Terror, actually pushing back against the idea that it began in 2001, but instead it began in the 1990s. That's the next project, and it is still in the research phase. Hopefully it will come out before 2030.

JJ: Well, congratulations on your recent and upcoming publications. I wish you the best of luck researching the War on Terror. Thank you again for taking this time.

MB: It was a pleasure, Joe.

Dr. Brenes's lecture can be viewed here.

A Conversation with Dr. Stephanie Freeman

This interview with Dr. Stephanie Freeman was conducted a week before her visit to CENFAD. We discuss her recent publication, Dreams for a Decade, *and her current position at the Department of State's Office of the Historian.*

Stephanie Freeman: Hey, Joseph!

Joseph Johnson: Hey, Dr. Freeman, thank you for joining me today.

SF: Thank you for asking me!

JJ: Of course! Could you briefly summarize your research for our readers?

SF: Before we proceed, I will offer a disclaimer that "the views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State or the U.S. Government." I'd also like to add that the book we'll discuss was

published before I entered government service.

My book is titled *Dreams for a Decade: International Nuclear Abolitionism and the End of the Cold War*. In it, I examine the nuclear abolitionist influence on the course of the Cold War's last decade, which I define as 1979 to 1989. This was really a unique decade during which this radical goal of nuclear abolition enjoyed support from grassroots movements around the world and from the leaders of the two superpowers, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev.

"I'm interested in the ideas of these grassroots and government nuclear abolitionists, the interactions between these actors, and how their ideas and contacts transformed US and Soviet foreign policy in the 1980s."

When I use the term nuclear abolitionist, I'm using it to refer to both grassroots activists and government leaders who pursued the elimination of nuclear weapons. You can see that nuclear abolitionism made for strange bedfellows in the 1980s. It brings together coalitions who share this ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons. They have very different strategies and very different timetables for how to achieve this and, oftentimes, are at odds, but they do ultimately want a world without nuclear weapons.

I'm interested in the ideas of these grassroots and government nuclear abolitionists, the interactions between these actors, and how their ideas and contacts transformed US and Soviet foreign policy in the 1980s. So, the main argument I'm making in this book is that nuclear abolitionists played a significant role in ending the Cold War. Together, abolitionists actually shifted US and Soviet nuclear arms control paradigms from arms limitation to reduction. So, instead of just limiting the increase of nuclear weapons, the superpowers focused on reducing their nuclear arsenals.

I argue that this new emphasis on arms reduction paved the way for the reversal of the US-Soviet nuclear arms race, which I say began with the signing of the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, or IMF Treaty. This landmark agreement eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons. I also make the case in the book that European activists influenced Gorbachev's common European home initiative and his support for the idea of freedom of choice. This prevented Gorbachev from intervening in the 1989 Eastern European revolutions that tore the fabric of the Iron Curtain and helped end the Cold War division of Europe. The big takeaway is that you cannot understand the end of the Cold War without taking into account nuclear abolitionists.

JJ: Let's start with that term, "nuclear abolitionist." As you mentioned, these groups do not necessarily see this process unfolding the same way; even within the Nuclear Freeze Campaign, the groups coming together are eclectic. Since you're working with so many groups at odds, did you experience difficulty making your archives speak to one another?

SF: I'm trying to connect these grassroots activists and government officials working on nuclear issues, notably Reagan and Gorbachev, at the highest level. Luckily, I did find sources in the archives where you see government officials specifically referring to its impact on their thinking. Reagan, for example, met with Helen Caldicott, arguably the most famous anti-nuclear activist in the world in the 1980s. They met at the White House in December 1982 in a meeting arranged by Reagan's daughter, Patty Davis, who was very active in the anti-nuclear movement and critical of her father's policies. It's pretty dramatic. Reagan writes about it in his autobiography, and Helen writes about it in her memoir. It's a striking meeting where Reagan directly engages with this famous anti-nuclear activist. And later, he refers to her in National Security Council (NSC) meetings on arms control.

