

30. For examples, see: *Soviet Woman*, No. 9, 1984, p. 38; Valentina Tereshkova, “Soviet Women in the Anti-War Movement,” *Social sciences* (USSR Academy of Sciences) 16, no. 3 (1985): 202–215, esp. 213; and E.N. Ershova and Ye.E. Novikova, *SSSR-SShA: zhenshchina i obschestvo* [USSR-USA: Woman and Society], (Moscow, 1988), 252–262.

31. Handwritten notes by Laurie Daschle Fulton, Folder 4, Box 34, Peace Links Records, University of Arkansas. For more on the conversation, see Carol Stocker, “Seeking common ground: US, Soviet women try to bridge the understanding gap,” *Boston Globe*, December 10, 1983.

32. Mira Petrovskaya, “What women can do to prevent a nuclear war” and Elena Serebrovskaya, “Education in a spirit of peace and women’s role in coping with this problem” at a seminar in Leningrad, September 4–9, 1984, Folder: Soviet Women’s Committee Conference (Leningrad), Box 1, Sep 1984, Sayre Sheldon Papers, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

33. Sayre Sheldon notes during a seminar in Leningrad, September 4–9, 1984; Sayre Sheldon typescript, “Listening to Their Stories: Citizen Diplomacy at Work,” 1985, both in Folder: Soviet Women’s Committee Conference (Leningrad), Box 1, September 1984, Sheldon Papers.



Figure 1. International Seminar on Problems of Peace, Leningrad, September 1984. Standing at the head of the table is Valentina Tereshkova, leader of the Soviet Women's Committee. Sayre Sheldon Papers, Collection number SSC.MS.00645, Smith College Special Collections.

supported by U.S. philanthropic foundations, Ruth Mandel, Director of the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University, observed with commendable restraint the Soviet women's "view that since all was well between them and their government . . . and since we had some problems with our leaders and openly criticized them, we were obviously in much worse shape than they were." Following a "stultifying" discussion at the Soviet Women's Committee building at the end of 1984, journalist, educator, and Russian expert Colette Shulman privately vented her irritation and commented: "we just hit a brick wall."³⁴

34. Ruth B. Mandel to Phoebe H. Cottingham, January 24, 1984; Colette Shulman note, December 13, 1984, Colette Shulman Papers (private collection), Sherman, CT.



Figure 2. Sayre Sheldon, President of Women’s Action for Nuclear Disarmament (right), in Leningrad in 1984, shows an unidentified Soviet woman a poster with one of WAND’s primary slogans, “children ask the world of us.” Sayre Sheldon Papers, Smith College Special Collections.

In contrast to the widely held notion that by the 1980s faith in the superiority of Soviet socialism had died, Soviet professional women repeatedly and emphatically proclaimed their belief that conditions for women were better in the USSR than in the United States, which underpinned their confidence in the Soviet system.³⁵ In a speech to prominent U.S. women in Washington, DC, in 1985, Oidin Abbasova, the Minister of Public Education of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, underlined the enormous progress of Soviet women over conditions in prerevolutionary Russia, where women had faced severe discrimination and her grandmother had been illiterate. The great advance from a previously “slavish existence,” Abbasova explained, was “the source of the Soviet women’s high patriotism.”³⁶ Three years later, Elena Ershova, a researcher at the Institute of the USA and Canada who often visited the United States, observed in a book that “the woman’s question” had become the ground for sharp ideological struggle between socialism and capitalism. She went on to assert the superiority of conditions for women in the Soviet Union to conditions in the

35. Dina Fainberg and Artemy Kalinovsky, ed., *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange* (Lanham, MD, 2016), esp. vii, xiv; Avery Russell, “Reaching Beyond Politics,” *Foundation News*, November/December 1983, 43; Anna Quindlen, “It’s Hard to Be a Woman in Russia,” *Woman’s Day*, May 10, 1988, 45.

36. Address by Oidin Salihovna Abbasova at the U.S./Soviet Women’s Exchange Conference, October 16, 1985, Folder 10, Box 35, Peace Links Records, University of Arkansas.

United States, where there was legal and practical inequality between women and men, narrowly constrained opportunities for women in “female” professions, unequal pay, and an inability to influence political decisions.³⁷

U.S. women occasionally acknowledged that, in some respects, Soviet women had gained more than women in the United States had. After participating in a hike with Soviet women in Kazakhstan in 1987, for example, Dr. Anne Cahn, an arms control expert, recalled: “We sighed with envy upon hearing that the Soviet maternity leave policy is one year’s leave with full pay, an additional half-year with partial pay and guaranteed job security.”³⁸

Yet the U.S. women more often expressed skepticism or distaste about the conditions of Soviet women. Colette Shulman commented in 1982 that “in many ways Soviet women have been captured by the official ideology about them.” Catherine Menninger, a boldly imaginative philanthropist and activist who initiated many exchanges, felt that “we have a choice,” while “many of our Soviet sisters . . . pass their lives in fairly narrow existential space.”³⁹ While Lorie Cahn (daughter of Anne Cahn) recognized after the 1987 hiking expedition that the Soviet women were proud of their way of life and did not feel they were oppressed, she deplored the “sexist” attitudes that prevailed among both men and women in the USSR.⁴⁰

