What Would Sakharov Say? The Americanization of Andrei Sakharov

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Abstract
From the late 1960s to the late 1980s, the Russian physicist Andrei Sakharov became globally admired for his advocacy of human rights. Repressed by the Soviet government for his activism, Sakharov became a figure of near-universal admiration in the United States. Despite the wide array of support for Sakharov, conservative and liberal Americans struggled to control Sakharov's image and co-opt his words to support various sides in a distinctly American political context. Efforts to claim the mantle of Sakharov have continued in the years since Sakharov's death, obscuring his Russian identity and muting his human rights legacy.

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Paul Rubinson

In August 2023, a Russian court ordered the dissolution of the Sakharov Center, a Moscow organization that commemorated the legacy of political dissent and independent thought during the Soviet era. According to the *Washington Post*, the Russian government had for a decade targeted the Sakharov Center because of its continued advocacy of human rights, finally forcing its closure as part of an accelerating crackdown on dissent during the war against Ukraine. The Center's name commemorates Andrei Sakharov, a revered Soviet physicist and dissident whose human rights activism the Soviet government tried—and failed—to silence; his death in 1989 did nothing to diminish his power. A mourner's sign at Sakharov's funeral captured the fear of him felt by the Soviet government, telling the deceased: "Even dead you terrify them."[1] In contrast, Sakharov always seemed to enjoy in Cold War America a unanimous esteem across the societal spectrum, from ordinary individuals to elite scientists, politicians of both parties, and government officials. Should Russia succeed in erasing Sakharov's memory, it might provide some comfort to think that, as a global human rights icon, Sakharov bequeathed a legacy of peace, justice, and social responsibility to the world at large and particularly the United States, where the scientific community adopted his causes as its own. But a closer analysis of the American embrace of Sakharov reveals a different reality: in the United States, Sakharov's profound, complex legacy has been the object of extensive political struggle.

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The Americanization of Andrei Sakharov began in the 1970s at the intersection of two mammoth shifts in global activism and geopolitics. First, the cause of human rights took hold across the Western world and particularly the United States. President Jimmy Carter's decision to enshrine human rights as the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy and grassroots activists' mobilization

[1] Niha Masih, "Russian court dissolves Sakharov Center, a prominent human rights group," *Washington Post*, Aug. 19, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/08/19/russia-sakharov-center-shut-down/; Andrei Sakharov, *Memoirs* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 681; Joshua Rubenstein and Alexander Gribanov, eds., *The KGB File of Andrei Sakharov* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 348.

behind the same cause exemplified this shift. Upholding the international ideals of human rights bolstered the country's pride and its international reputation, both in tatters after the perceived barbarity of the Vietnam War. Criticizing other countries for human rights violations, whether the leftist Soviet Union or far-right Latin American dictatorships, ensured a liberal-conservative consensus on human rights. In the words of the historian Barbara Keys, human rights "helped redefine America to Americans, for they were about American identity even more than they were about foreign policy."[2]

Second, the human rights revolution coincided with the détente in U.S.-Soviet relations. Between the late 1960s and the late 1970s, the superpowers reached agreement on a number of national security issues and in the process stabilized the Cold War. Détente was the purview of leaders and not activists, but human rights came to play a role, particularly after the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Signed by the United States, the Soviet Union, and almost every European country, the Final Act recognized the post-World War II borders of Eastern Europe. It also bound each signatory to protect the human rights of its citizens. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev had long coveted the recognition of Eastern Europe's borders but he had given little thought to the human rights aspect of the agreement; activists nevertheless seized on those provisions to challenge Soviet political repression. Soviet and Eastern European dissidents became geopolitical actors by establishing citizens' groups to monitor adherence to the Final Act, most notably in Moscow where the physicist Yuri Orlov founded a branch of Helsinki Watch. In turn, western activists and policymakers, informed by groups such as Helsinki Watch, boosted dissidents' visibility and used "public embarrassment" to shame and pressure the Soviets into improving their human rights record.[3]

Orlov was the driving force behind Helsinki Watch in Moscow, but Sakharov served as a nexus for the shifts in human rights activism and geopolitics of the 1970s. American scientists in particular transformed their discipline and infused their professional identity with the values he espoused. And yet, during this age of transformation, the American movement for Sakharov fit in with a long tradition of American attempts to reform Russia and then the Soviet Union. Since the 1880s, according to historian David Foglesong, Russia existed in the American imagination as "an object of the American mission and the opposite of American virtues." Americans assumed that Russians yearned for a country based on American political freedoms and individual liberty.[4] During the 1970s, this mindset reemerged in efforts to help Soviet dissidents realize the universal human rights that Americans thought of as their own.

The tendency to Americanize dissidents fit within broader U.S.-Soviet relations and culture. During the Cold War, American journalists filtered their

[2] Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 3.

[3] Sarah Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 110.

