

Turmoil & Triumph Discussion Questions

A Call to Service

1. Secretary of State Shultz and others discussed the importance of character as a basis for leadership, along with virtues like integrity and deportment.
 - a. Are these still crucial for leadership today?
 - b. Do voters still believe character is important for leadership?
 - c. Does the media?
2. Mr. Shultz emphasized the importance of persuasion and compromise. Political scientists have shown that the two political parties have both gotten more extreme over the past few decades.
 - a. Which do we value more, compromise or “our side” winning?
 - b. How do we find the common good with such divisions?
3. Mr. Shultz demonstrated and convinced President Reagan of the value of direct talks with politically opposed countries. Others feel that this gives sanction to such countries. Which to you think is the better approach?
 - a. When was the last time you had a meaningful conversation about politics with someone whose political beliefs are different from yours?

To Start the World Over

4. Many think President Reagan was too zealous in his support of anti-communism, e.g. Iran-Contra and supporting Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. What should America’s position be with countries that have similar foreign policy goals but are politically abhorrent?
 - a. Should we follow the quote allegedly from President Truman (some say FDR): “He may be an s.o.b., but he’s our s.o.b.”?
 - b. Or should we refuse on moral grounds to deal with such countries?
5. Mr. Shultz insists that President Reagan did not have direct knowledge of the Iran-Contra funding. Others are certain that he did.
 - a. Is it possible that a President could not know, or is something that large impossible for a President not to know?
 - b. Is it possible that Reagan, similar to Henry II of England crying “will no one rid me of this meddlesome priest?”, made the sentiment known, but had no knowledge of what was carried out?
6. Mr. Shultz was instrumental in convincing President Reagan to hold a summit with Mr. Gorbachev. Secretary of Defense Weinberger and others were worried that the U.S. position would be eroded.
 - a. What is the value of having face-to-face meetings between principals instead of negotiations through lower-level bureaucrats?

Swords into Plowshares

7. When President Reagan walked out of the negotiations in Reykjavik, Iceland, many thought it was a risky move and a failure. Mr. Gorbachev would later define Reykjavik as the “end of the cold war.” Negotiation experts emphasize being willing to walk away from the table rather than taking a bad deal.
 - a. Should Reagan have accepted the compromise or was he right to stand on principle?
 - b. Is there a time that you risked much by walking away from a deal, but benefited in the end?
8. Mr. Shultz encouraged President Reagan to push for release of “Refuseniks,” Jews who were being denied passports to emigrate out of Russia. When Presidents have emphasized human rights, formerly with the Soviet Union, or more recently with countries like China, they are often told these are “internal affairs” and none of our business.
 - a. Are human rights in other countries our business or internal affairs?
 - b. Which is more effective, to isolate such countries, or to trade with them, hoping to use commerce as leverage to increase human rights?
9. President Reagan and George Shultz both had/have degrees in economics. They knew better than most that the Soviet system could not survive economically, though even they did not know the extent to which the Soviet economy was collapsing. Which economic system has a better understanding of human nature:
 - a. A “collective” system in which individuals are cells on the body politic?
 - b. An “individualist” system in which persons have individual rights that are inalienable?
 - c. If it is an individualist system, how do we get people to work for the common good?