Although Cahn’s comment suggests that she had a feminist perspective, many of the U.S. women who participated in exchanges with Soviet women did not consider themselves feminists or prioritize advocacy of feminism. Deborah Harding, former Chair of the International Committee of Peace Links, did not “think of Peace Links as a feminist organization at all.”⁴¹ When selecting U.S. women to take part in dialogues with Soviet women, Colette Shulman and other organizers did not think of forms of feminism but rather of the women’s experiences, personalities, and areas of expertise.⁴²

However, in the 1980s, a number of anti-nuclear activists *were* feminists who associated militarism and war with a problematic form of masculinity—a view famously articulated by Helen Caldicott, founder of Women’s Action for

37. Ershova and Novikova, *SSSR-SSbA*, 13, 273. For a contrasting view of women in the late Soviet Union see Valerie Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition* (Cambridge, 1999), 3, 5.

38. Anne H. Cahn, “Soviet, American women can share their life stories,” *Kansas City Star*, December 6, 1987.

39. Undated memo re Moscow Women manuscript from Colette Shulman and memo from Catherine Menninger, November 20, 1982, Folder 1, Box 34, Peace Links Records, University of Arkansas.

40. Paula Massa Anderson, “Woman to woman: Soviet journey helped foster understanding,” *Daily Sentinel* (Grand Junction, Colorado), n.d. clipping, Cynthia Lazaroff Papers (private collection, Kaua’i, Hawai’i).

41. Interview with Deborah Harding, August 12, 2020 and interview with former Peace Links leader Carol Williams, September 2, 2020, both conducted by telephone by David Foglesong.

42. Colette Shulman to David Foglesong, May 10, 2021.

Nuclear Disarmament, in her book *Missile Envy* (1984).⁴³ For example, at a conference in Leningrad in September 1984, Riane Eisler, an educator from Carmel, California, criticized the “institutionalized male violence we call war” and linked it to “the dominance of one half of humanity over the other.”⁴⁴

Since Eisler and some of the other professional women from the United States initially expected their feminist ideas to resonate with Soviet women, they were often surprised by the views of “feminism” among women they encountered in the USSR, who tended to consider it at best unnecessary and at worst repugnant.⁴⁵ Although there had been a strong feminist movement among educated elites in the Russian empire, socialists had attacked “bourgeois feminism.” After the revolutions of 1917, when Soviet women were among the first in the world to gain legal equality and the right to vote, Soviet and foreign communists continued to disparage “bourgeois feminism” as a diversion from the international class struggle.⁴⁶

Although avowed feminists were quite rare in the USSR in the 1980s, two of the Soviet women who traveled to the United States did call themselves feminists. Ludmila Tarasevich-Skrylnikova, a middle-aged mother, professor of history, and Communist Party member, said concern for women’s equality ran deep in her family, with a grandmother who had been a radical feminist in late Imperial Russia.⁴⁷ Nina Belyaeva, a much younger legal scholar and journalist who came to the United States in 1990 for a Women for Meaningful Summits conference, explained that it was only after she “became acquainted with living, bourgeois feminists from the U.S.” that she realized she had “always subscribed to their views.”⁴⁸

In contrast, most Soviet women who participated in dialogues with U.S. women in the 1980s firmly rejected what they considered feminist ideas. At the World Congress of Women in 1987, for example, Zoya Zarubina explained: “Since 1917 we don’t view anything ‘feminist,’ dividing men and women. We suffered too much together to divide it categorically the way some of you do.”⁴⁹

43. Activist Sharron Singleton invoked Caldicott’s book in a speech, “Women’s Role as Peacemaker in the Nuclear Age,” in Kingston, Rhode Island on February 16, 1987. Claudine Schneider Papers, Folder 14, Box 33, University of Rhode Island, South Kingstown, RI.

44. Riane Eisler, “How Can We Use the Mass Media to Work for a World of Peace?” Folder: Soviet Women’s Committee Conference (Leningrad), Sep 1984, Box 1, Sayre Sheldon Papers, Smith College.

45. Nina Belyaeva, “The unmarked road to Soviet feminism,” *In These Times*, March 21, 1990.

46. Linda Harriet Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917* (London, 1984); Marilyn J. Boxer, “Rethinking the Socialist Construction and International Career of the Concept ‘Bourgeois Feminism,’” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (February 2007), 131–158.

47. Marianne Hamm, “Visiting Russian Feminist Gets Chance to Compare,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 11, 1983.

48. Belyaeva, “The unmarked road to Soviet feminism.” See also Margaret Wolf Freivogel, “Soviet Feminists Are Beginning To Demand Equality,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 28, 1990, 13.

49. Zoya Zarubina statement in U.S.-Soviet Dialogue, Moscow, June 26, 1987, f. 7928, op. 3, d. 7231, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Moscow.