[4] David Foglesong, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire": The Crusade for a "Free Russia" since 1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–6, 155–72.

depictions of the Soviet Union through their own American value system, reinforcing the belief that Soviets were essentially Americans-in-waiting. American journalists grew enamored with the plight of dissidents because they invoked a classic American trope: the freedom-loving underdog. They reported on dissidents' disillusionment while harboring and conveying an unexamined assumption that Soviets could eventually become more like Americans. As Dina Fainberg writes in her history of the phenomenon, "Journalists' descriptions of the dissidents obscured the distinctively *Soviet* (emphasis in original) nature of the dissident movement—the ways that the dissidents' actions and ideas about 'right' and 'good' developed in conversation with Soviet ideas and Soviet experiences and drew inspiration from the Russian and Soviet intelligentsia's preoccupation with morality and society."[5]

American scientists engaged the human rights movement because a substantial percentage of Soviet dissidents came from the sciences, and in their campaign to protect Sakharov they also Americanized Soviet dissidents. They saw dissident peers like Sakharov as misplaced Americans who shared a desire for freedom—but with an added wrinkle. To them, science was an international endeavor, a field whose values transcended the nation state and geopolitics. Ultimately, however, this dedication to internationalism thinly veiled the national aims of their own activism. When looking at Sakharov's plight in the Soviet Union, American scientists could only see science in a national context. The United States was, in their minds, the only proper place to conduct science because of its dedication to human rights. This Americanization of Sakharov, and indeed science writ large, enabled Sakharov to remain a symbol after the Cold War's end, liable to manipulation and misrepresentation by anyone.

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Born in 1921, Andrei Sakharov was a brilliant, soft-spoken Soviet physicist who designed his country's first thermonuclear weapons in the 1950s. For this and other accomplishments, Sakharov received just about every citation and privilege the state could offer, including—three times—the Hero of Socialist Labor award. But his growing unease about radioactive fallout led him to question his superiors' willingness to put civilians and soldiers at risk during nuclear tests. When these concerns drove Sakharov to confront Nikita Khrushchev directly in 1961, the mercurial Soviet leader responded "I'd be a jellyfish…if I listened to people like Sakharov." This upbraiding further inflamed Sakharov's conscience. In 1968, amid the optimism of the Prague Spring, Sakharov wrote an essay hailing intellectual freedom and arguing that a convergence of the best aspects of communism and capitalism would help end the threat of nuclear war. Smuggled to the West and widely read, "Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom" won him vast admiration from all quarters—except from Soviet authorities, who swiftly removed

[5] Dina Fainberg, *Cold War Correspondents: Soviet and American Reporters on the Ideological Frontlines* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 3, 186–88, 193, 206–07.

him from classified nuclear weapons work. The move emboldened Sakharov to broaden his activism by defending victims of state repression, challenging show trials, denouncing nuclear weapons, signing petitions, advocating for persecuted minorities, and warning of environmental degradation. If seemingly anyone in the Soviet Union needed help, he was happy to oblige. As a burgeoning dissident movement gained momentum, Communist Party authorities increasingly cracked down on his personal liberties. When Sakharov won the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize, they barred him from accepting the award in person. After he criticized the 1979 Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, the Kremlin exiled him to the closed city of Gorky, allowing him to live with his beloved wife Elena Bonner but otherwise cut off from his family, his dissident allies, and the worldwide scientific community, whom he could reach only through smuggled letters. His exile lasted until 1986 when General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev released him as part of his reform efforts. Back in Moscow, Sakharov jumped into debates over a new constitution until his death in 1989.[6]

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Sakharov's struggle for individual freedoms resonated in the United States, where scientists had linked their discipline to human rights since the country's founding.[7] In the 1970s and 1980s, Sakharov became a symbol of the unassailable ideals of free speech, free thought, and science as the way to demonstrate objective truths. Recent scholarship on U.S. efforts to aid Sakharov emphasizes a wide unanimity of admiration: Western scientists sought to emulate his bravery and boycotted scientific exchange with the Soviets in his name, in turn mobilizing a "meaningful" percentage of U.S. scientists as well as peers from France, Britain, West Germany, and Italy.[8] In addition to the boycott, Sakharov's American peers pressured Soviet officials with letters, lobbying, and statements to ameliorate their treatment of him, in particular his ability to communicate, seek medical treatment, move about freely, and see his family. Accounts of his reception in the West have suggested only mild differences—his supporters may have disagreed on tactics or held different views on scientists' role in politics, but they were all working for

[6] Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 217; on Sakharov, see Gennady Gorelik, *The World of Andrei Sakharov: A Russian Physicist's Path to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Jay Bergman, *Meeting the Demands of Reason: The Life and Thought of Andrei Sakharov* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). On the origins, antecedents, and identity of Soviet dissidents, see Bergman, "Soviet Dissidents on the Russian Intelligentsia, 1956–1985: The Search for a Usable Past," *The Russian Review* 51, No. 1 (January 1992): 16–35. See also works on specific dissidents, such as Emma Gilligan, *Defending Human Rights in Russia: Sergei Kovalyov, Dissident and Human Rights Commissioner, 1969–2003* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[7] Paul Rubinson, "Mistress of the Sciences, Asylum of Liberty: Joseph Priestley, Human Rights, and Science in the Early U.S. Republic," *Isis* 112, No. 3 (September 2021): 484–506.

[8] Charles Rhéaume, "Western Scientists' Reactions to Andrei Sakharov's Human Rights Struggle in the Soviet Union, 1968–1989," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30, No. 1 (February 2008): 17–19.