"Reagan and Gorbachev have the same ultimate goal of eliminating nuclear weapons… They are paying attention to these movements because they share the same aim."

Reagan was very dismayed by growing support for these grassroots anti-nuclear movements because they were advocating disarmament strategies. The Nuclear Freeze in the United States and the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) campaign were very different from his "peace through strength" strategy. He thought that the Freeze and END would actually endanger US national security and that this would not help bring about nuclear arms reduction. He had to prove the merits of his "peace through strength" strategy, and you see him referring to these grassroots activists to do it, which I found very striking.

On the Soviet side, we see Gorbachev directly engaging with anti-nuclear and peace activists at a three-day "Forum for a Nuclear Free World and the Survival of Humanity," which took place in Moscow in February 1987.This huge three-day conference brought activists, socialists, and left-leaning politicians together. Gorbachev goes to the conference and mingles with activists. Later, he says that his conversations with activists really shaped his decision later that month to pursue an IMF Treaty separately from agreements on strategic arms reduction or strategic defense. And to me, this decision by Gorbachev to pursue the IMF Treaty was critical for making the IMF Treaty possible. So, I do have evidence of government leaders directly engaging with activists and referring to the impact of these engagements on their thinking and policymaking. I really try to highlight that in my book.

JJ: It feels so rare to see high-level officials discussing these citizen-level actors, even if they are transnational in their impact. Is this an oddity of this moment? Why do they seem to have Reagan and Gorbachev's ears?

SF: It kind of is an oddity of this moment. Reagan and Gorbachev have the same ultimate goal of eliminating nuclear weapons. I think that makes them uniquely attuned to activists' ideas, arguments, and proposals, even if they're not always adopting specific

proposals. They are paying attention to these movements because they share the same aim.

One of the broader points I make in the book is that, for grassroots anti-nuclear activists to have policy influence it is really important to have allies in government. I think this is one of the reasons these activists could have policy influence in a way that earlier iterations of the movement did not. One of the key things is that you have people in power in the United States and the Soviet Union who share the same goal. I think the fact that Reagan and Gorbachev were themselves nuclear abolitionists makes them sit up and pay attention to these movements.

JJ: That is an interesting generational gap to highlight. I experience this gap in my research when looking at movements in the 1950s and 1960s where the activist voice is not quite as clear and present in the politics of the time. It is interesting that it was so vibrant in the 1980s, even from government officials.

SF: Right? They're paying attention to it; they're talking about it. Reagan's talking about it in NSC meetings! When I'm in the archives, you don't get much better than that feeling that there is clear proof of Reagan grappling with activism and it is influencing his administration's policy. The same goes for Gorbachev.

JJ: I have another question about the archive for you. What was it like working with such recent material? Did you run into obstacles with classified materials? Or have you encountered criticism that your research is current affairs and not history?

SF: I was fortunate when I started working on this project – initially the dissertation. I started working on it around 2013, and we were seeing a lot of declassification of materials in the US from the Reagan administration and the George H.W. Bush administration. I drew on government archives in Europe, the National Archives of the United Kingdom in particular. They are pretty excellent at declassifying material after 25 or 30 years. I certainly benefited from the fact that it had been 25 to 30 years since these events.

In terms of declassification, I wasn't really sure what I was going to find in the archive because this was more recent and because it dealt with nuclear issues, which are obviously sensitive. However, I was fortunate to be the beneficiary of declassification requests made by other scholars, which made the material available.

One interesting thing about working in the 1980s is that when I present my work, oftentimes, there will be folks in the audience who participated in the June 12th, 1982, Anti-Nuclear March and rally in New York City or who were active at the grassroots level. Sometimes, I feel like the protagonists in my research are coming to life to argue with me in person, which is an exciting experience. Similarly, some folks served in the Reagan administration who have been at talks I've given. It's interesting to present your work about campaigns and then have people who were part of those events listen and give their reflections.

JJ: It sounds rewarding to have an ongoing dialogue on history with someone who participated in that event. It's rare to have someone in a lecture

stand up and say they were present at a historical event, no less to argue with you about it.