Similarly, the next year, in an officially approved book, Ershova directly criticized “radical feminists” who divided the peace movement into “women’s” and “men’s” and blamed war on male domination instead of the class nature of society.⁵⁰

Even sharper debates between Soviet and U.S. women erupted over sexuality and the roles of women in families or at work. During an early meeting in Moscow in 1983, there was a “chilly exchange” when Soviet women not only declined to discuss sexuality, as the Americans proposed, but also rebuked Americans for having excessive interest in sex and for the “explosion of pornography” in the United States. Ksenia Proskurnikova, a vice president of the SWC, further declared that “motherhood is the main function of women”—a belief some of the U.S. women found terribly old-fashioned and restrictive.⁵¹ Four years later, Lottie Shackelford, the mayor of Little Rock, Arkansas and one of the few African American women to participate in the exchanges, described the defensiveness and accusations in discussions of “sensitive topics” like abortion and rearing children.⁵² While Soviet women strongly favored legal protection from jobs requiring heavy manual labor, U.S. women delegates sought to open all fields of work to women.⁵³ Like many Soviet women who wanted to be able to stay at home more with their children, an Estonian woman strikingly declared to U.S. visitors in 1987: “In our country we have long since ceased to fight for the rights of women. We are fighting for the right to *be* women.”⁵⁴

Unlike other Western feminists who encountered state-affiliated women’s organizations in socialist countries, the U.S. women did not castigate the SWC.⁵⁵ Yet they did express disappointment. As Alida Brill put it in 1986: “Visiting the Soviet Union as an American feminist is a perplexing experience, for in many respects our cultures are moving in opposite directions.”⁵⁶ Thus, “feminism,” as some U.S. women and many Soviet women saw it, was more a source of friction than a basis for connection until the end of the 1980s.

50. Ershova and Novikova, *SSSR-SShA*, 248. In personal interactions Ershova was more open-minded. Cora Weiss to David Foglesong, April 24, 2020.

51. Russell, “Reaching Beyond Politics,” *Foundation News*, November/December 1983, 43–44.

52. Marie Nelms Crawford, “Women-to-women exchange marks LR mayor’s Soviet visit,” *Arkansas Democrat*, August 24, 1987.

53. Colette Shulman, Closing Remarks at the Wingspread Seminar of Soviet and American Women, December 1–2, 1979, Colette Shulman Papers, Sherman, CT; Cahn, “Soviet, American women can share their life stories,” *Kansas City Star*, December 6, 1987.

54. Quindlen, “It’s Hard to Be a Woman in Russia,” 140. See also Margarita Papandreou, *Love and Power: A Midwestern First Lady* (London, 2015), 302–303.

55. Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex*, 111.

56. Alida Brill, “Reaching for a Russian Rhetoric: Reflections on the Women’s Dialogue – US/USSR,” *The Wingspread Journal*, December 1986.

FOUNDATIONS FOR COLLABORATION

With so much tension and disagreement, how could Soviet and U.S. women possibly work together to help their nations overcome Cold War antipathies? By far the most important factors were beliefs that women everywhere shared values as mothers (or potential mothers) and feelings that women were different from men. The depth of the U.S. women's feelings helped to give them faith that they could find like-minded partners in the land of the Cold War enemy. Statements of beliefs about women, motherhood, and children by U.S. and Soviet women then helped them to feel bonds despite their differences over other issues. In contrast to the concerns of some feminist theorists that emphasis on motherhood and women's distinctive outlooks undermines female political influence, affirmations of those commonalities facilitated the women's successful citizen diplomacy.

As in earlier eras, U.S. women found emphasis on being mothers a valuable shield from accusations of being subversive.⁵⁷ That protection was especially important for Peace Links, which had to cope with an early and highly visible attack. On October 1, 1982, Senator Jeremiah Denton (R-AL) charged on the floor of the Senate that Peace Links had on its advisory board four organizations that were "either Soviet controlled or openly sympathetic with, and advocates for, Communist foreign policy objectives."⁵⁸ The accusation became even more threatening to the reputation of Peace Links when some major national newspapers partially echoed Denton's charge.⁵⁹ Senator Bumpers indignantly rebutted Denton's attack on his wife by declaring that Peace Links was born "not in the Kremlin but in my kitchen." Wives of other members of Congress took parallel approaches. When a reporter asked about Denton's charge, Teresa Heinz, who was married to Senator John Heinz (R-PA), said: "If mothers would involve themselves in peace they will be doing something important for their children."⁶⁰ While the anticommunist allegations at first shook some Peace Links leaders and caused them to doubt the wisdom of going ahead with an exchange with Soviet women, after the widely publicized responses they concluded that "Peace Links have weathered the Denton storm magnificently."⁶¹

57. On the precedents see Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, esp. 16; Dee Garrison, "Our Skirts Gave Them Courage": The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955-1961," in, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia, PA, 1994), 201-226.

58. "Senators in Clash Over 'Peace Day,'" *New York Times*, October 2, 1982.

59. "Hot Words for the Freeze" (editorial), *Washington Post*, October 6, 1982; "The Unclear Freeze Debate," *Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 1982. The gendered attacks focused particularly on WILPF.