Sakharov in their own particular way.[9]

While Sakharov's saga unfolded, however, some of those involved noted variances within the movement regarding activists' efforts and motives. In 1988, Sakharov's wife Bonner contrasted two camps of American advocates of Sakharov: those who genuinely worked for him on the one hand, and mere pretenders and opportunists on the other. "For one group Andrei is alive, and everything relating to him hurts them like their own pain," she wrote in her memoir; "for the others, he is a symbol, a game, politics, even personal success—a dead concept, I am afraid to say it, a dead man." Activists' true intentions, according to Bonner, could be determined by their willingness to sacrifice in Sakharov's name. For the truly committed, "Sakharov's name usually does not bring gain, success, or popularity, and often their honesty and lack of compromise actually involve them in loss—they lose an election, or do not receive an invitation, or are turned down for a visa, or are not given an honored post—but through them we live."[10]

In line with Bonner's characterizations, one scholar has demonstrated how Sakharov's would-be rescuers in the group Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov, and Shcharansky (SOS) prided themselves on "always doing something for Sakharov" and shared Bonner's disdain for part-timers, those not one-hundred percent dedicated to the cause.[11] This distinction between sacrifice and self-interest, however, is somewhat misleading; even the most dedicated Sakharov activists, it turns out, had something to gain, from bolstering an ideology, to advancing political goals, to settling scientific disputes, or even enhancing the reputations of their universities. American support for Sakharov was so universal that a scientist risked little—if anything—in advocating for him. His scientific supporters even claimed him as, in essence, a displaced American in order to signal how harmoniously American science mixed with human rights. Americans of all political persuasions admired his courage, expressing it in different ways. To some, his life inspired pursuit of social change, while others took it as confirmation of the evils of Soviet communism. More than anything, though, Sakharov's moral authority was a highly sought and politically useful prize, and during his life and after, a large and ideologically dispersed group of Americans maneuvered to claim his mantle as their own.

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One such attempt to speak for Sakharov took place on Human Rights Day, December 10, 2014, the sixty-sixth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On that day the Hoover Institution, a think tank and archive on the

[9] Rubinson, "'For Our Soviet Colleagues': Scientific Internationalism, Human Rights, and the Cold War," in Petra Goedde, William Hitchcock, and Akira Iriye, eds., *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 245–64.

[10] Elena Bonner, *Alone Together* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 128, 135.

[11] Charlotte Alston, "Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov and Shcharansky: Professional Networks, Human Rights and Dissent in the Late Cold War," *East Central Europe* 50 (2023): 126–38.

campus of Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, hosted the "Conference on Andrei Sakharov and the Conscience of Humanity," which its organizers described as an opportunity to address "humanity's present challenges in light of Sakharov's moral integrity, personal courage, scientific excellence, and devotion to human rights." To fulfill this vision, the Hoover (as it is known on Stanford's campus) drew almost exclusively from its immediate surroundings: fifteen of the nineteen participants were Hoover fellows or had other Stanford ties, including a former Secretary of State, a former Secretary of Defense, a future Secretary of Defense, a retired naval commander, a former Stanford president, and the CEO of Theranos, Elizabeth Holmes.[12]

These were heady days for the Theranos CEO: *Fortune* magazine had recently declared Holmes "out for blood" and estimated her personal worth at around $5 billion.[13] Before she entered federal prison in May 2023 in connection with her infamous and massive fraud, Holmes often spoke of health as a human right that sat at the core of her life's work. On that December day, she gave the audience her now-familiar inspiration story for Theranos: the uncle who died too early because his cancer was diagnosed too late, the absurd and unfair costs of and barriers to medical testing, and of course her fear of needles. As liberation from these systemic injustices she offered the Nanotainer and the single-drop-of-blood analysis that she was attempting to perfect. But it was Human Rights Day, and Holmes embellished her standard Theranos pitch to match the occasion. She reframed her talk around Sakharov's 1986 release from exile and credited him with inspiring "individuals like me who share in his commitment to and belief in the basic human rights defined in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Near the end of her talk, she brazenly (and characteristically) appropriated Sakharov's cause. "By building on Sakharov's commitment to fighting for human rights, including the right to health care etched in the United Nations' declaration," she intoned, "we can build a world in which all people have access to the health information they need."[14]

What would Sakharov say about Holmes' posthumous endorsement? His lifelong stance on scientific integrity makes the answer fairly obvious. An early display of his bravery and integrity took place at a 1964 Soviet Academy of Sciences meeting where he openly opposed the nomination of Nikolai Nuzhdin, an acolyte of Trofim Lysenko. Lysenko created a Stalin-approved version of biology based on ideologically correct but wildly flawed pseudo-science; his critics were punished and genetic science in the Soviet Union was stunted. Sakharov shocked Nuzhdin and his allies—they expected a perfunctory approval at the meeting—by directly blaming Nuzhdin and Lysenko "for the shameful backwardness of Soviet

[12] "Conference on Andrei Sakharov and the Conscience of Humanity," Hoover Institution, https://www.hoover.org/events/conference-andrei-sakharov-and-conscience-humanity

[13] John Carreyrou, *Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup* (New York: Knopf, 2018), 208.

[14] Elizabeth Holmes, "Diagnosis, Reinvented for the Individual," in Sidney Drell and George Shultz, eds., *Andrei Sakharov: The Conscience of Humanity* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2015), 75–80.

biology and of genetics in particular, for the dissemination of pseudoscientific views, for adventurism, for the degradation of learning, and for the defamation, firing, arrest, even death, of many genuine scientists." The Academy promptly voted down Nuzhdin's nomination. Elsewhere Sakharov castigated Lysenkoism as an "unprincipled" perversion of science founded upon "scientific bankruptcy" and "economic adventurism," words that would also apply to Holmes' scheme to raise hopes and billions of dollars selling twenty-first century snake oil.[15]