SF: It certainly is rewarding. One time, I had to give a presentation in front of Mary Caldor, a leading figure in the END movement and someone I deeply respect. I was quite nervous to present this work to her, but it's a wonderful opportunity to engage with these people and hear their memories and thoughts about my work, which is largely based on archival material rather than interviews. It's a great opportunity, although a little nerve-wracking when you're going into it.

"I absolutely love doing historical research, which is why I became a historian. The chance to use my subject matter expertise to help policymakers grapple with today's difficult issues has been a wonderful opportunity, and I feel very lucky that I am able to do this job."

JJ: Considering your interaction with government officials, I also wanted to ask about your current role in the Office of the Historian for the Department of State. Has that been central to bringing you into conversations with policymakers? Also, what has it been like transitioning from the classroom into a government historian?

SF: I'll say right off the bat that it's a wonderful position. For me, it is honestly a dream job. I work on the policy studies team within the Office of the Historian. I generate supportive policy-oriented historical research for Department of State officials in Washington, D.C. I am also posted abroad. I handle requests related to Europe and Eurasia.

I absolutely love doing historical research, which is why I became a historian. The chance to use my subject matter expertise to help policymakers grapple with today's difficult issues has been a wonderful opportunity, and I feel very lucky that I am able to do this job. Every day is a little bit different. You never know what requests will come in or the completion timeline. It has been a rewarding experience thus far.

I will give a shout out just in case readers are not aware of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series that our office publishes. That is not something that I work on, but it is a major project that the Office of the Historian undertakes. It is the official documentary history of US foreign policy and diplomacy. All the FRUS volumes are available online, for free, at history.state.gov. It is a really wonderful resource for research and teaching. I went back to some of the FRUS volumes from the Reagan years when I was finishing up *Dreams for a Decade*. I was working as a professor at Mississippi State, and I would regularly use FRUS documents in the classroom or assign them to my students. If anyone reading this newsletter is not familiar with FRUS, check it out!

JJ: You said that this job has been a "dream." Is this the career path you imagined during graduate school? Or was it something that you found yourself doing on the side? Finally,

what advice would you give to graduate students seeking roles outside the traditional tenure-track academic job?

SF: When I was in grad school, I always wanted to keep my options open because the academic job market, or even federal historian jobs like mine, is very unpredictable. You don't know what will be available year to year. It also feels like COVID-19 throttled hiring in academia.

I tried to be open to different career paths, and I would certainly advise other grad students today to do the same. After leaving the University of Virginia, I had a couple of postdocs, and both of those were focused on applied history. Specifically, they focused on how history can be used to support policymakers and people working on current issues. Both programs were interdisciplinary and brought together historians and political scientists. I then did a tenure-track job at Mississippi State, which was a great position, but I'd always had my eye on the Office of the Historian.

When the opportunity to apply for my current position arose, it felt too good to pass up, so I decided to apply. I would say to current students to keep their options open and try to get as much experience as they can in different areas.

JJ: Thank you for the sound advice. In closing, do you have any upcoming projects in the pipeline? Are you working on any new publications?

SF: Right now, I am working on peace activism in the post-Cold War era. I'm interested in what some of these activists who helped end the Cold War did after the Cold War ended. At the time, it seemed like anything might be possible.

I'm also working on a journal article on the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, and its efforts to create a peaceful, democratic, and integrated Europe. In the 1990s many of the key figures in my book, particularly those in the END movement, turned their attention to the Helsinki Citizens Assembly and were very optimistic about creating a new Europe. Assembly supporters and activists reached the heights of power in places like Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1989 and 1990. Initially it seemed like this group would be well positioned to shape the contours of the post-Cold War order in Europe. Though we know they were unable to create this Europe, I'm interested in why that is the case. It is still in the early days, but that's what I'm working on right now.

JJ: Sounds fascinating. I hope that our readers will keep an eye out for it in the future. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. We are all excited to meet you for your lecture next week.

SF: Thank you for asking me to do this interview! I look forward to coming to Temple next week!