60. Rose DeWolf, "Congressional Wives Form Links of an Anti-Nuke Chain," *Philadelphia Daily News*, November 3, 1982. See also Carol Stocker, "Senate wives link arms to teach about the dangers of war," *Boston Globe*, October 22, 1982.

61. Deborah Harding to Anne Bartley, October 12, 1982 and Catherine Menninger to Betty Bumpers, November 4, 1982, Folder 1, Box 34, Peace Links Records.

Yet, for leaders of Peace Links highlighting motherhood was not primarily a defensive tactic. Three months before Senator Denton's assault, Betty Bumpers distributed to women across the United States a statement that Peace Links had been created "in response to a growing awareness of the common bonds and values that women have, as nurturers of their children, and of the strength in linking together to prevent nuclear war."⁶² That sentiment helped Peace Links win broad support and be seen as all-American. In 1986, a widely read magazine profiled Bumpers as "Mrs. America for Peace" and quoted her discovery that "women all over had a sixth sense that their children—and their very homes on the planet—were in jeopardy."⁶³

Such statements reflected intensely emotional experiences and deeply felt beliefs. Like Betty Bumpers, many women felt impelled to act by something their children said to them. For example, Catherine Menninger was "galvanized" in the early 1980s when she and her son watched a televised discussion about the placement of nuclear weapons in Europe and her son said to her: "Now you know Mom why we don't expect to live out the normal length of our lives."⁶⁴ Other leading women recalled comparable moments of intense concern about their children that drove them to get involved in U.S.-Soviet relations.⁶⁵

Maternalism has often been seen as antithetical to feminism.⁶⁶ However, like other women peace activists before them, many of the U.S. citizen diplomats who considered themselves feminists did not see a contradiction. As Colette Shulman observed after a meeting with Soviet women in Wisconsin, ideas such as moving "maternal thinking" of nurturance and compassion into the public world of work and politics reflected "elements of American feminist thinking."⁶⁷ In 1985, Representative Claudine Schneider (R-RI), who regarded Jeanette Rankin, the first female member of Congress, as a constant inspiration, participated in an international conference in Stockholm on the role of women parliamentarians in the quest for nuclear disarmament. Schneider reported that she learned first-hand what she had long suspected: "Regardless of our nationality or ideology, women are and always will be the nurturers of life. Because of this

62. "Dear Madam" letter from Betty Bumpers and Nancy Graham, July 15, 1982, Folder 1, Box 34, Peace Links Records.

63. Nina Totenberg, "Mrs. America for Peace," *Parade Magazine* (nationally distributed insert), *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), March 2, 1986.

64. Catherine Menninger to David Foglesong, June 1, 2020.

65. Linda Smith, "MEND Strikes Responsive Chord With Nuclear Disarmament Efforts," *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1985; Susan Eisenhower, *Breaking Free: A Memoir of Love and Revolution* (New York, 1995), 32, 22; Sharon Tennison, *The Power of Impossible Ideas: Ordinary Citizens' Extraordinary Efforts to Avert International Crisis* (Temple, TX, 2012), 2–5.

66. See, for example, Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, ed., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York, 1993), 2; Natasha Zaretsky, *Radiation Nation: Three Mile Island and the Political Transformation of the 1970s* (New York, 2018), 164.

67. Colette Shulman, "Soviet or American – Women Are Women," undated article, c. 1985, Catherine Menninger Papers (private collection), Franconia, New Hampshire.

unique heritage, we have a more sensible view of the ultimate futility of the nuclear weapons buildup.”⁶⁸ In late 1986, at another international conference of women, Margarita Papandreou, an avowed feminist from Illinois married to the Prime Minister of Greece, more succinctly declared: “Women give life. Men make war.”⁶⁹

Soviet women repeatedly and passionately proclaimed similar beliefs regarding the importance of maternalism. In 1984, for example, Elena Serebrovskaya, deputy chair of the Leningrad Peace Committee, expressed her conviction that “the virtuous force of motherhood . . . is in every woman” and that women were, therefore, the guardians of life even if they had no children.⁷⁰ Five years later, on a Peace Links-sponsored visit to Nashville, historian Nadezhda Shvedova declared in a meeting with women legislators in Tennessee: “We are the givers of life, and that’s why we must preserve life on earth.”⁷¹

The single most eloquent and elaborate statement of this maternalist belief was made at a seminar in Moscow in October 1987 hosted by the Soviet Women’s Committee. Betty Bumpers recalled that from their first encounters in the early 1980s Soviet and U.S. women “knew immediately that we had a great deal in common as women.” Women of both countries, she continued, “felt the need to work together to make the world safer for our families and our children.” Furthermore, she argued, “We as women—as mothers and nurturers of the young—think differently about national security and the arms race than do most men. . . . Because women already think differently, they have the capacity to change the outmoded national thinking which continues to carry us in the wrong direction.”⁷²

Bumpers’ sharply critical emphasis on the difference between women and men in policymaking diverged from the published views of SWC leaders, who refrained from criticizing Kremlin policies. Yet, the Soviet women loved Bumpers’ speech.⁷³ The shared fear of nuclear war, concern about how the arms race detracted from spending on social needs, and devotion to the well-being of children created a strong basis for cooperation. As Anne Allen of Women for a Meaningful Summit (WMS) wrote to a key figure in the SWC

68. Statement for the Rhode Island chapter of Women for a Non Nuclear Future, attached to a June 5, 1985 memo by a staffer, Folder 14, Box 33, Claudine Schneider Papers, University of Rhode Island.