What would Sakharov say? has been a difficult question to answer over the years, though many people—such as those at the Hoover—have tried. Thus, Holmes' appropriation of Sakharov could be easily dismissed but for the fact that it jibed neatly with other speakers at the conference who aligned Sakharov with a conservative, militarized, and free-market future. While Sakharov lived, it was so rare and so powerful to hear from the man himself that a 1974 collection of his interviews and speeches was titled simply *Sakharov Speaks*.[16] Soviet authorities feared his words' ability to inspire resistance. As a nuclear physicist, Sakharov enjoyed little privacy from Soviet government surveillance, but after losing his security privileges in 1968, the KGB shifted to active repression. His words—phone calls, letters, conversations, and writings—were strictly monitored, intercepted, and censored. In Gorky the KGB pilfered the only draft of his lengthy memoirs; after he painstakingly redrafted some nine hundred hand-written and five hundred typed pages from memory, the KGB stole them once again. Nonetheless, he agonizingly but defiantly rewrote them.[17] The desire to quiet him and throttle his moral authority remained strong even in 2014, when the Russian government labeled the Sakharov Center a "foreign agent" and the Hoover held its conference.

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Herbert Hoover founded his eponymous Institution in 1919, and for its first thirty-odd years it served strictly as a library for the extensive records he collected in public service. The Institution's famous tower went up in 1941—"Hoover's last erection," as Malcolm Harris calls it in his leftist history of Palo Alto—and today it continues to dominate the Stanford campus. In 1959, the now-former-President Hoover turned his library into a vehicle for anticommunism and crafted a new mission statement: "The purpose of this Institution must be, by its research and publications, to demonstrate the evils of the doctrines of Karl Marx whether Communism, Socialism, economic materialism, or atheism." In the following years, according to Harris, the Hoover "attract[ed] right-wing thinkers and donors to the university, spewing anti-collectivist theory across the nation." Implicated in the Vietnam War tragedy, the Hoover and its fellows were targets of Stanford's antiwar student riots in the 1960s, but they survived the turmoil and celebrated

[15] Quoted in B.M. Bolotovskii, "A Criminal Matter," in Sidney Drell and Sergei P. Kapitza, eds., *Sakharov Remembered: A Tribute by Friends and Colleagues* (New York: American Institute of Physics, 1991), 56; Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 234.

[16] Sakharov, *Sakharov Speaks* (New York: Knopf, 1974).

[17] Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 681.

the ascendence of an anticommunist and free market ideology during the 1970s. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn paid a visit in 1975, and Milton Friedman became a fellow two years later. Stanford faculty continued to be irked by the Hoover's conservative bent and continuously wrestled with various university presidents over its role on campus.[18]

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While Sakharov was feted in 2014 at Stanford's "beacon for right-wing thought on campus" (Harris' words again), and his step-daughter Tatiana Yankelevich provided the audience with "personal reminiscences," the conference offered pitifully little information about the man himself. The Bay Area had teemed with Sakharov supporters in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly those of SOS, but none of them were invited. While the conference organizers, former Secretary of State George Shultz and retired Stanford physicist Sidney Drell, had actually met Sakharov, two speakers candidly admitted to knowing next to nothing about him, while several others perfunctorily mentioned him before moving on to their topics of interest, which ranged from religious ethics to war, bioweapons, and technology. One presenter claimed that Sakharov had predicted the internet.[19]

Several months later, the Hoover published proceedings from the conference. Titled *Andrei Sakharov: The Conscience of Humanity* and edited by Drell and Shultz, the volume featured a photo of a worried-looking Sakharov on the cover. The attempt to conflate Sakharov's ideals with the Hoover's agenda was patently clear to reviewers. In *Physics Today*, the University of British Columbia professor Alexei Kojevnikov pointed out the conference's glaring misrepresentation of Sakharov and ridiculed the contributors' "understandings of peace and human rights" which "on some key issues run contrary to what Sakharov actually stood for." He bemoaned the attempt to co-opt Sakharov, "the ultimate among Soviet doves," by "Cold War hawks" and "neocons." The Hooverians vying for Sakharov's legacy contested this portrayal, complaining that the review was "outrageous" and full of "slurs," and that it was Kojevnikov, not the conference participants, who held a "rather dubious concept of Sakharov's value system." With the last word Kojevnikov declared Sakharov's legacy "absolutely incompatible with hawkish

[18] Malcolm Harris, *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2023), 350, 384, 573; Roxy Bonafont, Emily Lemmerman, and Lucas Rodriguez, "100 Years of Hoover: A History of Stanford's Decades-Long Debate over the Hoover Institution," *Stanford Politics*, May 11, 2019; Kenneth Lamot, "Right-thinking Think Tank," *New York Times*, July 23, 1978, 5.

[19] Harris, *Palo Alto*, 384; J. Bryan Hehir, "The Scientist as Prophet: Sakharov's World and Ours," William Swing, "The Soul and Sakharov," Lucy Shapiro, "Decoding the Biosphere and the Infectious Disease Threat," and Christopher Stubbs, "The Sakharov Conditions, Disruptive Technologies, and Human Rights," in Drell and Shultz, eds., *Andrei Sakharov: The Conscience of Humanity*, 21, 35, 70, 81. The internet claim was not even original—Gorelik made this argument in 2005, *The World of Andrei Sakharov*, 343.

and neoconservative agendas and must not be used for such purposes."[20]

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While Holmes' appearance stands out as the most bizarre, Drell was the most surprising participant in the Hoover's 2014 rebranding of Sakharov. Since 1956 Drell had been professor of physics at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center and its deputy director from 1969 to 1998. For just as long, Drell had advocated for nuclear arms control and advised the U.S. government on the technical aspects of arms control agreements. Upon his retirement from Stanford in 1998 he became a fellow at the Hoover.[21]

Andrei Sakharov: The Conscience of Humanity was not Drell's first collection of essays in honor of Sakharov. Almost thirty years earlier, Drell had co-edited a volume of postmortem tributes to Sakharov under the title *Sakharov Remembered*. While the Hoover's volume featured vapid banalities from strangers and coattail-grabbers, Drell's earlier collection reveled in endearing anecdotes from Sakharov's friends and colleagues from his earliest days as a physics student to his reading habits during World War II, the human rights meetings in his crowded apartment, his hunger strikes, and even the time Sakharov spent forty minutes chatting with a cab driver after reaching his destination, only to realize that the meter had continued to run the entire time. "I now understand why he showed so much interest in my theory of convergence," Sakharov later grimaced. The accounts leaned toward hagiography, with many Russian contributors hailing Sakharov as "the precursor of *perestroika* in our country," but they also exuded a genuine and widely shared love of Sakharov, and no one loved him more than Drell.[22]

Drell met Sakharov in August 1974 at a Moscow seminar on particle physics hosted by the Soviet Academy of Sciences.[23] Moved by Sakharov's personal integrity and deep concern for victims of Soviet repression, Drell anointed himself Sakharov's personal champion in the United States. For nearly two decades he communicated with Sakharov, Bonner, and their relatives in the United States. He also edited English translations of Sakharov's writings, and reminded American scientists and government officials in countless ways of Sakharov's plight. A major part of Drell's self-appointed mission was to serve as the curator of Sakharov's image in the United States—it was Drell who began referring to him as "the conscience of humanity"—and while this role grew out of his evident love for Sakharov and Bonner, it required guarding Sakharov's name from people and

[20] Alexei Kojevnikov, "Andrei Sakharov: The Conscience of Humanity," *Physics Today*, July 2016, 61–62; Drell and Shultz; Vladimir Z. Kresin and Tatiana Yankelevich; and Kojevnikov, "Book on Sakharov raises issues," *Physics Today*, February 2017, 14–15.

[21] On Drell's life after retirement, see Philip Taubman, *The Partnership: Five Cold Warriors and Their Quest to Ban the Bomb* (New York: Harper, 2012).

[22] Vladimir Ya. Fainberg, "Precursor of *Perestroika*," and G.A. Askaryan, "Sad Humor in the Era of 'Confrontation,'" in Drell and Kapitza, eds., *Sakharov Remembered*, 15, 63.

[23] Drell, "Tribute to Andrei Sakharov," in Drell and Kapitza, eds., *Sakharov Remembered*, 84; Sakharov, *Moscow and Beyond: 1986 to 1989* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 69.

causes Drell found unworthy.

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Drell had not always been as closely aligned with the Hoover as he was by 2014—in fact, during the 1980s, Drell had vigorously opposed an early Hoover attempt to co-opt Sakharov in the name of Reagan-era anticommunism. At that time, the Hoover was riding high, frequently credited with initiating the Reaganite revolution. The Hoover "*was* Reagan," Malcolm Harris writes (emphasis in original), and a 1978 *New York Times* profile noted that "[t]hrough its ties with the right wing of the Republican Party, the Hoover Institution is exerting increasing political influence. It is the brightest star in a small constellation of conservative think tanks that serve as workshops where out-of-office intellectuals can fabricate the underpinnings of domestic- and foreign-policy positions for the Republicans." Elsewhere the *Times* counted twenty-six Hoover fellows serving in the Reagan administration.[24]

In September 1984, the Hoover hosted a conference convened by the Andrei Sakharov Institute. Formed in 1980, the Sakharov Institute promoted Sakharov's ideals in the United States by sponsoring a Sakharov Fund that raised money, a touring orchestra that performed benefit concerts, and a math and science education program. Drell belonged to the Sakharov Institute's advisory board and supported the organization's endeavors. But at the 1984 conference, the Sakharov Institute introduced a new goal: to "promote democratization in the Soviet Union."[25] Depending on who was asked, this effort could entail smuggling banned books to Soviet readers, destabilizing the Soviet government, or pursuing full-fledged regime change, but in general the rhetoric of democratization harmonized with Reagan's aggressive Cold War policy. At that time, a neoconservative ascendence in U.S. politics called for the defeat of leftist regimes around the globe, leading the Reagan administration to support anticommunist insurgents in Central America as well as nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union. After the Cold War ended, neocons broadened their enemies to include non-leftists but continued to pursue regime change and nation-building, most notably by persuading the second Bush administration to invade Iraq in 2003.

As with the 2014 Sakharov conference, the attendees of the 1984 conference were mostly affiliated with the Hoover. This time, however, Drell and several colleagues saw this as a partisan takeover of Sakharov's name. Several of Stanford's "non-Hooverites" attempted to attend the conference, but were dramatically turned away at the venue's entrance. Ronald Hilton, a retired Stanford professor of romance languages, managed to get in but found the presentations "unrealistic,"

[24] Harris, *Palo Alto*, 398–402; Lamott, "Right-thinking Think Tank"; Douglas Martin, "W. Glenn Campbell, Shaper of Hoover Center, Dies at 77," *New York Times*, November 28, 2001, sec. D, 11.