69. Papandreou quoted in “Women for Meaningful Summit’ Meeting Condemn Star Wars Plan,” *Athens News*, November 8, 1986, Folder: Women for a Meaningful Summit, Box 11, 1986, Cora Weiss Papers, Swarthmore Peace Collection, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

70. Elena Serebrovskaya, “Education in a spirit of peace and women’s role in coping with this problem,” Leningrad, September 4–9, 1984, Folder: Soviet Women’s Committee Conference (Leningrad), Box 1, September 1984, Sayre Sheldon Papers, Smith College.

71. Ellen Dahnke, “Local governments need more money, whether they’re American or Soviet,” *The Tennessean*, April 12, 1988. See also, Ershova and Novikova, *SSSR-SSbA*, 224.

72. Bumpers to Tereshkova, June 30, 1982, Folder 1, Box 34, Peace Links Records; Prepared text of Bumpers speech, October 13, 1987, f. 7928, op. 3, d. 7212, GARF.

73. Interview with Carol Williams by David Foglesong, by telephone, September 2, 2020.

after meetings in Moscow in 1988, the Americans learned that “essentially as women we have the same goal—to bring about peaceful co-existence.”⁷⁴

It has sometimes been argued that the myth of women being natural peace-makers tended to marginalize women activists and make the struggle for peace more difficult.⁷⁵ However, involvement in citizen diplomacy gave many women greater self-confidence and pride in their abilities, which, in turn, made them more effective activists. For example, Betsy Bell, a graduate of Bryn Mawr, mother of three daughters, and difference feminist, emerged from the shadow of her husband, a dean at the University of Washington, after she was energized by a trip to Uzbekistan with the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association in 1983. Carrying a multimedia presentation about the visit to Tashkent, she travelled around the United States and made numerous presentations, including to members of Congress and their staffs. That, she recalled, broke down her insecurities and helped establish her independent identity.⁷⁶

Beliefs in women’s distinctive values and special abilities also inspired and empowered many other female anti-nuclear activists and citizen diplomats.⁷⁷ Anne Zill, a leader of the U.S. branch of WMS, believed that “we women, unlike men perhaps, have a considerable talent for flexible collaboration.”⁷⁸ After hiking with Soviet women in the mountains of Kazakhstan, biologist Ann Harvey told a journalist that Soviet-U.S. relations would be “a little less tense if women had a little more to say” about the relationship. Women would handle the relations better, she explained, because “women are less aggressive” and would engage in “less posturing about weaponry.”⁷⁹

Such beliefs significantly emboldened U.S., and eventually also some Soviet women, to assert their right and need to affect foreign policies. In an early proposal for dialogue between leading U.S. and Soviet women, Colette Shulman stated one of the major goals: “To bring women’s voices and perspectives into fuller participation in decision-making on important issues of international relations.”⁸⁰ A few years later, just before Reagan and Gorbachev met in Washington to sign an arms reduction treaty, Margarita Papandreou, international liaison of WMS, delivered a powerful address in which she angrily insisted that women’s voices, long unheard, must be heeded. Papandreou

74. Anne Allen to Vera Soboleva, July 21, 1988, f. 7928, op. 3, d. 7212, GARF. See also Beth Wilson’s letter to the editor of the *SiouX City Journal*, March 15, 1988.

75. See Goedde, *The Politics of Peace*, 131.

76. Betsy Bell, *Open Borders: A Personal Story of Love, Loss and Anti-War Activism* (Kenmore, WA, 2018), esp. 31, 74. For another example, see Patrick Connolly, “Her purpose: to make a better world,” *The Tennessean*, February 28, 1988.

77. See Stocker, “Seeking common ground”.

78. Anne B. Zill to Margarita Papandreou, October 9, 1989, Folder: Papandreou, Women for a Meaningful Summit, 1989–1990, Box 17, Cora Weiss Papers, SCPC.