[25] Agenda for the Andrei Sakharov Institute Conference, Folder: 5.11, Sakharov—Andrei Sakharov Institute, 1981, 1984–85, Paul J. Flory Papers, Hoover Institution, Palo Alto, CA.

objecting in particular to the Sakharov Institute's desire to seek funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, an organization that one historian has called "a neoconservative version of Amnesty International." Another Sakharov Institute board member at Stanford, the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Flory, scored the conference's "[a]ppeal to rightwing hardliners."[26]

At that moment, Sakharov and Bonner endured a lonely exile in Gorky. Communicating with the outside world entailed smuggling letters, leaving them dependent on journalists, friends, and sympathizers for the proper transmission of their words. In such a context, Fainberg writes, "careful and precise rendition of the dissidents' written and oral communications were of the utmost significance."[27] All too often they could not make themselves heard or were unaware of actions taken in their names. As Sakharov put it at the time, "Even in prison, there is more possibility of communication with the outside world." The couple undertook hunger strikes as a more urgent method of communicating with Soviet authorities, though these took a drastic toll on the couple's health. One of Sakharov's hunger strikes had successfully pressured the Soviet government to let their daughter Tatiana Yankelevich emigrate to join her husband, Efrem, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There, Efrem Yankelevich acted as Sakharov's representative in the United States and communicated frequently with Drell. Astonished at the Sakharov Institute's brazenness at the Hoover, Drell traveled to meet with the Yankeleviches in Cambridge and express in person his "grave concern" about the Hoover conference. Drell emphasized that "the very broad respect for Sakharov and the unique position he commands through the world will be diminished if his name is used not by him" but by those with a political agenda. Meanwhile Donald Kennedy, the President of Stanford and yet another member of the Sakharov Institute advisory board, drafted and signed, along with Flory and Drell, a letter to the *Stanford Daily* stating that they had not been consulted about the conference, and that "indeed, its nature and its organization…sound quite contrary to the purposes for which we agreed to support the Institute."[28]

Efrem Yankelevich, also on the Sakharov Institute board and also not consulted about the group's change in focus, had a different view. He told Drell that the actual content of the conference had been fairly tame and that the "Democratization" of the Soviet Union, "though I would prefer some other term, is a legitimate area of the Institute's activity." To be sure, he regretted "the conspiratorial character it had" and its "appearance of a partisan affair." But the larger problem for everyone involved was the question of *What would Sakharov say?* "Though we all know what Sakharov stands for," Efrem Yankelevich explained to Drell, "there seems to

[26] Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue*, 273; Flory, handwritten notes, n.d., Folder 5.11: Sakharov—Andrei Sakharov Institute, 1981, 1984–85, Paul J. Flory Papers, Hoover Institution.

[27] Fainberg, *Cold War Correspondents*, 217.

[28] Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 674; Drell, memo to files, Nov. 5, 1984; Drell to Yankelevich, Oct. 23, 1984; and Flory, Drell, Kennedy, and Kornberg to Editor, *Stanford Daily*, October 24, 1984, Folder 5.11: Sakharov—Andrei Sakharov Institute, 1981, 1984–85, Paul J. Flory Papers, Hoover Institution.

be some confusion as to what are Sakharov's views on specific subjects."[29]

This confusion sparked a tug-of-war between the Hooverite and non-Hooverite cliques over Sakharov. Yuri Yarim-Agaev, an organizer of the 1984 conference, flatly stated that "[t]he idea of democratizing the Soviet Union is not in contradiction to Sakharov's ideas at all. I don't find any contradiction." In the *San Jose Mercury News*, Flory responded that the idea of democratization was in fact "highly political and I would think Sakharov would regard himself above politics." Elsewhere Hilton described the conference participants as "very reactionary," while Sakharov Institute director Edward Lozansky insisted that his organization only pursued "things that Dr. Sakharov would approve of." Yarim-Agaev accused Drell, Kennedy, and Flory of being afraid to provoke the Soviet government, sneering that "one cannot help those persecuted in the Soviet Union by being nice to their jailers. Any real help will always be perceived by the Kremlin as a 'hostile' or 'subversive' political activity. And those who are ready to accept such Soviet definitions should not associate themselves with the name of Sakharov." Ultimately the Sakharov Institute decided not to pursue the democratization venture under their own auspices, while Drell and Kennedy resigned from the advisory board. This outcome pleased Drell, who told Flory and Kennedy that "this style of activity was not in Sakharov's best interest, and was no way to maintain a broad coalition of liberal and conservative and humanistic support for him in the West."[30]

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While the right-leaning Hoover Institution seemed borderline obsessed with Sakharov, his supporters on the left were equally eager to keep his image in the United States aligned with their particular political views. Even when Sakharov and Bonner could and did speak for themselves, Drell sometimes felt compelled to try and change their words, lest they make some politically awkward affiliations. In 1987, out of exile and back in Moscow, Sakharov—with Bonner alongside him—sat for an interview in which he compared himself to the physicist Edward Teller. A Hoover fellow since 1975, Teller had been spurned by the American scientific community for his role in discrediting the physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer during a 1954 security clearance hearing and for his unabashed support of nuclear weapons. Reading a transcript of the interview in late August, Drell probably blushed with shame when he read Bonner's comment

[29] Yankelevich to Drell, Dec. 30, 198[4], Folder 5.11: Sakharov—Andrei Sakharov Institute, 1981, 1984–85, Paul J. Flory Papers, Hoover Institution.