79. Lucy Conant, “Harvey finds Soviet/American women’s ‘dialogue’ is fruitful,” *Jackson Hole Guide*, September 2, 1987.

80. “A Proposal for Our Consideration,” undated, c. 1983, Colette Shulman Papers (private collection), Sherman, CT.

emphasized the need to “look at the question of nuclear disarmament and peace . . . from the vantage point of the women’s movement.”⁸¹ In 1990, when women gathered in Washington on the eve of a summit between Bush and Gorbachev, Sarah Harder of WMS explained: “We want to show that women not only have the capacity to make decisions, but would make them differently than men.” Olga Bessolova, deputy director for social policy of the top Soviet space research institute, added a warning at a press conference: “If the presidents don’t behave themselves, we’ll get together and arrange that in the next century the presidents of our countries are women.”⁸²

By that point, many Soviet women, especially younger women, were more receptive to the kind of feminism represented by some of the U.S. women involved in the exchanges. In an extraordinary collaboration led by Colette Shulman, Soviet and U.S. women jointly produced a magazine, full of information about the U.S. women’s movement and topics such as women’s health or women in politics, that was widely distributed in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia through the 1990s and into the twenty-first century.⁸³

THE IMPACTS OF EXCHANGES BETWEEN SOVIET AND U.S. WOMEN

Some scholars have dismissed women’s activism as totally irrelevant to the ending of the Cold War. In a biography of Bella Abzug, for example, Alan Levy claimed that Abzug and others in WMS “had absolutely no significance in the international events of the 1980s.” Moreover, “any notions that women could somehow begin to exert effective pressure on their leaders along the pacific lines that Abzug desired was . . . a pipe dream.”⁸⁴

Such scornful views are demonstrably false. In fact, female anti-nuclear activists and citizen diplomats significantly influenced U.S.-Soviet relations.

Within months of taking power in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev began to realize the great importance of face-to-face encounters between Soviet and U.S. citizens. After an international youth festival in Moscow and a U.S.-Soviet peace cruise down the Volga River, Gorbachev explained to the Politburo that such contacts between U.S. visitors and regular Soviet people “have produced a better repealing of ‘the Soviet threat’ than all of our foreign propaganda.”⁸⁵ That

81. Address by Margarita Papandreou, Washington, DC, December 5, 1987, Folder: Women for a Meaningful Summit 1987, Subfolder 1, Box 11, Cora Weiss papers.

82. Margaret Wolf Freivogel, “26 Soviet Women Come To Washington, Meet With U.S. Peers,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 16, 1990, 8.

83. “The Reminiscences of Colette Shulman,” Columbia University Center for Oral History (2017), 42–44; Colette Shulman, *Discovering One Another. I Listened With the Ear of My Heart* (Agawam, MA, 2018), 161–163. For wider discussion of international influences on the women’s movement in Russia in the 1990s see Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia*.

84. Alan H. Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug, 1976–1988: Electoral Failures and the Vagaries of Identity Politics* (Lanham, MD, 2014), 228–229.

85. The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev, August 27, 1985, The National Security Archive, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., <http://www.nsarchive.org>.

did not mean Gorbachev saw citizen diplomats as tools of Soviet propaganda. He angrily attacked that idea in a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz in October 1987.⁸⁶ Instead, he increasingly realized that by helping to dispel nightmarish images of a Soviet menace, citizen exchanges would make it more difficult for U.S. hardliners to justify massive military spending and would prod anticommunist politicians toward diplomatic engagement with Soviet leaders. That, in turn, would enable Gorbachev to convince hardline Soviet officials that threats from the West were diminishing, that Soviet military expenditures could be reduced, and that he could safely proceed with the slow motion revolution called *perestroika* (restructuring). Thus, for Gorbachev, U.S. citizen diplomats were not pawns but partners.

In the summer of 1987, Gorbachev, who closely consulted with his wife Raisa, warmly welcomed women from around the world to a congress in Moscow. In a long speech, Gorbachev recognized the distinctive roles of women activists and endorsed their maternal thinking: "It is among women, chosen by nature to preserve and carry on the human race, that the idea of peace today finds its most selfless, self-sacrificing and numerous defenders." He further acknowledged that women's organizations had affected the climate of opinion about world affairs. "The international women's movement," Gorbachev declared, "has markedly reinforced the potential of peace and goodwill. It has forced people to listen to it. It is a real factor in politics."⁸⁷ A year later, Gorbachev had a three-hour meeting in Moscow with leaders of Women for a Meaningful Summit and other peace groups, during which he assured the women: "We consider your efforts most important."⁸⁸ In a more general way, in a major address at the United Nations in December 1988, Gorbachev recognized the profound influence of the ardent desire of "broad circles of the public" for peace, which even Cold Warriors were being forced to take into consideration.⁸⁹

On the other hand, Ronald Reagan initially viewed peace activists as pawns of the KGB and lamented that even his own daughter Patti had been "taken over by that whole d—n gang."⁹⁰ However, the widespread popularity of the

86. William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (New York, 2017), 398.

87. *Welcoming Address to the World Congress of Women, Moscow, June 23, 1987* (Moscow, 1987); copy in Folder: Women for a Meaningful Summit 1987, Subfolder 3, Box 11, Cora Weiss Papers.

88. Anne Allen, "Moscow Summit Notes," June 10, 1988, Folder: Women for a Meaningful Summit, 1988, Moscow, Box 14, Cora Weiss Papers. Raisa Gorbacheva hosted a separate two-hour reception, at which she spoke for thirty minutes about the importance of women in the peace movement. On the seriousness of her concern with nuclear disarmament see Papandreou, *Love and Power*, 311.

89. "Gorbachev's Speech to the U.N. 7 December 1988, www.literaster.com/writing/gorbachevs-speech-un-7-december-1988.