[30] Diana Diamond, "Kennedy, others criticize Sakharov Institute meeting on Soviet Union," *Campus Report*, October 31, 1984; Marlene Somsak, "Plan born at Stanford meeting splits Sakharov backers," Nov. 6, 1984; Walt Gibbs, "Stanford president attacks smuggling plan," Nov. 4, 1984; Bukovsky and Yarim-Agaev, "The Wild, Wild World of Publicity," Nov. 9, 1984; Lozansky to Drell, Dec. 20, 1984; Kennedy to Lozansky, Jan. 4, 1985; Drell to Lozansky, Feb. 1, 1985; Drell, memo to file, Jan. 3, 1985, Folder 5.11: Sakharov—Andrei Sakharov Institute, 1981, 1984–85, Paul J. Flory Papers, Hoover Institution.

that, although "it's considered indecent to be nice to Teller…he is true to his position and that is like Sakharov." During his years of dissent, dozens of Soviet scientists had denounced Sakharov, and despite the very different circumstances, this allowed him to empathize with Teller as a fellow scientific outcast. Bonner concluded that both Teller and Sakharov "were very similar in the way they hold to their positions," and that Teller was "an absolutely honest man"[31]

The Cornell physicist Kurt Gottfried had also read the interview and dashed off a note pleading with Drell to "dispel this nonsense from the Sakharovs' minds." Drell shared Gottfried's sense of urgency and desperately tried to convince Sakharov and Bonner that when it came to historical parallels, they should avoid the pariah Teller, whose actions had earned him "some disdain and loss of respect and affection by many scientists. Sakharov is Sakharov," Drell wrote in a letter to the couple, "a universally admired scientist of great bravery and moral courage. They are very different." He confessed that "some of us who feel so deeply about Andrei would prefer to see him on his own achievements and not be paralleled with Teller or anyone else." But Sakharov and Bonner could not be told what to say. In 1988, Sakharov conveyed his "deepest respect" for Teller and described him as "a man who has always acted, always his whole life, in accordance with his convictions…always moved by motives of principle." Their lives, Sakharov said, ran "a parallel course," a theme he continued in his memoirs, where he wrote that Teller's colleagues had been unfair to ostracize him. In the otherwise glowing tributes in *Sakharov Remembered*, one contributor bluntly dismissed Sakharov's affinity for Teller as "embarrassing."[32]

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The noxious Teller aside, Drell cherished bipartisan support for Sakharov and was undoubtedly proud that, as Efrem Yankelevich once noted, the "Sakharov constituency" in the United States "embraces the whole political spectrum." This balance was on display at the International Conference in Honor of Andrei Sakharov, a Sakharov birthday celebration that Drell helped organize at Rockefeller University in New York in May 1981. Eminent speakers praised Sakharov's contributions to science, peace, and human rights, and the audience got to see a film of Sakharov intoning that "the defense of mankind's lasting interests are the responsibility of every scientist." George Soros, affiliated with many liberal initiatives, provided much of the funding and Drell even stayed with

[31] "An Interview with Andrei Sakharov and Elena Bonner," 6–8, Folder 2.8, Sakharov Chronological File, 1987, Papers of Sidney D. Drell, Hoover Institution.

[32] Gottfried to Drell, August 19, 1987; Drell, "Comment on Interview," July 29, 1987, 1–2, Folder 2.8: Sakharov Chronological File, 1987; "Remarks of Dr. Andrei Sakharov," Nov. 16, 1988, 3, Folder 3.1: Sakharov Chronological File, 1988 Nov. 11—Teller, Papers of Sidney D. Drell, Hoover Institution; Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 100; Susan Eisenhower and Roald Z. Sagdeev, "Sakharov in His Own Words," in *Remembering Sakharov*, 94; see also Bergman, *Meeting the Demands of Reason*, 85, and Gorelik, *The World of Andrei Sakharov*, 349. Despite Sakharov's admiration for Teller the two often disagreed on nuclear weapons and particularly the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Soros at his 101 Central Park West apartment during the conference. But Drell craved balance and sought out a message from President Reagan, a Republican, who obliged with a statement that "Sakharov is one of the true spiritual heroes of our time."[33]

In contrast to Bonner's claim that politicians could "lose an election" for supporting Sakharov, members of both parties made a habit of praising Sakharov. The Democrat Jimmy Carter became the first head of state to communicate with Sakharov when he wrote to the dissident physicist in February 1977 and after his exile to Gorky, Carter issued a statement deploring the move. The 1980 Democratic Party platform called for Sakharov's release, and four years later both the Democrats and Republicans included a Sakharov plank in their platforms. As human rights activism erupted across the world in the late 1970s, inspired to a great extent by Sakharov himself, crusaders in the United States could be found on both sides of the aisle. But what Drell saw as bipartisan support for Sakharov looks, in retrospect, more like an ideological struggle over Sakharov's words and legacy. The consensus that the Soviets should stop repressing Sakharov obscured a bifurcated view of the Cold War. One approach, favored by conservatives and many Soviet expats, emphasized hostility and nuclear deterrence, while moderates and liberals, a group that included Drell, preferred diplomatic negotiations, especially when it came to nuclear weapons. Drell, in fact, had once tried to tone down an open letter from Sakharov that seemed to endorse nuclear deterrence, a strategy that Drell deplored. All too often, Sakharov's image in the United States was employed to serve Cold War ideologies.