90. December 6, 1982 entry in Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 117; Angela Santese, "Ronald Reagan, the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign and the Nuclear scare of the 1980s," *International History Review* 39, no. 3, (2017): 496–520, esp. 507–510.

anti-nuclear movement in the United States and Europe in the early 1980s compelled the Reagan administration to soften its rhetoric and make arms control proposals to the Soviet Union.⁹¹ In addition, tutoring about Russia by art historian Suzanne Massie, combined with guidance by diplomat Jack Matlock and Secretary of State Shultz, inspired Reagan to see how diverse citizen exchanges could encourage positive changes inside the Soviet Union.⁹² In a speech on November 14, 1985, on the eve of a summit with Gorbachev in Geneva, Reagan spoke enthusiastically about “proposing the broadest people-to-people exchanges in the history of American-Soviet relations” in order to “build in our societies thousands of coalitions for cooperation and peace.” Affirming the power of maternal sentiment, Reagan said he knew “how deep the hope of peace” was in his wife Nancy’s heart, as it was “in the heart of every American and Russian mother.”⁹³ Gorbachev accepted the proposal. In 1988, when the Reagans themselves traveled to Moscow, the First Lady served as honorary chairperson of one of the ambitious exchanges, an American-Soviet Youth Orchestra coordinated by Grace Kennan Warnecke (daughter of diplomat George F. Kennan).⁹⁴

Beyond the White House, many members of Congress were affected by women’s anti-nuclear activism and citizen diplomacy. By 1988, when conservatives launched a campaign to block ratification of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, one third of the spouses of members of Congress (172) had expressed their support for Peace Links.⁹⁵ Among the women who endorsed Peace Links were the wives of a number of Senators with strong influence on foreign policy issues, including Carl Levin (D-MI), Paul Simon (D-IL), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), and Paul Tsongas (D-MA), as well as John Heinz (R-PA) and Dale Bumpers (D-AR). In addition, a number of prominent women in the House of Representatives, such as Patricia Schroeder (D-CO), actively supported Peace Links and became directly involved in exchanges with the Soviet Union. For example, Claudine Schneider (R-RI) served as co-chair of the Congressbridge Steering Committee, which arranged for three televised broadcasts of discussions between members of Congress and their Soviet counterparts

91. Jeffrey W. Knopf, *Domestic society and international cooperation: The Impact of protest on US arms control policy* (Cambridge, 1998), Chapter 7; see also William M. Knoblauch, *Nuclear Freeze in a Cold War: The Reagan Administration, Cultural Activism, and the End of the Arms Race* (Amherst, MA, 2017).

92. Foglesong, “When the Russians Really Were Coming,” 437–438; Suzanne Massie, *Trust But Verify: Reagan, Russia and Me* (Rockland, ME, 2013), esp. 100–101; David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire”: The Crusade for a “Free Russia” Since 1881* (New York, 2007), 185–187.

93. President Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Upcoming Soviet-U.S. Summit Meeting,” May 25, 1988, www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-upcoming-soviet-united-states-summit-meeting-geneva.

94. Foglesong, “When the Russians Really Were Coming,” 423; Grace Kennan Warnecke, *Daughter of the Cold War* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2018), 214–219.

95. Eblen and Eblen, ed., *Betty Bumpers*, 30.

in 1987. As Schneider noted, a major goal of the program was “to demystify the ‘enemy.’”⁹⁶

Although the participation by members of Congress and the endorsement of U.S.-Soviet citizen exchanges by Reagan and Gorbachev were important, to focus primarily on the impact of activists on top leaders would risk reinforcing the conventional “great man” interpretations of the ending of the Cold War. The citizen diplomacy projects of the 1980s, often launched and led by women, contributed more directly to the ending of Soviet-U.S. antipathy by dispelling negative stereotypes, abating ideological hostility, highlighting the common humanity of the peoples of the two countries, and showing that effective cooperation was possible.

Visiting the United States, Soviet women generally met much friendlier receptions than they expected, saw that crime, poverty, and homelessness were not as widespread as they had believed, realized that Americans cared more about their families than stereotypes of materialistic individualism had led them to think, and learned that there was a strong U.S. peace movement (whose influence Soviet leaders had doubted in earlier years).⁹⁷ Soviet women also shattered U.S. stereotypes by not being eager to defect to the consumer paradise, not appearing to be repressed, having senses of humor, and, increasingly in the late 1980s, freely speaking their minds. Thanks in part to the dialogue with U.S. women, the Soviet women became more open and willing to acknowledge serious problems in the USSR.⁹⁸

Soviet women affirmed the effectiveness of the exchanges and highlighted the importance of the wide media attention they received both in formal reports to the SWC leadership that were seen by Soviet officials and in correspondence with U.S. women.⁹⁹ Women in the United States were even more enthusiastic. For example, Gwen Erwood of Cazenovia, New York, excitedly reported to Vera Soboleva at the SWC after “one very successful project” in 1988 that “the people-to-people meetings absolutely shatter the myths of the Anti-Communists.”¹⁰⁰ Elena Ershova and her co-author were most definitive in their book in 1988: Thanks to the personal contacts of Soviet and U.S. women, they

96. Claudine Schneider, “A Congressbridge to Understanding,” *Government Publications Review* 15 (1988): 301–321 (quote on 302).

97. Nadezhda Shvedova, “Dve nedeli v Nashvil” (Two Weeks in Nashville), *SSbA*, 1989; Ershova and Novikova, *SSSR-SSbA*, 230–236; Foglesong, “When the Russians Really Were Coming,” 438.

98. See, for example, the SANE/Freeze press release, May 30, 1988, Folder: Peace and Human Rights, Moscow, May 1988, Box 16, Cora Weiss Papers, and “The Reminiscences of Colette Shulman,” Columbia University Center for Oral History (2017), 38.

99. Report on trip to U.S. in October 1985, f. 7928, op. 3, d. 6398, ll. 249–260; Vera Soboleva to Betty Bumpers, April 6, 1988, f. 7928, op. 3, d. 7212, GARF.

100. Carol Williams of Peace Links to Vera Soboleva, March 24, 1988; Gwen Erwood to Vera Soboleva, June 10, 1988, f. 7928, op. 3, d. 7231, GARF. See also Alida Brill to Vera Soboleva, April 15, 1989, Colette Shulman Papers.

concluded, the “image of the enemy” was overcome and the ice of “the Cold War” was thawed.¹⁰¹

The U.S.-Soviet Cold War ended, as recent historical studies have recognized, not with the disintegration of a defeated Soviet Union in 1991 but through discussion, negotiation, and adaptation in the preceding years.¹⁰² Yet, far too often it has been assumed that the only important participants in the dialogue were top male leaders in Washington and Moscow. As this article has shown, women played vital roles in the process. Impelled by fear of nuclear war and encouraged by the belief that women everywhere shared concern for their children, they contacted women in the supposed enemy nation and coordinated ambitious exchanges with them that attracted widespread media coverage.

By 1988, when Betty Bumpers made a cross-country speaking tour that garnered extensive publicity, she was certain that the peace movement was helping to change the minds of a critical mass of fifteen to twenty percent of the population.¹⁰³ She was right. Between 1984 and May 1988, the percentage of U.S. citizens who categorized the USSR as an enemy declined from 49 to 30.¹⁰⁴ In early 1990, when a strong majority of Americans surveyed agreed that the Cold War was ending, Bumpers felt confident that “we really contributed to the thaw of the Cold War.”¹⁰⁵

U.S. peace activists in the 1980s were fond of the maxim: “When the people lead, the leaders will follow.”¹⁰⁶ Mikhail Gorbachev came to have a similar view. As he recalled in his memoirs, a high-level Soviet delegation that traveled to the United States early in 1989 “reported a noticeable swing in American public opinion in favour of the Soviet Union, particularly at the grass-roots level.” That was quite important to Gorbachev at a time when he wanted to push ahead with the democratization of the Soviet Union but faced objections from hardline officials that the United States was still plotting against the USSR. The shift in U.S. popular views gave him reason “to believe that sooner or later the Bush administration would have to follow suit and adapt to the changing mood of the American public.”¹⁰⁷ Although Bush and his aides, especially National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, were deeply skeptical of Gorbachev and reluctant to recognize that the Cold War was ending, widespread and persistent criticism of the administration for passivity pushed it to engage with

101. Ershova and Novikova, *SSSR-SSbA*, 269.

102. One of the best of such studies is Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*.

103. Elizabeth Durbin, “Children in a nuclear age,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 14, 1988.

104. Alvin Richman, “Changing American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 55 (1991): 135–148.

105. Richman, “Changing American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union,” 144; Bumpers quoted in Mea Andrews, “Carol Williams: Peacemaker hasn’t abandoned the cause,” *The Missoulian*, February 25, 1990.

106. For example: Tennison, *The Power of Impossible Ideas*, 3; Vincent Kovalovski, “Peace movement deserves credit for altering views on arms race,” *The Capital Times* (Madison, WI), December 22, 1987.

107. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York, 1995), 497.

Moscow.¹⁰⁸ After Bush finally agreed to a summit meeting at Malta in December 1989, Gorbachev explained to the president: “People are having an impact on policy in the U.S. and the Congress, and in the USSR and the Supreme Soviet,” while officials were “lagging behind our people, who want to become closer.”¹⁰⁹ Most often, the people at the forefront of this process were women.

108. On the impact of the criticism see Scowcroft memo, December 5, 1989, Condoleezza Rice Files, Soviet Union/USSR Subject Files, OA/ID CF00718-006, George Bush Presidential Library, College Station, Texas; Engel, *When the World Seemed New*, 97, 227, 248–249; Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *The Man Who Ran Washington: The Life and Times of James A. Baker III* (New York, 2020), 352–356.

109. Memorandum of Conversation in Malta, December 2, 1989, 10:00–11:55 a.m., Condoleezza Rice Files, Soviet Union/USSR Subject Files, OA/ID CF00718-006, Bush Library.