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While American efforts to help Sakharov encompassed an array of political affiliations, they all evinced a feeling, sometimes implied and sometimes blatantly expressed, that Sakharov was, above all, in the wrong place—that he really belonged in the United States and not the Soviet Union. This feeling at times took on an acquisitive nature. After he received his Nobel Peace Prize in 1975, his reputation as well as his suffering soared, and American universities sniffed an opportunity. Princeton, Penn, MIT, and Stanford all offered Sakharov a faculty position in the hopes of saving him from repression, to be sure, but also to boost their own prestige. Fritz Rohrlich, a Syracuse University physics professor, made this covetousness abundantly clear in 1981 when he discussed the upcoming International Conference in Honor of Andrei Sakharov with Syracuse Chancellor

[33] Yankelevich to Drell, Dec. 30, 198[4], Folder 5.11: Sakharov—Andrei Sakharov Institute, 1981, 1984–85, Paul J. Flory Papers, Hoover Institution; "Science People," *Discover*, July 1981, 76, Folder 5.1: Sakharov Collected Materials, International Conference in Honor of Andrei Sakharov (May 1–2, 1981), 1968, 1981, Papers of Sidney D. Drell, Hoover Institution; Pagels to Drell, March 10, 1981, Folder 5.6: Sakharov Collected Materials, International Conference in Honor of Andrei Sakharov, 1981, Papers of Sidney D. Drell, Hoover Institution; "Message on the 60th Birthday of Andrei Sakharov," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/message-60th-birthday-andrei-sakharov

Melvin Eggers. Rohrlich noted that "tremendous publicity and credit" would redound to Rockefeller University for hosting the event, and he reminded Eggers that he had once nominated Sakharov for an honorary degree. Had Syracuse approved the nomination, "we could be the first university in the United States to pay homage to him and to become visible to the world regarding the great cause for which he stands." But the nomination had gone nowhere and Syracuse had missed its chance. "How sad it is for me," Rohrlich wrote, "to see my university lose out again at a great opportunity to show that they are above mediocrity."[34]

American action on Sakharov's behalf likely helped ameliorate his plight, and yet his scientific advocates could not help but fixate on not merely freeing him from exile but permanently relocating him to the United States. Drell once told Moscow that "[i]f the Soviet system cannot tolerate a free and active Sakharov and what he stands for, then send him out to us in the West. We'll enthusiastically welcome the most courageous voice of our time." But Sakharov had no interest in leaving Russia. What Sakharov needed was always simple: to have his words heard, not erased as in Russia and not struggled over as in the United States. While he lived, Sakharov was characteristically serene about representing many things to many people. "It happens that my name does not belong only to me," he said in the 1970s, "and I must take this into account." But after Sakharov's death, S.A. Kovalev, a Russian scientist and human rights activist, felt this had gone too far. "[P]erhaps a hundred icons are being created," he stated, "and each is created for somebody's own purposes. Many people no longer care what Sakharov was actually like. He must be quickly pinned to one's own banner, so as, heaven forbid, not to be left without the benefit of his name. Everybody is now fighting for his name!"[35]

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And so in the United States the question *What would Sakharov say?*, while an interesting one, came to overshadow what Sakharov actually said, especially as he transformed from a man who lived and breathed into a malleable symbol. He dedicated his life to human rights and suffered for reminding his country that it had social obligations to uphold. He opposed war, of course, denouncing the Soviets in Afghanistan and the Americans in Vietnam. On his first appearance on the world stage in 1968, he declared the fundamental importance of intellectual freedom, encompassing as it did the "freedom to obtain and distribute information, freedom for open-minded and unfearing debate, and freedom from pressure by officialdom and prejudices." His struggles taught him that the essential human rights included

[34] Rohrlich to Eggers, April 13, 1981, Folder 5.1: Sakharov Collected Materials, International Conference in Honor of Andrei Sakharov (May 1–2, 1981), 1968, 1981, Papers of Sidney D. Drell, Hoover Institution.

[35] Sidney Drell, "Remarks for Andrei Sakharov," Feb. 21, 1980, 9, Folder 5.9: Sakharov General, 1979–1985, 2 of 2, Paul J. Flory Papers, Hoover Institution; quoted in B.L. Altshuler, "Misunderstanding Sakharov," and I.N. Arutyunyan and G.M. L'vovskii, "On Free Thought," in *Sakharov Remembered*, 239, 290.

the "freedom of opinion; the free flow of information; control by the people over national life, including decisions affecting war and peace; freedom of religion; freedom of movement; freedom of association; and the unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience from prisons." "These rights," he stated, "constitute the basis for a fully human life and for international security and trust." And despite years of repression and punishment, he retained an optimistic belief in humanity: "If mankind is the healthy organism I believe it to be, then progress, science, and the constructive application of intelligence will enable us to cope with the dangers facing us."[36]

Sakharov, once popular enough to be portrayed in an HBO feature film, has faded in the American public memory, perhaps as a direct result of the struggles over his legacy. In his lifetime, Americans insisted on using him as ammunition in Cold War debates, which admittedly kept his memory alive but only by speaking for him, enlisting him in partisan battles and ideological crusades, and portraying him as some geographically misplaced American rather than someone whose sacrifices aimed squarely at improving Russia. His death in 1989 made it easy to consign him to the past, coinciding as it did with the end of the Cold War and the evaporation of what the historian Benjamin Nathans has called "the West's Cold War appetite for exemplary crusaders against communism"—in essence a type of forgetting, not as nefarious as Russia's attempts to erase him from history but with similar effects.[37] Even as the Hoover's 2014 conference was denounced as an attempt to co-opt Sakharov, few in the United States have taken steps to remember him in the twenty-first century as his cherished principles of freedom and democracy seem to retreat across the globe.

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[36] Sakharov, *Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1968), 29; Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 409, 579.

[37] Benjamin Nathans, "Talking Fish: On Soviet Dissident Memoirs," *The Journal of Modern History* 87, No. 3 (September 2015): 614.